

EL PORTAL

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literary and Arts Journal**

ABOUT EL PORTAL

Since its inception in 1939, Eastern New Mexico University's literary magazine *El Portal* has offered a unique venue for the work of writers, artists, and photographers both on campus and off. It is published each fall and spring semester thanks to a grant courtesy of Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at ENMU who underwrote the publication during his time on campus.

Each semester *El Portal* encourages previously unpublished short stories, poetry, non-fiction, flash fiction, photography, and art submissions from ENMU students and faculty, as well as national and international writers and artists. *El Portal* does not charge a submission fee. Submissions from ENMU students receive the special opportunity to win a first-, second-, or third-place cash prize in their respective categories.

For additional information about *El Portal*, please visit our website: <http://elportaljournal.com>

SUBMISSIONS

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and editorial needs.

El Portal serves as a creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU), as well as artists, writers, poets, and photographers worldwide. Consequently, the views expressed in *El Portal* do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

GUIDELINES

Please submit all written work in .doc or .docx format. With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story/essay per submission. Simultaneous submissions are welcome; we ask that you notify *El Portal* in the event that your work is accepted elsewhere so that we may remove it from consideration. When entering a submission, please include a third-person biography of no more than 50 words to be printed in the event that your submission is selected for publication.

- Fiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Flash Fiction (up to 500 words)
- Poetry (up to 5 pieces)
- Art & Photography (up to 5 pieces)

Prizes will be awarded to ENMU students only.

Prizes are awarded in the Short Story, Poetry, and Art/Photography categories.

DEADLINES

Our staff reads year-round. Please note that we are a university-based publication. Response times may be slower in the summer. Please allow one-hundred and twenty business days for our staff to respond.

E-mail: El.Portal@enmu.edu

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AFTER WHISKEY

Jennifer Battisti

After whiskey you tell me
you'd like to be a part of my body

and I wonder if my skin has been a
hostel for you all this time.

That maybe you were an element worked out of me,
the sliver of graphite under the flesh of my thigh

after I stabbed myself with a number 2 pencil
in the third grade to stop the arithmetic of separateness.

Maybe I was injecting our future—pierced myself
with the blue-gray cold-shock meeting—analgesic for the hard stuff.

The small splatter of blood staining the plastic chair, so that
later your mouth could venom and surface my epidermis

to kiss all the wounds you'd already known. To soften
the sharpened world into shavings of spiraled aphrodisiac.

To love me minimally toxic, with the near-extinct intimacy
of cursive.

CANCER

David Romanda

No, I wasn't bored
in the hospital.
I was quietly terrified.

I had a sunny room
with a view of trees.
Terror killed the sun and the trees.

CHASING COMETS EARLY ONE JULY MORNING

John Dorroh

Chasing meteors at 2 in the morning,
riding waves and ribbons of fog, the
acid odor of corn expelling its waste
through thick leaves that can cut your
throat, leaving you to bleed out in these
wee hours. I smell my father's Kiwi wax,
see him hand me dull leather shoes,
the look in his eyes is all he offers. I know
what to do without instruction.

We park the car in the darkest folds
of night, hoping with much might
that we can see at least two or three
streaks of light each minute. Such
ambition, casting limits on the Universe
as if our voices, our presence matters.

Dog's distant bark, maybe miles away,
the fog catching up with us, moving in
from the lake like a sheet, driving us
deeper into the sinking night. The first
one announces its glorious debut with
strong blue-white light, a solid tail that lasts
but one short second, my spine tingling
as if I've entered into Heaven itself.

Whenever I polish dull leather with short
powerful strokes, pulling in my chest like
the man he wanted me to be, I smell corn
dust under these lights, knowing that I can
be his shining star, lasting longer than either
of us expected.

ALL FEATHERS FIERCE

Evan Anders

the conversation regarding divorce
erupted during an argument over the coffeepot.

red, white, embolden
all feathers fierce

*"domestically satisfied is to dump out
the filter and fill the reservoir!"*

decadent depravity and decapitation
bruised, railing against beauty

all petals disorganized

i retreat to the narrowest grave
beneath the furthest ocean.

on the patio, listening to waves of suffering
why do we tantalize those we love with borders?

some grips are impeccably cruel.

we dip into the same pattern,
dotted shoulder blade in sun

we traded our wings for these flames
conditioned to believe

happiness is brutally attained.

spring beckons legal fees
and custody disputes.

enclosed for your amusement,
all the feathers

meticulous edited with fragmented bits
of my skull.

hard truth congregates
after exiting the wound

truth lies within
this blood.

RAMBUNCTIOUS

Michael Berton

where do the children play
skip slide hang on bump
into squeal swing on roll
around scream climb up
fall down imagine themselves
as another swallow dirt
yell help cry shout out
annoy poke at throw rocks
spit punch dance kiss kick
the ball hug hold hands
tackle pummel laugh make
faces act silly pass gas run
around knock heads get ants
in their pants eat ice cream
spill milk take a nap dribble
on a pillow hide and seek
wet their pants pick their
nose skin their knees day
dream secrets of youth
into adulthood create
memories for their old age

HERE-IN-AFTER, HERE-IN-BEFORE

Timothy Dodd

For Ralph Eugene Meatyard

For some a comforting trick
poured down with convenient grin:
to throw away mask by word, tablet,
to give us bone fields, decay hearts,
darkness beaten of its ancient name,
red-smiled forecasts denying disease.

So we believed the crow's throat rested at night,
a twisted nose of defect no longer sniffed sideways,
and the dead never died and roamed beneath us.

Then a camera ended the vacant serial: masks
returned a winding of vines and shriveled tree bark,
a reading of wrinkled hands and ponder play,
centenarian children check and the mystery
in earthly games. And we steady our gaze
for a lost vision cut out with the umbilical.

NEW TO EACH OTHER

Lowell Jaeger

My first love and I, new to each other,
rented a sensible cinderblock apartment,
cozy as an eggshell, room enough
for her sewing and my bookish pursuits.

Soon foolishness grabbed ahold of us,
and we splurged our meager net worth
on a flashy used car – a car-buff's hobby car,
candy-apple red, lots of chrome and fancy options.
Which took us places we never dreamt we'd go.

She expected the new machine be kept clean,
something I'd scarce considered,
but consented reluctantly to scrub it
that first Saturday she'd complained
of dirt and worried the sun might ruin
the car's sugared luster.

And shortly after,
expressed her dismay I'd neglected
to polish the chrome – common sense
car-care she'd learned from
her big brother's penchant for sports cars
and cruising Main looking grand.

That very evening
I tore a hole in a sock, offered it up
to her sewing box, but later spied
my request in the garbage.
She'd be damned, she said, before she'd
darn it. Which set me back to admire

my dear old mom, who'd made a career
of mending, washing, ironing, and more.
Which I shouldn't have spoken
aloud, as we drove with a cloud of dust
chasing after us, my bedmate's teeth clenched
and needles clacking. Leather bucket seats,
separated by a mahogany console

and a bitter draft from the optional AC
pouring into the space between.

B-BOI (1)

Mario Loprete



on concreto cement 20cm x 30cm

WAITING FOR THEIR ARMS TO GET TIRED

Jennifer Battisti

The taxi man looks at your tits
while you bend over the hustle of geometry: rolled bill,
square card, the pocket pouch meant for spare buttons.
This ritual of symmetry is your only loyalty.

Strutting the Blvd, you are a bottle of Goldschlager;
fermented flecks of sex float under the marquee.

When you slur your words, your mother calls in sick for you.
You are not a black sheep, you are a black hole.

Sometimes you're the girl waiting outside an AutoZone.
Under the sign for antifreeze, you feel eternal.

While waiting for the dope man
your bowels twist like a rabid animal.

For a buck, you can confess your sins
to the bathroom attendant. She pities you in Spanish.

One time you were a girl lost in a strange city,
retracing your steps in a Red Bull can on-wheels.

All of the multitudes of you will sleep with each other's
boyfriends because addiction is a whore in every dimension.

In the morning, power lines play double-dutch in the wind.
Your heart is an abandoned dance floor.

Twin scabs ripen each Achilles where the stiletto
loves the night like a tourniquet.

Your mouth is packed in ice like rotting meat.
When the asphalt burns your feet, you feel what you can't
remember.

You are a pigeon outside the mini-mart. The man sells
you menthols, sucks his teeth, everyone is a prophet at 6 a.m.

A block from the local detox, there is
a bar named *Just One More*.

The intake doctor asks you what year it is.
You try to seduce him. You answer every question with your body.

1. STATE AGAINST MANDELA AND CONFEDERATES

Gerard Sarnat

– to celebrate this month’s 101st birthday of “Madiba”

Coarsened rhetoric of African National Congress
prosecutors pulsed through pages
of that trial’s transcript

which recorded just how compelling
their testimonies must have been
to avoid death penalties

from judges who instead sentenced
Nelson to twenty-seven years
on Robben Island: I pour over

it to determine what if anything remains
relevant today: “We fought against
white or black domination.

Available tools started with many decades
dedicated to non-violent means
for opposing apartheid

including sabotage – but could escalate
into guerilla warfare, terrorism,
plus even open revolution.

Leadership was always prepared to die
for equality of simply being able to
sit down for tea in a restaurant.

At times our stomachs got sooo cold
when afraid but somehow all of us
managed to stay the course.”

A NEON NIGHT IN LAS VEGAS

Katherine Perelas



PERPETUAL SUMMER

Haley Lynn Jo

I forget to lick at the blue raspberry popsicle in my hand, so it melts and drips and sticks to my skin instead. The sun immediately fuses it to me and the only possible solution will be to jump into the pool. But it's not time for that yet.

The jug on the ground next to me brims with the dark luster of diet coke. I'm pretty convinced the aspartame won't actually create holes in my brain, so I take a big gulp. The carbonation slides down my throat and everything is as it should be; it's a blistering hot summer day and I've got all the time in the world.

I've got the tv right in front of me for optimal viewing. I must have adjusted it twenty times the other day to minimize glare. The most important summer ritual is getting everything set up just right so I don't have to do anything but come outside and enjoy myself. One of those reality tattoo shows is on and it's just what I want.

It doesn't matter that I've taken over the area because dad couldn't give two shits about the backyard, which reeks of his abandoned projects:

- a half-finished end table from when dad thought he'd get into furniture making; it wobbles in the slightest breeze, but I don't have any other options
- string lights extend across the porch beams, but there are no bulbs and they can hardly be considered secure and as if to stoke my fears one lies triumphantly on the ground now, covering a scorpion's dead body
- nails, often upturned, beckon tetanus and lie scattered across the concrete

- a bunch of empty beer cans, not mine, half crushed under the weight of the combat boots that I always wear to get outside because, well, remember those nails

If anybody is master of the backyard, it's me. I've made some additions:

- pool towels nicely folded in piles so that I can rotate through them and minimize laundry
- the extension cord intended for dad's tools now ends in a power outlet that I use to plug in the tv and phone
- a large, black and white umbrella that I saved up for months to buy (thank you, neighbors, for having bratty kids that I can charge you a bunch of money to watch) despite dad's protests that it was an unnecessary expenditure
- a cluster of cacti that I planted when my biology teacher told me I needed to do something to better appreciate life

The pool is the exception that proves the rule. I could sit by it all day. And I often do. I'm willing to overlook the fact that all my dad did to achieve this pool was dial a phone number and pay someone to do it, which, admittedly, is more than he will do now.

He used to order pizza, but now he just leaves twenty-dollar bills on the kitchen counter along with a post-it note designating whatever toppings he prefers. (Usually pepperoni, but sometimes meatball.)

I've learned not to think about it. How the pizza arrives, I eat a slice, stuff the rest in the fridge, and then slices just continue to disappear over time. That's the beauty of living in perpetual summer; there's nothing to interrupt my time with the sun and the pool.

The episode I'm watching ends, which means it's time for me to start my rounds. I turn off the tv and grab my journal filled with

accounts of my phone conversations.

Today, I'm going to be really thorough, hit my whole list, and reach the goal of new numbers.

A—Adam:

I think his skin must be alabaster. It sounds right because he seems like someone that does not love the sun like I do. He tells me that I sound sexy and I laugh because I don't know how else to respond. He tells me I should start a phone sex line. I consider this because money is nice, but I don't know why he says so because I only ever told him the color of my underwear once (cherry).

I punch in the numbers and the phone rings twice before he picks it up.

"Arielle?" his voice sounds a bit different from usual, a little more strained and a little less eager.

"Hey...you. Lovely day, isn't it?" I try out the kind of greeting I think might work for a classy phone sex line.

"Look, Arielle. You can't call here anymore, okay. Just, just don't call anymore."

"Well, I certainly wasn't expecting this." I stare out at my cacti, appreciate the fine points on their needles.

"I know we have something special, and trust me, that is so important to me. But if we keep talking, then I'm going to get in trouble. Just, goodbye."

He clicks the phone off before I can tell him about the bikini I'm wearing.

H—Hope:

This isn't actually his name, but he won't tell me his name so I give him the feeling he gives me. Cheesy, I know. He says life is hard and sometimes it will seem like nothing in the world is right, but it gets better. These are words I've heard before:

- my long-since-fired therapist was relentless in her goal to convince me that I'd be just fine without a mother
- every fervent school teacher with too much enthusiasm has always taken interest in my "tragic" background, as though I'm some sad teenager they can save
- shitty friends that I do not talk to anymore would tell me I needed to just cry it out and that I wasn't being properly sad about the whole thing – that if I could just get the sadness out of my system, I could heal or something

But from Hope they sound okay. He often tells me about the battle he had with cancer, how his wife is pregnant with a little girl and maybe they'll name her after me, and that his favorite color is orange.

Another set of familiar numbers, another familiar voice.

I smack on my popsicle, frustrated with its mission to continue dripping down onto my belly and don't hear how he answers the phone.

"Oh, hey, it's me again," I answer when it seems like it's been the right amount of time.

"Arielle?"

"The one and only."

"How have you been holding up?"

“Well, let’s see. It’s Tuesday and I’m by the pool. Yesterday was Monday and I was by the pool. So, I’d say things have been going pretty well.”

“Enjoying summer break then? That’s good.”

“Of course. Has it been that long since we talked? How gross. I’m in the perpetual summer mindset now, you know? No use in thinking about school and all that shit that happened weeks ago. Everything can just stop existing for a while.”

“It sounds like you might be suppressing important feelings, Arielle. Do you want to tell me about them?”

“I dunno. I mean, I think my father doesn’t love me. But that’s nothing new. Same old thing.”

“Your father is probably just emotionally unavailable because of how your mom left. I bet the two of you could talk about it –”

“It’s been four years. He should just fucking get over it.” I surprise myself by saying this, dredging out a thought I didn’t know I had.

“Are you over it?”

Usually, Hope is pretty okay, but this question reminds me way too much of my therapist, so I don’t answer.

“Why do you bother talking to me when you’ve got everything together, anyway? What do you get out of this being such a good guy nonsense?” I wave my popsicle around wildly and it looks like what little is left might slide off the stick.

“Arielle, you know this is the crisis help line. I said that at the beginning of our phone call, like I do at the beginning of all of our phone calls. I just want to make sure you’re okay and getting the support you need.”

Well, that'll teach me to ignore the way people start phone conversations.

"Oh."

"So, are you over it?"

"You know what, I don't wanna talk about this anymore. I've got other calls to make anyway."

I hang up the phone, knowing it might worry Hope just a bit too much, but I'll call again next week to let him know I'm alive and stuff.

Now, it's time for the best call on the list.

P—Parker:

I figure he's about ten and doing the same exact thing as me. Once, he told me about a time when he played hide-and-seek with his mother but she forgot to find him. We swap stories like that. He also spends a lot of time on the phone and his favorite person to talk to, besides me, is his family's Argentinian in-house maid. If I didn't have my own real person contact, I might not understand. But there's Carlos, the resident neighborhood landscaper. He teaches me pieces of Spanish and yells *ay Chiquita!* every time he sees me walk to grab the mail.

Parker and I have mutually decided that while physical interaction is nice, something about the mysterious phone contact is magical.

I dial the numbers and the phone rings a few times too many for my comfort. I worry that I'll reach the voicemail. I hate voicemail. It's a trap and I refuse to get caught in it.

Finally, Parker answers, "Arielle! Hey."

I imagine that Parker smiles when he answers the phone,

"I hear ya, man. My dad's out, theoretically driving to Wyoming or some shit, but probably already at a bar."

"Your family's so trashy."

"Yours is so pretentious."

"Hey, only my parents are pretentious. I am a humble child."

"No humble child knows the word pretentious. Besides, by that logic, only my dad is trashy. I am very classy."

"Uh huh."

"Oh shut it, you little shit. What's new?"

"The maid gave me some pretty great gossip this morning, you wanna hear it?"

"Hit me." I bite off the last of the popsicle and throw the stick on the ground.

"She says one of her lady employers is pregnant by the next-door neighbor's nineteen-year-old son."

"Hot damn. Well, at least she's getting some!"

Parker and I both laugh; I wish he was my brother.

"Alright, so you owe me the gossip next time we talk," Parker says.

"I'll see what I can do. Now, don't do anything too crazy, kay?"

"I won't if you don't."

"Why, whatever do you mean? I am always well-behaved."

Parker is still laughing when I hang up the phone. Nice kid.

It's 3 o'clock now and the sun is beating down pretty hard. I consider doing the responsible thing and applying a thin layer of sunscreen or just moving the umbrella over slightly to actually give me shade, but I've got a good base and the stick of sweat and popsicle makes me not want to move, so I continue to go through my phone ritual.

It's time to start punching new numbers and see if I have any luck. Of course, I'll need someone new to take Adam's slot now that he's bailed on me, which really is a bother.

U—Unknown #143:

Not right. The voice is too gruff and not at all honey like mine, so I hang up pretty immediately.

U—Unknown #144:

Closer, but upon asking her age, she says in a huffed voice, "twenty-nine," like she's offended that I'm asking, so I say, "don't answer if you're going to be rude," and she hangs up.

U—Unknown #145:

She sounds a lot like me, like I'm talking to myself through some kind of space-time continuum, but I ruin it by getting too specific. "Is your name Lindsay?" I ask, and before giving her room to answer, "are you 34 years old? and were you born in Fresno where the sun always shines?" "Don't call again," she replies, "I'm blocking your number," and then promptly hangs up. I figure she's bluffing and hit redial immediately, but I'm met with silence.

My body trembles and I want to throw the journal in the pool, throw the phone in the pool too, just let it all fade away in the water. But I can't. Otherwise, what's the point of all this?

U—Unknown #146:

This one is a man, although he insists that he was meant to be a woman. He is not what I'm looking for.

U—Unknown #147:

This woman sounds much too old and she reinforces my assumption by calling me a "hooligan" for dialing blind.

I pick the jug of diet coke back up again and don't set it back down until I've finished it. I drink it the way dad drinks beer. Like it's the only thing that will ever sustain me.

Time to return to the familiar numbers.

V—Veronica:

Somehow, this ends up being the only girl I talk to; the others I've made contact with before generally hang up, but not before I can hear the beginnings of an accusation shouted at the man of the house. Woman? Girl. Young lady? I don't know how old she is. We trade depressions like they're pieces of gum to chew on and when the flavor of one grows dull, we exchange again. She tells me that she cuts herself to feel alive and that crimson is the prettiest color. I think the prettiest color is the yellow-orange of the sun but don't tell her I disagree. She says I should try it, and I think about it, but when I ask her if it leaves scars, she admits that it does and I decide against it, because who knows, dad just might notice.

V—Vincent:

"Hi, Grandpa Vinny." I always try to greet him by establishing my relationship to him and jog his memory.

"Uh...hello, young lady."

It rarely works.

Grandpa Vinny has Alzheimer's so he doesn't normally know who I am when I call. I exploit this and attempt to extract information about mom. Even though he usually gives me inconsequential details, I gobble them up like chewy, sour candies that burn a little going down. Over time, I've learned that she loved sundresses because it was part of loving the sun, that she was a rotten cook, and that she has read *Pride and Prejudice* at least ten times; I haven't.

"I was wondering if you could tell me about Lindsay."

"Lindsay....umm....yes.....I think...."

"She's your daughter, remember?"

"Oh, oh, yes! Lindsay. How is she? When is she coming to visit? Did she ever marry that one fellow? I think I remember her being engaged to him..."

"Greg, yeah. She married Greg. And she had a daughter too. That's me, Arielle."

"Oh, you know Lindsay? Lovely, that's just lovely. Tell her to drop by and see me sometime." Grandpa Vinny sounds perpetually heartbroken over Lindsay's absence. It's as if he knows he only has a partial picture, but he just can't find the pieces that he needs to make it all make sense.

"I'll tell her if I see her. Could you maybe tell me more about her though? That'll help." I look at the popsicle stick on the ground. The remnants of blue dye have created a small pool on the patio.

"Oh, well, there's this one story that comes to mind."

"Go ahead and tell me." I physically smile as though it will infuse more joy into my voice.

"Lindsay was just thirteen years old and she got in a fight with me and her mom. She was mad we wouldn't let her spend the night at a friend's house or something like that. She stormed out of the house, shouting stuff like how much she hated us. I thought she'd be home in a few hours, but next morning came and she still hadn't returned."

"You must have been scared."

"Oh, I was in a tizzy alright. I went right out to find her. Looked all over the neighborhood, pounded on the front doors of all her friends' houses. Finally, it hit me; she must be at the beach. So, sure enough, when I arrived, I saw her there, all buried under the sand. And you know what she said to me when I walked up?"

"No, what'd she say?"

"She said, *I'm going to make myself into a mermaid so I can go be in the sea and live there forever. Away from you and away from mom. Just me and the water.*"

"How'd you get her to go back home with you?"

"I picked her up and dragged her, of course! Wasn't going to be any other way about it. She was mad for weeks, but we started letting her visit the beach every weekend, and she calmed a bit after that."

"She really loved the ocean, huh?"

"It was more than that. It was like she needed it."

Grandpa Vinny sounds like he's really pulling together his memories now and I want to push further, but he loses it in an instance. He starts mumbling about how he needs to go to the store and buy some rope. I call his name a couple times, but at this point it sounds like he's set the phone down on the bed.

That's how it always ends. Abruptly and without fulfillment.

I haven't been in the water yet today and my skin itches for it. As if I'm some kind of amphibian that has been out of the water too long and has started to dry out. Frogs are like that, I think. Though I wouldn't say I'm a frog. It's like – we need air to breathe or whatever but I need water to feel alive and that's why I only live in summer when the pool is ready to receive me.

Finally, I set everything down and slide in. The water swallows me the way blankets at night can't. And the sun punches through in rays so brilliant I wonder how anyone can prefer the moon. I've learned to hold my breath so that I can stay under as long as possible, to make myself weighted down at the bottom.

Sometimes I like to open my eyes and watch the water move around me, but today I leave them closed. The concrete walls that normally hold me in crumble and my world is unlimited. Seaweed dances and licks playfully at my calves. Gentle swells bring sea shells to me. The harsh concrete floor has given way to sand and feeling of it between my toes is exquisite. Until they aren't toes anymore – the webs between them grow and wrap my legs together forming a strange flesh tail. Seaweed joins the fray and fuses with me. I become green. And the shells refuse to be left out so they lodge themselves into my new tail so densely that they clink together when I move. The sand grows coarse. The swells grow in ferocity and everything becomes an assault. The seaweed continues to crawl up and around my body and I'm grateful because it shields me from the sand. My chest heaves ragged. It begs for air, but I tell it no and the seaweed climbs and constricts. It is only when I am completely overtaken that I remember to move. And I swim far, far away.

ISLAND

Christopher Gomez

The erratic waves rush by
while the ships retreat,
leaving the pristine island alone again—
as an Island should be.

Suffocated in masses
of water, earth, & sky,
it sits alone.
Trapped by others
in a place it knows as home.

The Island waits for visitors,
it sees hundreds per day yet
it is abandoned,
as the sun disappears into the horizon;
it is left alone again.

The island sits alone—
as the waves begin to slow
strangers come & go
that which surrounds the island
is what makes it feel so
alone.

FOOD PANTRY

Paul Bluestein

In the gray morning,
the ragged line forms outside the door.
People wait, talking quietly
while rain runs off their shoulders and shoes.
Inside, volunteers count cans of tuna
and loaves of bread.
There are bags of rice,
peanut butter and jars of jam —
food and hope, doled out in three-day parcels -
the best we can do
even while we know it's not enough.
Still, we listen to funny/sad stories,
ask about children or parents,
and carry bags to cars
that are sometimes also homes.
When, finally, we have nothing left to give,
we close the door, and
surrounded by empty shelves,
realize again how lucky we are,
living so close to asking
if we can please have one more box of cereal

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

David Romanda

call to me master

master that i despise
master that i spit upon

call to me

tell me tell me
what comes
next

MY DADDY HAS A LIFE SENTENCE

Gerard Sarnat

Don't know what it's like
to get hugged, be comforted
when I am troubled.

BREATHING IS GOOD

John Dorroh

I am the one
stuck in the
bottle, glass
sides, open
hole at the
top

like that's
not enough,
that's not
enough air

in here. There
are many stories
but mine's the
only one that
counts right
now.

Daddy preferred
his daughter and
she got a used car
when she turned 16.

I got a whipping
for sniffing gas
from the car tank
and another one
for frying up a
bologna sandwich
when no one was
home.

I grew up cursing
inside, inside the
glass bottle with
clear glass sides
and not enough air.

Now I can breathe
without trying. And
it feels pretty good.

B-BOI (2)

Mario Loprete



oil on canvas 60cm x 90cm

VISITING WRITER FEATURE

THE SCRATCH*Thaddeus Rutkowski*

I try to squeeze my bicycle between two cars—one is stopped for a traffic light; the other is double-parked. As I roll through, one end of my handlebar scrapes the side of the parked car. I maneuver my bike backward, using my feet, as the driver of the parked car shows up in front of me. I hadn't realized he would return so soon.

"Did you scratch my shit?" he asks.

I wonder for a moment if the man really said "my shit." Why would he call the paint on his car his shit? Maybe he said, "Did you scratch my strip?" His car might have been decorated by an artist who specializes in fine lines. The metal of my handlebar might have damaged the paint job.

Or maybe he said "my ship." Some cars are so big they resemble boats. Some drivers helm their "boats" like captains. But if the man said "my ship," he should not be concerned. A scratch will not sink his ship.

"No," I say. "I didn't scratch your shit."

The man stands in the street, watching me as I ride away. His arms are away from his sides, and his hands are curled into fists. I wonder if he will get into his car and chase me—to rough me up over scratching his shit.

As I'm riding, I feel something hit the side of my head. It is soft, like a bird or a pillow, and it makes no sound—no cracking

of a hard object against my skull. I'm riding the wrong way on a one-way street; I know it. An approaching 5 rider could have hit me with his sleeve, just to correct me. I look at two riders who have passed. Neither is looking back at me and swearing.

I look around to see if a pigeon might have hit me. No bird is on the ground, stunned or killed; no harm was done to any bird.

Then I see the car of the man whose shit I scratched; the driver is pacing me. The car has a clear scratch at the level of my handlebars. The man must have thrown something soft at me. Maybe a chamois cloth, the kind used to clean and dry his car. Or maybe a shirt, a mop head, or a brush. I have been the target of a drive-by swatting.

VISITING WRITER FEATURE

ON SOFT WINGS*Thaddeus Rutkowski*

A moth sees a flame, or multiple flames, through its compound eyes. The image is a kaleidoscope of luminous spots radiating from their brightest point— the corona around a burning candle's tip. The moth has no choice but to fly toward the light. Other insects, other moths, must also be attracted. Many small winged creatures will gather here, but no others have arrived yet. The moth is first, because its many eyes have received sharp signals. But the moth encounters an obstacle: a pane of glass between its body and the flame. Perhaps this development is lucky for the moth; it cannot fly into the flame and cannot be burned alive. It settles on the glass and fans its soft wings. It is a great silk moth, with a wide wingspan and brilliant colors. However, the colors are not visible in the dark. The moth has been navigating by the moon, but the moon is faint on this night, and the candle is the next best thing. The moth has reached this point by tuning into visible and invisible wavelengths. The infrared light reminds it of pheromones, of sex, while the ultraviolet light is not much help. The main factor is the night. The moth is active in darkness, and as it goes about, looking for a mate, it samples each source of light it sees. The next night or the one after that might be better, if no candles are burning and the moon is waxing.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THADDEUS RUTKOWSKI

Alexandria Crowson, Assistant Editor

In October of 2019, the Languages and Literature Department of Eastern New Mexico University welcomed fiction writer Thaddeus Rutkowski to Portales, New Mexico. Rutkowski has published both full-length poetry and short story collections. A passionate teacher, Rutkowski guides fellow writers at Sarah Lawrence College's Writing Institute, Medgar Evers College and the Writer's Voice of the West Side YMCA. He has also taught at Pace University, the Hudson Valley Writers Center, and the Asian American Writers Workshop. During his visit, Thaddeus Rutkowski took a few minutes to speak with *El Portal* about his philosophy as a writer.

EP: At what point in your life did you know that you were a writer? How did you come to claim this identity for yourself – were there any obstacles you had to overcome or expectations you had to release in order to be able to call yourself a writer?

TR: I liked to write small pieces when I was a teenager. I was interested in stories, and I would get lost in the world of a book. That world could have been the one I knew, or it could have been a place completely different, someplace fantastic or just odd. Through writing, I could see things as they were, but I could also uncover a layer below what we see.

I would show these pieces to friends, maybe to a teacher. I even submitted a couple of them to mimeographed literary magazines. At least one was published, in purple ink on slick paper. I recently received a comment on Facebook from a high-school friend who remembered a character from one of those pieces—the Likable Creature. The name embarrasses me now.

In college, I read my work aloud in cafes, including a place called the Unmuzzled Ox, which was in the basement of a church in Ithaca, New York. I doubt there were more than a handful of people in the Unmuzzled Ox at any one time. But there was something communal about being there, sharing work, and listening to others. One of the attendees played the dulcimer—it was the first time I'd heard that instrument.

Did this make me a “writer”? I don't know, but these are things that many poets and writers do, and that I still do. The only obstacle to doing such things is an internal, contrary voice, saying such activities are not important in the practical, commercial world. You can't listen to that voice.

EP: What advice would you give to writers who struggle with developing/maintaining writing as a daily practice?

TR: Maintaining a daily practice is difficult for anyone, but here are some ways to keep a schedule:

- Give yourself deadlines. Tell yourself you'll write a page (or a paragraph, or a sentence) each day. Extend that deadline as needed—bigger projects take longer.
- Put yourself in situations with built-in deadlines. Take a writing workshop. Apply to contests that have deadlines. Submit to journals and magazines.

- Go to public readings. Many readings have an open mic. Bring something you've been working on, and read it.
- Find a quiet place to work. Whether you have "a room of your own" or go to a favorite café, set aside time to do your work. You won't spend all of your time writing—you might spend much of it gazing—but the down time will help you generate ideas

EP: How do you know when a project is finished?

TR: I can tell (more or less) when a piece is finished. I'll look for whether it's unified in tone, whether it conveys a strong emotion. I don't know how to get to that point—I have no formula—but I usually have an idea in mind, something I want to say or a situation I want to describe.

That said, I can work on a project for years. My first book of poetry came out in 2017 (from Sensitive Skin Books). Some of the poems in it were written when I was a teenager, while others are much more recent. The idea was to collect the poems into a unified book, with a progression from poem to poem, and themes (nature, family, travel) that are linked. After the writing came the selecting, collecting and editing.

EP: You mentioned visiting writers houses in many different states. Does this experience assist more with beginning a project, completing a project, or both? Can you explain more about what one can expect from visiting a writers' house?

TR: All artists' colonies offer time and space. You'll be given a studio, which could be a separate room or part of your living area, and you'll have unstructured time. No activities are

required, but artists are invited to share their work. You can give a performance, hold an open studio, or do a reading—and these events are usually totally fun.

You'll most likely get a lot of work done at a colony, but you'll have to travel there, and you'll have expenses. Some colonies charge a daily or weekly fee, while others are free or "pay what you wish." In addition, colonies are selective, and most applications require a work sample, a project statement, and letters of recommendation.

There are dozens of colonies in the United States and abroad. I found some good tips on the *Writer's Digest* site.

I traveled to colonies for many years, during my vacations from work. More recently, I belonged to an urban colony, the Writers' Room, which is in a Manhattan loft. The space has desks, a kitchen and a small library. No talking is allowed in the main room. I could walk there from our apartment.

Now, however, I can easily work at home.

EP: Do you have any other set community that reads or comments on your work? Does this community vary with each project? What advice do you have for writers who are not a part of a writing community?

TR: I've been part of peer groups—people who meet in each other's homes and share work—some of which ran for years. The arrangement is free, convenient, and useful. A peer group will give feedback, and sometimes it's hard to find people to do that. The downside is, the feedback in an unchanging group can become predictable.

These days, I'm part of a loose group of writers called

the Unbearables, who meet in bars, give readings, and put out occasional anthologies. I recently traveled with the Unbearables to read in the Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania. We rode in the Artmobile, a car decorated by a visual artist. There were six of us, so one had to ride in the hatchback trunk. We stayed in a building—a former beauty school—owned by the artist who'd made the Artmobile. Then it was back to New York, with me in the open trunk.

It's easy to start a writing group or to join one. Artists get so little encouragement and support from the world at large that it's good to find or form a posse of like-minded people.

El Portal would like to thank fiction writer Thaddeus Rutkowski for visiting with us and reading for Eastern New Mexico University. His work has also been featured *The New York Times*, *Asia Literary Review*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and many other journals. A few of his works include the novels *Haywire*, *Tetched*, and *Roughhouse*, each of which were finalists for an Asian American Literary Award. *Haywire* won the Member's Choice Award, from the Asian American Writers Workshop in New York. We are pleased to say that readers can read some of Rutkowski's poems in our very own journal! The New York Foundation for the Arts has awarded Rutkowski with a fellowship in fiction, which is given to emerging artists during their critical career points. His most recent book, *Border Crossings*, is available at Sensitive Skin Books—it is his first full-length poetry collection.

DOE SEASON

Connie Woodring

I want to be free.

I want to roam the woods nibbling on the newly sprouted leaves of oaks, maples, ash, poplar and black walnut trees.

I want to feel the softness of Swan's-Neck Thyme and ostrich ferns on my ankles.

I do not want to have offspring every year.

Offspring who suckle at my teets, nibble my ankles and want to romp when I am tired.

They don't leave me until their white spots finally fade.

Just in time for another round of bucks sniffing and running after me.

Unlike you humans who have birth control, abortions and nunneries,

I have the scent of my unrelenting femaleness wafting through the woods. When I just want to be free.

Another doe season and bullets and arrows fly through the air missing me by inches.

Will this season be my deliverance?

SERIAL

Timothy Dodd

When Colby came down out of the mountains, nervously wiping calloused hands on greasy work jeans, his face looked maybe like he'd just killed someone. When he came down out of the mountains, the town in quiet abandonment, he was breathing heavy. Skittering, huffing, anxious – to see him would be to wonder why.

As far back as high school Colby was like that himself – curious about the why of things.

“Whether you know it or not,” Mrs. Wolf had said to him one day after his 11th-grade Humanities class, “you’re one of the few students who can get beyond the literal.” Mostly apathetic in school, he had surprised her with his urgency during discussions of Beowulf and Homer. “You can see things as symbol, myth, epic. You can see that people weren’t really talking about their spears and killing make-believe monsters.”

Colby didn’t have much for replies. He’d look at the wrinkles around Mrs. Wolf’s eyes, or the necklace she wore, and wonder how hard he’d have to pull for it to snap.

“You by any chance a Catholic, Colby?”

He barely nodded.

“Oh, I see. I just thought maybe you’d grown up with Saint George killing the dragon. Well, anyway, what you say makes the class think. Your thoughtfulness is good for all of us, so keep it up.”

The words meant nothing in Colby’s skull as he felt

the coldness of the old, empty classroom – its run-down, pockmarked, graffiti-filled wooden desks and stained walls, its antiquated world maps and fire alarms. He stared again at Mrs. Wolf's long, black-topped desk. Like an autopsy table he'd seen in some forgotten film.

"There's isn't always a definite point when the living become dead. And there isn't any truth in saying the dead aren't also alive. Really, life and death is blurred." He'd said it earlier in her class when talking about death in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, when feeling some sort of power emanating from Mrs. Wolf's desk as he imagined a corpse lying on it instead of all the lifeless papers typed up with gibberish.

But you can't necessarily count it as thoughtfulness or goodness or any kind of care, he thought after leaving Mrs. Wolf and walking out into the hallway. It was just a curiosity, pure and simple, that led some people to question, to wonder, to try and figure out. In the end you have to chalk it up to instinct, second nature as they call it, which is almost the same as saying things are how they are because it's how they are: the hawk snares a rabbit because they're a hawk, just like all the other hawks.

And now, nearly twenty years after he'd dropped out and never seen Mrs. Wolf again, Alma had left because she wanted – no, *needed* – a child: it was second nature for her, but not something he was going to give. Just like Lazarus rose from the grave because people needed a miracle, or Odysseus needed to wander home.

And the thing that he did? Something had stirred inside him for as long as he could remember, even before high school: an emotionless interest not in the separation of life and death, but the merging between them – their fusion. Even Alma couldn't extinguish it in the end.

Out of the mountains and back in town, Colby turned the corner onto Whitler Street just as Jasper Blunt limped out of The Dusty Cane with his Amoco overalls and three sneezes, the door to the bar whipping closed behind him. "Where you going strutting like a young gun?" the old man asked, wiping his nose with his flannel shirt.

Colby pulled his Mountain Dew cap down to his eyes and walked by him, regretted not going the extra block to avoid the bar he sometimes frequented. He didn't need more witnesses who could verify his movements.

Stumbling forward a couple steps Jasper hawked up phlegm and spit onto the road a few inches from a parking meter, then yelled out Colby's name and repeated his question.

Colby stopped in front of the vacant Dollar Plus store two buildings down, its twenty-five-cent bubble gum and candy machines still half full in the window. "Headed to my wheels. That all right with you, Mayor?"

Back up against the wall, his grey, stringy hair tinged with yellow as if it had been highlighted with markers, Jasper cleared his throat. "Chilly afternoon for April. Seen McCoy?"

"Why would I, old man?"

Jasper slurred his words. "Bell's looking for him out at the market and Ginny said he'd been asking you for a ride."

"That so? And you got nothing better to do? Let Bell do his own bidding."

"Well he said he nicked a big bag of yellow plums. So that'd put you as an accomplice."

"You think it's the first time McCoy stole something? If Bell wants to find him, he'll find him. Not far between here and

Jefferson, is it? Now look for someone else to whittle away what's left of your brain, Blunt."

"Ah ... one of those kinds of fellows only concerned when they steal from *you*, huh?"

It was the insinuation needed to keep Colby on edge. "Is that a Baptist bar you just fell out of, goose? Another worthless moralizer. And a drunk one at that." Colby turned and renewed his pace as Jasper's mumbling trailed off. When he reached the Chinese take-away on the next block he looked back, the old man gone.

Colby got in his white Chevy Tahoe and started the engine. The bag of plums lay in the floor of the passenger seat, and he reached down to pick two up, peeling off the stickers that read "Imported from Chile." He bit in.

How do you get to Chile? he thought. Alma had taught him the names of all the little countries south of Texas, and of course some of the places in Mexico like Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and her hometown Durango. Chile wasn't on the list though, so that's where he should go — somewhere he'd never heard of. Leave before luck ran out. Just like she did: left a week early, unexpectedly, before he could get her onto one final trip into the hills.

"At least one last romantic date up there with me before you go back to Durango," he told her after finally giving up on convincing her to stay. She never believed him, that he'd marry her once Rebecca turned eighteen and he was free of paying child support.

"I know what you want to do to me up in the mountains," Alma said with a grin.

"Not denying it," Colby said. "But we'll take a picnic basket too."

“Que kinky,” Alma joked.

Colby laughed. Had his father survived the car accident a decade ago, he’d drink a whole bottle of Bushmills if he heard his son tell him Alma was the best girlfriend he’d ever had. Easily the best, and that’s why Colby told himself he’d never let her leave.

He rolled down his window and threw out the two plum pits, driving slowly back past The Dusty Cane. A drunk Blunt would be easy: easy to get him in the car, easy to get him out. He turned the corner and drove around the block — no sign of the old man. Blunt couldn’t get that far even if sober, not with old age and a bum knee he always attributed to getting shot during active combat, and Colby figured he’d gone back into the bar or else hitched a ride. Probably better just to let him go since anyone in the bar would recall seeing him. And anyway, fixing Blunt wouldn’t wipe out the lead since he’d said Grinny knew about McCoy asking for a ride. Still, there was logic and there was “so what,” and Colby much preferred the latter of late.

After the first one it had gotten easier. Now he had lost count, lost the reasons. Now it could happen in an instant, a spark, a sudden urge. Blunt had pushed him. Like McCoy. Plum thief asking for a ride. Again. Begging actually. And if you told McCoy no, he’d start with his guilt trip. “I haven’t had an automobile since I got back from fighting. They won’t let me pass the exam because of my eye injury.”

In the end Colby agreed to take him even though he was supposed to meet Fuller to fix the transmission on his old Ford, but then McCoy wasn’t content to be dropped off in town: no, he had to go all the way out to Walmart. And in the vehicle he sucked on one of his plums like a baby, made enough noise you’d think he was playing a musical instrument — out of key of course. Then he just threw the pit in the floor. That was the backbreaker.

Colby drove on to Walmart and parked in a desolate corner of the lot behind the building. When McCoy bent down to pick up his bag of plums before getting out of the SUV, Colby put his two strong hands on each side of the ruffian's neck and pushed down as hard as he could until McCoy went limp. Then he started the vehicle again, called Fuller to reschedule for the next day, and headed to his spot in the mountains.

A second trip around the block, but still no Blunt in sight. Colby turned to head back to Jefferson, stopping at the town's one red light. He'd eat the rest of the plums and go to the market, talk to Bell himself about McCoy so the matter would die, and see if there were any other fruits from Chile.

But then the automatic doors swung open at the Rite Aid on the corner and Blunt stepped out, his gnarled hand holding a prescription bag against his chest. Colby glanced over just before the light turned green, then turned the corner to pull up beside the old man. He threw the bag of plums in the back seat and made sure the streets were empty of eyewitnesses.

"Hey Blunt, come go with me back to the market. I'll get you and me both a bag of plums and we'll ask Bell all about McCoy. He'll feel better."

Blunt never rejected an invitation and got into the vehicle mumbling about his medicine.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll get you a glass of water. Just hold on," Colby said.

But it was oxygen that Blunt would end up needing. Colby drove back to the Walmart again, Blunt hardly noticing it was the opposite direction, and parked in the same space. His hands again around a scrawny neck, exerting pressure on Blunt's throat just below his Adam's apple — first time for two in one day. Like

McCoy, Blunt didn't have the strength to struggle, gave up quickly.

On the drive back to town, Colby turned off toward the mountains overlooking Mallory. At the top of the hill he took the rarely used dirt track surrounded by thickets, drove fifty yards and stopped. He pulled Blunt from the car and hoisted him over his shoulders, moved through the brush until he came to a small clearing where he dropped the body onto the ground, covering him quickly with a pile of pine-needled branches lying nearby. His modus operandi always the same: drop and cover, go back to town and leave the truck, then walk back the half mile to dispose of the body more discretely.

Returning to town, Colby parked in a little alley a couple blocks away from both Rite Aid and The Dusty Cane. Making sure nothing of Blunt's was left in his car, he took the bag of plums out of the back seat and got out, locked up, and started his walk back to the mountains with a good pace and time to think. Before hitting the trail at the edge of town, he took the five remaining plums out of the bag and put them into his pockets, then threw the plastic into a sidewalk trashcan and started nibbling on the sweet fruits one by one.

He'd see his mother and Dan one more time as if nothing was about to happen, then latex paint the truck black one evening and take off in darkness with nothing except a new toothbrush, two changes of clothing, and the cash he'd been storing at home. He'd leave the apartment in normal condition: furniture, clothes, all of it – with no claims on his last month rent and security deposit either, for the sake of disguise. Drive to the border and ditch the truck, get a boat over to Mexico, just where Alma had said.

Colby finished a second plum and threw its pit into a briar patch. And where would Alma be now? What would she be

doing? Preparing dinner in some new kitchen? Should he have gone to Durango with her? She had begged him to start a new life, in a new place. “It’ll even seem like a new time,” she told him at the stove while preparing breakfast one morning, “Beat It” playing in the background. Hadn’t her idea been the same as his own planning now – to go away forever from the town where he grew up? No, now it would be going alone. And he wouldn’t stop and settle in Mexico with it so near, where every month he read about someone getting extradited.

He peeled another sticker off the last plum. How about Chile? He was pretty certain it wasn’t in Europe or Africa. Got to be somewhere in Latin America. Unless it was in the South Pacific. He’d check it all out when he got back to the house. Maybe he could be happy in a place where the market fruits were different. Even the market itself. Without all the tongue-twiddling, meaningless conversations with Bell about his nieces and nephews. Maybe he wouldn’t miss the sounds of starlings and sparrows and wrens. There would always be other birds – even more, and probably better ones. And maybe there’d be mountains – the fresh air and trees and little creatures of glorious mountains, the best part of home. Yes, that should be a prerequisite. And one of the problems with Durango as well. He just couldn’t go somewhere dry and desert-like. Lifeless.

Colby approached the spot where he’d left Blunt, the same as all the others. A blue jay stared from its oak tree perch when Colby stepped off the dirt track onto the tiny path. They’d seen each other before, the jay even watching as Colby shoveled and buried. Colby, too, had seen it flying off with other birds’ nestlings. And now it would see him bury again. Blunt wasn’t his brightest or most beautiful victim, but he might be the last.

He made his way through the brush leading to the clearing that had served him for nearly a decade, back to the spot of

shallow graves and the shovel he kept hidden, the scene well-rehearsed. But this time, emerging from the thickets, he stopped: the pile of branches that had covered Blunt was now scattered across the clearing, the body gone. Colby didn't move.

A dog barking in the distance got louder. The wind stirring the trees strengthened. Blunt's faint and frail voice, chattering on about plums and pills, floated through his mind. A flash of Alma peeping into the bedroom of a morning to see if he was awake. Colby felt the beating of his temples.

And then, a rustling on the ground behind him, back toward the dirt path: Colby spun around to a buck lifting its head above the line of brush. On eye contact the animal took off like a bullet. And Colby bolted, too, in some unknown direction, his face maybe looking like he'd just killed someone.

FROZEN HEAT

Katherine Perales



LLANO ESTACADO

Corynn Tenny

I'm thinking of dotted lines,
red tire-prints running across a map.

I'm turning around, and I can see them in a curved line.
This is how you forget the direction East.

I'm turning back and in front of me is empty.
Somewhere, blown sand becomes a small cyclone – frail,
already dying.

One gust pulls from that direction I no longer know.
It carries something: the smell of wet rust, the smell of fresh rot.

And now, I'm *knowing*.

The tire prints are hurried footsteps,
 following. I can see their newness shimmer bright, like
wet paint.

HIGH DESERT ELK

Ed Ruzicka

Nothing but night and high desert highway.
 An on-coming car flutters its headlights
 just before I hit something big in the road. Hit it
 hard. Absorb the jolt just like tires and struts do.
 Impact, spasm. My Kia flies over the limp body.

See the oncoming driver slow. In the rearview,
 cut back. His headlights show a form the size
 of a yearling filly. I circle back. He says he just
 barely clipped this still warm, inert elk. Still, it
 ripped the aluminum ladder to his roof rack off.

Pickups, eighteen wheelers tear past.
 Sharp valley wind, stone cold in August.
 "If you've got some rope we can get it off."
 All I have is a fifty-foot coil of electric chord.
 I tie orange chord around the impossibly thin
 bones of the cow's back legs. First try, no budge.
 "Four hundred pounds probably," he says.

"Pull on three." I say. The beast's hinds rise,
 slide a few inches. "Trevor. Trevor," he yells.
 "Get out here." With the three of us, his kid
 maybe fifteen, we get it going seven inches
 at a tug until that heavy chord breaks. I go
 sprawling, my glasses fly onto emergency
 lane asphalt. I bang one hip up good,
 scrape an elbow. I retie the legs. We
 go back at it, half-foot to a go
 till we get that carcass to the side,
 sixteen hard inches off the rip of traffic.

In our Sorrento, my wife is done crying. I also think of how those hinds had sailed the elk over brush in whisks and steady arcs less than a half hour ago. The soft muzzle that took in shrub grass, berries, lowered to nestle upon the flanks of her young. But when you're dead in the mountains, you're just heavy dead and I have a lot of asphalt ahead.

UNINVITED ROOMMATE

Bill Diamond

Zale's parallel universe co-tenant was not carrying his weight.

Zale was thrilled when he rented the third-floor walk-up. It was roomy for the price. Both quiet and in a convenient location. He didn't anticipate the drawback that he'd be sharing the apartment with an unexpected roommate. Or, semi-roommate. One that didn't seem to be of this dimension. But something was definitely present.

In most aspects, nothing was there. Zale occasionally thought he heard distant and disembodied whispers. In his peripheral vision, he perceived slight physical movements of objects. On more than one occasion, Zale tentatively queried, "Is anyone there?"

At its most otherworldly, he detected the flicker of a barely visible apparition. If asked, he would have described it as similar in build and movements to himself.

The intrusion was disconcerting, but happened infrequently. Whatever it might be wasn't overtly threatening. In fact, it showed no acknowledgement or interest in Zale's existence. After a time, he concluded it was benign. Some spirit going about his business and living his life, like Zale was his.

A few times, he mentioned these experiences to friends with a casual, "There may be a ghost in my apartment."

Skeptics laughed and told him to "Cut back on the drinking." Or, made him the butt of jokes. The credulous were enthused and suggested all sorts of theories or conspiracies. One offered to move in and initiate 'spectre surveillance.' The apartment

management company suspected it was a scam to reduce the rent. Zale stopped discussing it.

He decided to tolerate it as a minor nuisance. After all, no apartment is perfect. Zale wasn't the type to perform a dark ritual, or a religious exorcism. Nonetheless, he needed an explanation to displace the concern this was a sign of mental deterioration. For peace of mind, he put it down to a minor fraying in the fabric of the universe.

If the multiverse is crowded with infinite parallel realities, it makes theoretical sense that sometimes they will bump into each other. This was simply Zale's turn. Like when you're the unfortunate one whose tire picks up the shard of glass on a busy highway. To further normalize the situation, he named the presence Z2.

However, a more serious event forced him to take action. Food in his refrigerator began disappearing. It was slow at first. Missing bites of dessert. Less juice in the bottle. The initial few times, Zale thought he might have forgotten he'd eaten the food. When entire servings vanished, he knew something was up.

Zale was alarmed by this increased physical manifestation. His imagination raced. As in horror movies, was the universe's structure ripping further and a portal about to open? Would a ravenous beast or the merciless minions of Satan pour through and wreak havoc?

He was on edge. But, the End of Days didn't occur. Just more disappearing food. It appeared that Z2, like Zale, had a particular fondness for Italian food.

It began stretching his food budget. And his tolerance. One cold night, Zale came home looking forward to a satisfying meal of leftover pasta. The bowl was empty. It was like dealing with a co-worker who keeps snatching your lunch from the office

refrigerator. Zale reacted the same way. He cursed and shouted threats, "You thieving son of a bitch. Stop taking my food." As in the office, there was no reply. Although, in his agitated state, he thought he heard a faint laugh. Grabbing a pen, he scribbled a note that said, "I'm serious! Don't take any more food!" He put it in the refrigerator and slammed the door. Zale bundled up and went to buy takeout.

The next morning, when he got breakfast, the milk was gone. There was a return note. "Z, Thanks for the food. But, could you add more spice. It's been rather bland."

Perhaps, he should have been frightened. Instead, he was infuriated at the arrogance. His anger and hunger drove away any concerns about apocalyptic consequences. Zale steamed all day at work. That night, he returned with a plan and supplies.

Zale cooked a large batch of spicy fettuccine with vegetables and sausage. He hummed as he enjoyed a huge helping. Before he put the leftovers in the refrigerator, he mixed in a lethal dose of rat poisoning.

Closing the door, he mumbled, "Bland, I'll show you bland."

Zale had no regrets. Z2 would get what he deserved. And, he reasoned, you can't be charged with killing someone who doesn't really exist. That night, he slept the sleep of the just. There were no inklings of Z2's presence.

In the morning, the fettuccine was gone. Zale pumped his fist in triumph, "Got you, you damned weasel."

Then, he heard a heavy footstep on the kitchen floor behind him.

A bottomless voice growled, "Thanks for the spice, Zale. It was just right. Now, it's my turn."

MOTH

Robert Beveridge

All I can see
is the claret waterfall
of your hair, its brush
against the small of your back,
how it strokes your neck
as I, so far away, cannot.

All I can see
is the sweet lines of your body
accented by the flaxen highlights
that stream over, down, across you
as my hands would, were you here.

All I can see
is the way your lips purse,
the half-smile pink wickedness
moist and sultry, the promise
reflected endless in the gold
of your eyes, that my mouth
would keep without these miles
between us.

A SMALL VOICE

Lowell Jaeger

turned my gaze
aside from other mourners
to stare blankly at a tombstone
nearby.

Dark slab of granite
flanked by two lesser stones:
"Mom" inscribed on the left.
"Dad" chiseled on the right.
No dates. Yet.

"Jeremy," said the larger, middle marker
August 2, 2001—May 19, 2004
with a toy locomotive and caboose
carved at the base, frozen
in forever's play.

Only then could I pivot to face,
with leveled compassion,
the casket we'd lifted
to its scaffold above the burial excavation.

As the mortuary crew
lowered our father
at the end of his long life
deeper into unpredictable
certainties
of what comes next.

DOLLAR STORE MADONNA

Steve Scarano

five weeks on a road trip you get opportunities to think about
things that should have been thought about elsewhere, earlier
in this case it is the lines someone i will never know
have carefully painted down miles of 2 lane backcountry asphalt
just so i could drive it safely—me, somebody that person will never know
& i wonder if he knew then how important his work could be
or if he maybe figured it out later on
or if anyone at all told him or even tried to tell him

and so there is also this:

what guidelines have in other places been painted for me
& even what lines have i laid down for other people
without knowing much about it

how do i make a connection with this other thing that happened
in this land o' enchantment
a woman wrapped head to toe with mismatched cloths like a shroud
only eyes exposed & those she is continuously rubbing like tears
that couldn't dry or images she can't erase
she is sitting on the sidewalk outside the door of a dollar store
when i walk in by her trying to figure out what my place in this is
and out again after my purchases a few yards until i ask my wife

What can we do with Her i think it is a her
so i walk back in the store

What do you know about that person
i ask the young cashier

She's homeless mental health & law enforcement have been here
She refuses help She knows this is a safe place We check on her
A couple of weeks ago some kids beat her up

i ask again

How does She eat
and the girl says She comes in here She likes sardines cup-
a-soup oysters

She gets hot water from the gas station over there

so i get her a bag of those things & also some sausages
put them on the sidewalk next to her

Thank you Her voice comes through the cloths
and we walk away but the thing still in my head and my heart is
i never told her my name and i never asked her what is hers.

STUCCO

Robert Beveridge

Cast your eyes away and smile
cheeks red. For all your protestation
you know this game, its rules
and other, unwritten, strategies

It was not, at first, your body
that caught my conscious,
but your words, your lyrics, your
desire on paper, let loose to the wind
to flutter where it may.

I caught it
in my teeth. It would be held
a flower, a snowflake, smoke.

And then, after, I saw you.

Deep hair, scarlet, blood, frame
encompasses your eyes, your lips.
Redness becomes you, blushes blue and pink.
Your shirt falls open and reveals to leers
And light your throat, chest.
Improper barest hint of bra
white on white as flesh on flesh

I glimpse you only once and dream.
Refuge. Your skin, your lips,
over and over. I whisper
"take me there."

QUICKSTEPPING SALLY

Mike Wilson

is like Sasquatch
rarely sighted
never captured

a disappearing vapor
trail of green whim
too much to un-see

but never enough
to know for sure
that she's my girl

FABRI FIBRA (1)

Mario Loprete



oil on concreto cement 20cm x 30cm

NEIL YOUNG LIVES: 1977 VERSION

Michael Berton

parents push out teenage
sons and their music
banished to a beach
side summer camp
away from desert heat
roofers heating tar

the Greyhound cruise
into Los Angeles
the scent of sea water
sniffed through tainted
traffic emissions on
a freeway overpass
that welcomes visitors
in black spray paint
Neil Young Lives

I'm now living
upper left coast
my conscious
still buzzes
on slogans
and songs
in public defiance
of the humdrum

never been
to Zuma beach
but warm organically
to coastal sunsets
cowgirls in the sand
guitar feedback
and they are
a heart of gold

CAN'T HAVE TOO MANY FLAMINGOS

Terry Sanville

Rawley slouched in a deck chair on the porch of his '73 Fleetwood doublewide and watched the afternoon parade. The overgrown succulents in pots along his porch railing nearly hid him in the shadows. But the trailer park kids knew he was there and shouted and waved on their way home from school. Sometimes he'd hobble down the ramp to the street and talk with them, tell stories, give them money to buy candy their parents forbade them to eat.

The park residents put up with him since he'd lived there longer than anybody, since coming back crippled from Nam, since outliving his wife and several pet cats. Only Magic Man, a twenty-pound tom, kept him company. He'd put the cat on a leash and walk around the park, the cat angering dog owners by leaving various deposits in their flowerbeds.

But Rawley's favorite haunt was stretched out in a lounge chair next to the pool, his straw hat pulled down but not enough to block his view of the women taking their daily swim. He never bothered anybody, except maybe Larue, a big-eyed divorcee who wore provocative bathing suits yet scowled at any man who looked at her twice. Rawley liked looking at her, wanted to be her friend.

A few months back the trailer park got new management, a live-in couple from Indiana, who wanted to improve the image of their ageing California park. Each household got a letter that detailed what should be done to spruce up their space and coach. After receiving angry complaints, the managers, Elsa and Stan, held a meeting in the clubhouse to explain their requirements.

Stan began the meeting. "I'm glad all of you came to talk

about our park improvement program. I'll try and –"

Before he could finish, residents jumped to their feet and loudly aired their particular grievances. A beleaguered Stan tried responding while Elsa sat fuming. After a while, tempers cooled. Most had finished when Rawley stood.

"You claim my garden's a jungle. I like jungles. More plants means cleaner air."

Stan smiled. "We're not saying you can't have a jungle. It just should be a neat jungle."

Laughter erupted from the crowd. Rawley continued, "And what's this about my flamingos? What's wrong with 'em? I think they're beautiful."

"Rawley, you've got 36 of them."

"Hey, they like my jungle."

More laughter.

"Look, Mr. Simmons, plastic pink flamingoes are what most people make fun of when they talk about...about mobile home parks. We're trying to improve our image in the minds of the community."

Rawley shook his head. "Can't see how ditchin' my flamingos will do that?"

"Ah, let 'im keep the stupid things," somebody yelled.

"Yeah, Larry, they're not as bad as your garden gnomes."

More laughter.

"My gnomes look better than those concrete bunnies you've got."

The laughter increased until Stan clapped his hands and the crowd quieted. "Obviously, we disagree on which garden ornaments are appropriate."

"Well I think flamingos are charming," Larue chimed in. "I think Rawley should keep 'em. But I'd wish he'd stop playing that darn clarinet. It's driving me nuts."

"Gonna be a short drive," somebody said followed by laughter.

On Tuesday evenings, if it wasn't raining, Rawley sat on his porch and played New Orleans style jazz and dirges, long strings of sweet soulful notes bringing life to the trailer park. In the summer, neighbors would join him, sometimes with guitars and banjos.

Rawley tipped his hat at Larue. "I'll try ta keep it down. Don't wanna disturb you watchin' Jeopardy and Wheel."

"That would be appreciated."

"Maybe if you'd join me some evening..."

"Oh, Rawley..."

A "woooo woooo" rose from the crowd followed by chuckling. The meeting broke up.

Over the next weeks Rawley noticed changes taking place. The managers pruned the park's trees to within an inch of their lives. Plastic bags filled with garden clippings lined the streets on trash day. A paint crew provided cut-rate pressure washing and repaint jobs for the ageing coaches. Even the clubhouse got a new coat and its ratty carpet replaced.

Rawley did nothing. Stan banged on his door every few days, wanting to know when the flamingos would be removed and the jungle manicured. He threatened to hire a gardener to do the

work then tack the cost onto Rawley's monthly rent. Meanwhile, Larue joined Rawley on Tuesday evenings, and his clarinet playing gradually shortened.

On one warm Tuesday, Rawley and Larue sat on his porch and sipped Margaritas. He played *Saint James Infirmary* and *Nearer My God to Thee*. The sun disappeared behind surrounding mountains and the string of tiny lantern-shaped streetlights flickered on. Rawley retrieved a cardboard box from his house. With Larue's help, he tied small flashlights onto his arms and legs and stuffed an array of them into his hatband. Properly festooned, he walked into the street and began to play his clarinet, a slow swinging rendition of *When the Saints Go Marchin' In*. With a purring Magic Man in her arms, Larue stood by his side.

Thirty-six squabbling flamingos immediately joined them. The birds formed two side-by-side columns and the parade moved off down the street. People came out onto their porches to watch. As the procession passed each coach, it was joined by a cadre of hopping bunnies, a platoon of marching garden gnomes, editions of Bambi and her mother, lizards that had escaped the sides of flowerpots, various frogs and toads, giant butterflies, a herd of miniature elephants, a few Yodas, Buddhas, midget black men holding lanterns, cupids shooting arrows or peeing into pools, hovering angels and archangels, and squirrels hiding from wide-eyed owls. At the end, a baby T-rex pulled a wagon that held a family of turtles.

The menagerie circled the trailer park then exited onto the busy city street and vanished. In the days that followed, the police failed to locate Rawley or Larue. But Stan discovered two pink flamingos inserted in the ground outside the pool's chain link fence. One seemed to glare at the other with huge eyes. The other stared at the pool, a toothy grin painted across its lower beak.

STATE OF THE UNION

Gary Beck

Not caring for others
has become endemic
in our troubled society
ravaged by poverty,
a growing disease
afflicting millions
at a terrible time
of diminishing opportunity
for the children of need,
deprived of services
that allow a better life,
indifference of the rich
arbitrarily condemning
so many youth
to a dismal future.

BROWN SHOE

Jonathan B. Ferrini

What has befallen you and led you to the center of a busy intersection, alone, at the peril of being crushed by racing cars? You remain erect and proud, as if standing at a counter of an expensive boutique, or dancing in the moonlight at a lavish cocktail party. What was your journey to this perilous intersection, brown shoe?

You resemble a fashionable, early twentieth century, woman's, ankle-high shoe, with elaborate brogue design and brown, silk laces. You're made of beautiful, polished, brown leather, which has aged gracefully. Were you lovingly handmade by a master cobbler in Europe for a wealthy matron, or mass produced by immigrants for upscale shoe stores?

Were you worn by a wealthy socialite, or a beautiful debutante? Your size suggests you were worn by a petite woman – perhaps a blond, brunette or a redhead? Was a man fortunate to have married you, or, did you simply date handsome suitors for your amusement?

Perhaps you were an entrepreneur, a professional woman, corporate chieftain, or a loving homemaker?

How many exotic travels did you enjoy, and romantic encounters did you relish? What were your heartbreaks and disappointments? Did you have children?

What has befallen you, beautiful brown shoe? Did you fall off the back of a thrift store truck, or return to visit your former neighborhood of stately Victorian homes, now replaced by skyscrapers? I pray you weren't struck in the intersection as you traveled to your afternoon tea with friends, and I shudder to think, you might have been an elderly woman, slowly crossing the street,

not making it through the crosswalk in time, before being hit by a careless driver.

As I fight rush hour traffic to present my grandmother's eulogy, you remain in my thoughts, brown shoe. My grandmother lived to be 103 years old. She was a tireless, progressive, trailblazer in business and politics. She was active in the civil rights movement, fought for equal pay and justice for women, and was an ardent environmentalist. Until the last few years of her life, she had a busy social calendar which included her beloved ballroom dance classes. My grandmother was a "global citizen" and was concerned for the future of the planet. Her credo was, "everyone and everything has value and purpose in life."

I want to rescue you from being crushed in the intersection, so I may cherish you as a valuable family heirloom, or provide you as a gift to my daughter who might research your history. Alas, I'm already blocks away, too late to retrieve you from the perilous intersection.

I pray a kind soul will recognize your beauty, retrieve you from peril, and you will find a home in an upscale vintage thrift store, clothing museum, or become a prized addition to a woman's shoe collection.

As I peer into the rear-view mirror, I see an old, homeless woman, pushing her shopping cart neatly packed with her life's possessions. She stops, picks you up, and gently polishes you, as if finding you in a fine boutique. She carefully places you in her shopping cart with her other prized possessions.

You reminded me of lost loves, revered, departed relatives, and inequities in our world my beloved, grandmother would work tirelessly to resolve. My remarks at grandmother's eulogy will have new meaning.

Thank you, brown shoe.

FABRI FIBRA (2)

Mario Loprete



oil on concrete 25cm

THE LOST RIVERS OF THE LA BASIN

Ginny Short

from Riverness

This story should read: *In the Los Angeles Basin there are three rivers.*

I once read that the Los Angeles River was wantonly wild, making mad swings across the broad, fertile valley coming down from the hills. This captured my imagination. Like a hose with the water turned high, she would wash out her shallow banks, whip this way and that along the flats, often wreaking havoc with the farms and ranches spread across the flat plain that now sports the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles. Its headwaters are located north of Santa Monica in the Santa Monica and Santa Susana Mountains near the community of Canoga Park where the Arroyo Calabasas and Bell Creek join. It flows west, then south. In the 1800's and early 1900's the river would sometime reach the Pacific by turning west through Ballona Creek into the Santa Monica Bay and sometimes south through Long Beach or San Pedro into the San Pedro Bay. To protect the growing region the river was channelized, tamed to run in one direction and one direction only. It's mostly concrete banks takes the runoff of about 33 cities or communities and funnels it into San Pedro Bay. Even the confluence of the Arroyo Calabasas and Bell Creek are channelized and concretized. Even the source.

I lived in Long Beach for a number of years during my young adulthood, where a number of the city roads cross the concrete channel. In most places I would see a smattering of scrawny trees, mud and oily water over the gray-white of the concrete. It rarely ran full, mostly small flows. I thought it was a runoff channel. I would never have known it was a river but for the sign

on the road, "L.A. River."

This story once read: *Once upon a time I saw three rivers.*

The San Gabriel River also starts in those unique hills, the transverse ranges. A series of discrete ranges, these hills bifurcate California with their unusual east-west formation. This river starts in the Santa Monica Mountains further east than the Los Angeles river, making its way onto the floodplains then south to the Pacific at the border of Long Beach and Seal Beach. Long Beach is encased in rivers: the Los Angeles to the west, San Gabriel to the east. The San Gabriel has five dams on its 58-mile length, although only ten of those miles are concretized, unlike her fully corseted sister to the west.

I drove or took the bus to Seal Beach frequently and noted the pelicans winging over this channel. It was a ditch, a channel, nothing to look at. It made no impression on me at all. Even writing about it I find I have to look up photos of it to remind myself what I looked at for thirty years. A whole lot of nothing much.

I thought I heard a story: *Once upon a time there were three wild rivers.*

The Santa Ana river flows out of the local mountains, a range further east called the San Bernardinios, where the woodpeckers barbershop pole up and down the pines and the siskins peck and chitter. I lived near the banks of the Santa Ana for a while, where it runs through Riverside. Great ribbons of reeds and willows cast their bouquet of scents into the pollen breezes and compete for our attention with the scent of smog. Great swath of sky above, vireos below. The Santa Ana sucker still fights the currents here, where the bright streams that ricochet from rock to sandbar smooth out to slow and wide meanders across landscape encroached by more and more and more houses. The upper and the lower river are divided by the Prado Dam, the dam that looms

over the 91 Freeway shuttling homeowners in Riverside County to the more lucrative jobs in Orange and Los Angeles Counties. This dam delineates the less developed northern reaches from the crowded urban landscapes to the south.

Historically the river emptied into Newport Bay, but the construction of the Bitter Point dam changed its trajectory, bypassing the bay. Now, by the time this river reaches the ocean it is a box culvert, a massive flood control channel protecting the homes that lie in its flood plain. The median cost of a home there is almost \$700,000. This is the land of surf and Disneyland. Back then there were still Orange Groves in Orange County and burrowing owls in the fields. But the river was channelized even then. It is directed with purpose into the ocean. As Nathan Masters says, "it bears little resemblance to its wilder, historical self."

There is this story: *About three rivers.*

Channelize, constrain, harness: I did not even know where the mouths of these rivers were for 25 years. I saw them. I drove over them. Stared at them. Birded on them. But it did not register: these are rivers. The concrete channels I passed over did have cormorants lazing in the sun, pelicans gliding towards the nearby ocean, bikes rolling by on concrete trails, but this is Southern California, the beach was always down the street. I did not realize – and I mean by that a visceral knowledge, awareness, recognition – I lived between the concrete mouths of three rivers all those years, though I crossed those bridges hundreds of times. When I finally realized these were rivers I was seeing, I was astonished by what I was looking at: dark, oily water in thin rivulets between concrete walls in the L.A. River. Mud and trash between homeless encampments, thin rivulets and sometimes roiling stormwater. Booms congealing cast-off plastic debris from the dozens of cities that bound the banks of the Santa Ana

River. Occasional closures of the beach as e-coli laden water spewed out their mouths. I thought they were only ditches to carry off stormwater.

This story read: *Once upon a time there were three rivers.*

A TIME FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Katherine Perelas



SPECIMEN 15

Adrianna Irizarry

Mia sat confidently in her latest role across from the male who had agreed to her solicitations. He was generically handsome, according to the social standards of the region, and would pose as an adequate addition to File 77-E3. The ceremony was functioning as expected, if the other ceremonies were of any measure. Kevin was asking questions and talking incessantly. Most of what he said was on the heels of interrupting her, but she didn't mind. She preferred not to lie—too much.

The feast arrived, organized on individual plates. After 369 specimens recorded in File 77-M4, she had grown accustomed to the clutter of deconstructed meals spanning the length of long-tables, which she had to plate herself. Despite the necessary objectivity Mia permitted herself to appreciate the charm of this small oddity. Her dish was smothered in a green goo and his in a red one. They had ordered the same meal, but she stayed clear of red liquids, gravies, or garnishes in strange dishes. One was never too certain of the ingredients. Following the preferences iterated by the males of the species, Mia spooned a large portion of the meal into her mouth. After a brief moment of flavor, a fire ignited on her tongue and she instantly regretted her bold show of native-ism as her eyes watered.

“Whoa, are you okay?”

She nodded in the traditional way, swallowed and downed the water controlled by a cylindrical glass container.

Kevin smiled, “I thought you said you were a true New Mexican. Isn't green-chili y'all's' thing?”

Mia hesitated, realizing her folly. The operations manual quickly loaded in her mind's eye and she chose a quick prefabricated excuse: "I forgot to stretch."

She watched Kevin hesitate. In the single beat of a heart she considered her exit strategy and the consequences of using it; however, Kevin smiled and laughed.

"You're funny."

Mia relaxed and smiled back. Under the cover of the table she pressed a button on the time-tracker strapped to her wrist and felt the surface of her tongue numb by three points. Considering the amount of fiery goo slathered over her meal, she pressed the button once more dropping three additional points before re-engaging the ceremony.

Kevin continued the ritual of speech revealing intimate details about his life. Mia mentally annotated his lack of concern regarding security, which she would later submit for analysis. By her studies, human males were uniquely talkative creatures. Mia wondered if the others would have comparable results. It would be a distinct characteristic if being lax in information protection protocols was the norm. She found this oddity less charming than the arrangement of their food.

When the feasting plates were empty, Mia prepared for stage two: probing. Although she had encountered little difficulty in the initiation of probing with previous specimens, Mia did not want to risk an extended engagement. She had read that some ceremonies could last weeks before probing commenced and she preferred not to wait. As they walked from the restaurant and down the street towards her place of lodging, she initiated physical contact.

It took little time in encouraging his participation in the final ritual. She found it pleasant enough and mentally recorded duration: 2 minutes 17 seconds—shorter than the current documented average. She annotated his enthusiastic vocalizations and physical symptoms in detail. Convinced she had thoroughly explored Specimen 15, she blinked in quick succession, uploading her notes to the main drive. Then she curled her body up from its prone position, displacing the languid male as she exited the bed.

“Where are you going?”

Pulling on her garments she looked at him curiously. “It’s finished, is it not?”

“I mean, yeah. But, you don’t have to go. You can sleep...wait, this is your room. Why are you leaving?”

“I only needed the bed.”

Again, Kevin stared at her confused and she decided to add a note regarding intelligence to the file. She returned his gaze with a traditional smile and walked out the room. Taking the stairs, she made her way to the roof and awaited extraction.

Specimen 16 awaited.

GOING STEADY

Michael Berton

it is 1976
in some niche
of my mind
a faded memory
where the song
Take It To The Limit
lingers at a
Sadie Hawkins dance
where shyness
is a chorus
heard throughout
the dimly lit
school cafeteria
as huddled cliques
of boys and girls
stand apart
pretending cool
teen scenarios
until one
giggly girl
on a double dare
shoulder taps
a gawky boy
pimpled in pointillism
they face off
uncoordinated
under supervision
arms around
each other
haphazard
puppetry
slow dance
that may lead
to going steady

LET MADNESS REIGN

Gary Beck

We can easily understand
why chaos reigns in our troubled land,
for the owners of our country
require instability
to maintain their positions
without suffering restrictions
on their exercising power,
while our beloved children cower
in vulnerable, defenseless schools,
unprotected by the adult fools
who rave about classroom locks,
arming our children with rocks,
making school assaults a trifle
by a mad kid with a rifle.

EN EL VALLE DE LOS CAÍDOS

J L Higgs

Concrete barriers blocked the uncompleted streets of La Ciudad. Beyond them, no adult voices or sounds of children playing existed. The landscape was littered with park benches, lamp poles, fountain basins, trucks, bulldozers, graders, backhoes, and cranes all abandoned amid skeletal frames of reinforced steel and cement cubes.

La Ciudad was to have had four quadrants of modern apartment complexes, stores, sports centers, schools, lush gardens, pastoral green parks, and serene blue lakes. But as sometimes happens, plans and dreams go unfulfilled. Shortly after the first phase had been completed Spain's economy collapsed. Now, this town and the other desolate ones like it, were known as *Los Ciudades Fantasma* – the ghost towns.

Bringing no personal possessions with him except an ivory handled hunting knife, a book of Federico Garcia Lorca poems, and a photograph, Cristo had moved to La Ciudad after his abuela's death. Now, in his dark barren room, he raked a wooden match against the pitted cement floor. Its tip flared, sputtered, then steadied into a flame. He picked up a tapered white candle; he held its wick in the flame and watched the melting wax drip onto the floor. When it had pooled, he held the candle in it until the wax grew firm.

Taking hold of his backpack, he reached inside. Setting aside the well-worn book of his grandmother's favorite poems, he stared at a photograph. Its image was faded but not his memory of that day. Elena was sitting on the swing he'd built for her. Though she disliked having her picture taken, he'd done it anyway. Tracing her lips with his finger, he recalled the soft

sweetness of her skin. Then, as he'd done countless times, he kissed her, laid down, and closed his eyes.

At first light, Cristo set out on foot. He hoped to hitch a ride with another soul traveling West but encountered no one. By mid-day, the roadway's surface had softened beneath the scorching sun. With its asphalt tugging at his every step, he decided to rest.

Beside the roadway, Cristo chewed on a piece of chorizo he'd cut off with the ivory-handled hunting knife Mateo had given him at their final parting. Bloody streaks where he'd wiped the sides of the blade clean stained the thighs of his pants. Mateo had told him the knife had been his father's and that he hoped Cristo would pass it on to his own son on day.

Cristo rubbed his aching shoulders, placed his palms on his lower back, and stretched. He removed his sombrero, pulled out a red bandanna, and wiped away the ocean of sweat on his shaved head. Unhooking the canteen from the hemp rope snaking through his belt loops, he unscrewed its cap. The lukewarm water tasted metallic, but he swallowed, forcing down the chorizo.

Rising, Cristo, pulled his backpack on. In the distance, where the black slice of roadway cutting through the dry red dirt met the sky, heat waves shimmered. With a sigh, Cristo poured water over his head, pulled on his sombrero, and resumed walking.

Their Bachillerato completed, Cristo and two friends were taking photos of themselves at popular tourist sites in Madrid. That's when they saw the children selling rosemary and flowers, and encountered women cradling infants, begging for alms. *Gitanos* - gypsies. Cristo and his friends decided to find out where these undesirables had camped and frighten them with fireworks

leftover from Carnival.

On the agreed upon night, Cristo's friends, afraid the gypsies would curse them, refused to go. As he made his way through the dense woods on the outskirts of the city alone, he followed the faint sounds of guitars, fiddles, accordions, and hand claps. Near the woods' edge, he got down and crawled forward. In the middle of a clearing, around a roaring bonfire, the Gitanos were singing, dancing, and playing their instruments.

The music's volume lowered, and its tempo slowed as a young girl, about Cristo's age, stepped from among the dancers. Holding the ends of her flaming red dress in her hands and swinging her slender olive colored arms side to side, the dress was a sea of cascading waves. Suddenly, with an almost imperceptible nod from the girl, the music turned raucous.

The girl tossed back her head and her long wavy black hair fanned out like the mane of an untamed mare. Thrusting her lithesome torso forward, she charged across the clearing, flashing and snapping the dress. Stopping suddenly, she threw her hands in the air, released the dress, and began stomping and twirling with a frenzy. The other gypsies clapped and whooped in ecstasy as the music continued at a feverish pace. Mesmerized, Cristo could not take his eyes off the dancing girl.

The crunch of car tires and a rush of rippling air awakened Cristo. He opened his eyes and caught a glimpse of a vehicle disappearing into the orange-red horizon. As he slept by the roadside overnight, his body had stiffened. He flexed and massaged each knee, then twisted at the waist, his back realigning with a pop. Opening his backpack, he took out the chorizo. He sliced off a hunk and slipped it into his mouth. As he chewed, he pulled out a loaf of chapata, poured olive oil on the

bread's hardened crust, and bit off a piece.

In the days after spying on the gypsies, an unfamiliar yearning gnawed at Cristo. By nightfall, when his desire to see the girl again became an unbearable hunger, he'd steal away to the gypsy's campsite.

One night, dizzy from spinning, she stumbled into the woods. Cristo leaped from his hiding place and caught her in his arms. Holding her, he smelled a tantalizing aroma of cinnamon and oranges. She then smiled, took his hand, and led him from the shadows.

Though they were outcasts, Cristo began spending time among the gypsies. He soon discovered the negative stereotype of them was more myth than reality and only applied to a tiny number of gypsies. As the weeks passed, Cristo witnessed the special connection the girl, Elena, had with nature and its mysteries. Even the direction leaves on a tree pointed were meaningful omens to her and her knowledge of the medicinal uses of plants that grew wild seemed endless. The other Gitanos also exhibited a deep respect for her special abilities. Many came to the trailer she shared with her Uncle Mateo, told her their dreams, and she'd interpreted the meaning.

The Gitanos's daily routine soon became familiar to Cristo. He accompanied the men, cutting and gathering wood for fires or repairing whatever needed fixing. In the early afternoon, however, all work activity halted for the siesta. The women ceased sewing, washing, and cooking to bring lunch to the men.

Elena always arrived with a basket decorated with freshly cut flowers from the planters surrounding her trailer. She and Cristo would then stroll hand-in-hand past the simmering cook pots,

colorful tents, and camp vehicles to a secluded field of tall grass. There, while they ate, Elena told him about the amazing places and things she'd seen during her travels.

One afternoon as they lay in the field resting, Cristo kissed her. When Cristo entered her for the very first time every cell in his body tingled with such intensity he lost all sense of consciousness. The moment their bodies and souls united was terrifying, beautiful, like running toward and over the edge of a cliff, free falling, and experiencing indescribable joy while letting go.

One day, while working with the men, Cristo asked Elena's uncle, Mateo, about her parents. After rubbing a thumb over his bushy eyebrows and thick mustache, he sat down on a weathered tree stump.

"We Romani have a long history of persecution," he said, pulling an ivory-handled hunting knife from beneath his blousy purple shirt. From his pocket he retrieved an apple, sliced off a piece, and handed it to Cristo.

"Many believe the Romani are a bad people, so we wander, not staying any one place too long. But all the Romani want is to live in peace. Elena's parents left to search for such a place, then return for her." Mateo shrugged his heavy shoulders and shook his head. "I am not an educated man, but this I know: There are always men who spread lies and hate about those who are different from them. Such cruelty harms millions of innocents."

At the first sign of fall, the Gitanos began discussing where to travel to next. Cristo asked Elena to stay. He then appealed to Mateo without success. Finally, in desperation, Cristo proposed marriage.

News of the pending nuptials was not well received. The Romani had an unspoken tradition of arranged marriages, and a

betrothed Romani groom's parents were to perform certain rituals.

Mateo, acting as his niece's surrogate, went to the Voivode hoping to negotiate a compromise. The Voivode told him that Elena had disrespected their traditions and if Romani's persisted in inter-marrying they would ultimately cease to exist.

These were things Mateo had believed his entire life but now he found himself questioning them. Comporting himself respectfully, he said, "But isn't change inevitable? Aren't Romani and Spaniard the same? You and I have chosen this life. Shouldn't our children have the right to choose when they come of age?"

The Voivode deliberated for a few days before giving Elena permission to marry but with conditions. No pedimiento – no engagement party. The casamiento – wedding ceremony – el yeli, and pañuelo would take place followed by the traditional three-day celebration with food, bulerias, rumbas, etc. But at the end of the celebration, when the Romani's left, Elena and Cristo would not accompany them.

Following their wedding, Cristo and Elena moved into the small two-story brick house where he lived with his Abuela. There, among the Cypress and Jacaranda trees, Elena began removing weeds and dead plants from the ruined flower that bordered one side of the property. She also assumed housekeeping duties while Cristo performed maintenance and repairs on the slightly run-down home.

Due to years of constant travel, Elena lacked a formal education. Cristo began tutoring her in reading, writing, and mathematics; she proved an able student. In the evenings she read poems to the old woman since cataracts and arthritis had stolen one of her lifelong pleasures.

One day when Elena was working in the flower garden, Cristo

got a rope, a solid piece of wood, and fashioned a swing. He tied it to a branch of the Jacaranda tree that overhung the garden so Elena could sit on the swing and watch the garden rejuvenate.

By mid-spring the Jacaranda tree was covered in delicate purple flowers and the reborn garden was in bloom. Elena refreshed a large vase in the house's front room with newly cut flowers every day. One day, as she sat on the swing deep in thought, Cristo went inside and got his camera. When the click of the camera's shutter broke the spell she was under she frowned. Elena believed capturing a person's image in a photo was bad luck. Cristo, however, thought it nothing more than a silly superstition. As he walked to where she was sitting a smile returned to her lips.

She told him they were going to be parents. Speechless, Cristo knelt before her and put his head in her lap. She laid her hand upon it and the fragrance of her cinnamon and oranges perfume locked that moment in his mind.

Elena's pregnancy progressed without incident except for the constant queasiness she experienced during her first trimester. As her delivery time drew near, Cristo pleaded with her to give birth in a hospital. But Elena insisted on a traditional Romani home birth so as not to incur "bad luck." The disagreement was finally resolved when Abuela secured the services of a neighbor who was a midwife.

In preparation for his impending fatherhood, Cristo built a cradle. He was applying the finishing touches when he heard Elena's screams and ran to fetch the midwife. Upon their return they found Elena squatting above the wooden birthing stool. She was squeezing its arms so tightly her knuckles were white. In the raging battle to expel the child, contraction after contraction wracked her body. Sweat streamed from her pores, drenching her

nightgown, and plastering her hair to her face. Mucus and blood poured out of her and onto the floor as she screamed over and over in an unknown language with Cristo looking on helplessly.

While the midwife worked to expand the womb's opening, Abuela held Elena, speaking words of comfort and encouragement. Then the midwife's eyes locked with Abuela's and she mouthed the word breech. Tiny feet, calves, and thighs emerged and as Abuela whispered to Elena her face turned pale and her eyes filled with terror.

With her hands deep inside Elena, the midwife told her to push. She inhaled deeply, gritted her teeth, and bore down. Her body shook uncontrollably, veins bulged in her head and neck, blood vessels broke beneath her skin, and her face turned crimson. The midwife struggled to rotate the infant's hips. As they came free, thick blood streamed down the midwife's forearms. She compressed the baby's shoulders to ease them out and as the shoulders and head emerged. Elena slumped against the wall.

With a sigh of relief, the midwife turned toward Cristo with the baby, before abruptly halting. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around the baby's neck.

Abuela grabbed for the hunting knife Cristo kept atop the dresser but only succeeded in knocking it to the floor. The blood and mucus covered tangle foiled the midwife's attempts to wedge her fingers into it. Abandoning that effort, the midwife snatched up the knife and repeatedly slashed at the cord. As it split a mournful rattle escaped from the child and Elena screamed an unearthly primal wail.

The child was dead.

Elena remained in bed for days, her dark sunken eyes

staring at the empty cradle. At times she cried, emitting no sound. Though devastated, Cristo tried to console his wife but his efforts proved futile. She remained broken, unresponsive, and began wandering the house in her nightgown with fixed and lifeless eyes.

Not knowing what to do, Cristo took the cradle outside. After placing it on top of a boulder he picked up a rock and brought it down on the cradle with all his might. He pounded it over and over until all that remained were splinters. Chest heaving, he threw the rock to the ground. As he lifted his chin, trying to catch his breath, he saw Elena staring down at him from their bedroom window.

A week after the child's death, Cristo awakened to find Elena dressed and sitting on the edge of the bed with a breakfast she'd made him. After watching him eat, she went downstairs and started in on her chores. Though things appeared to be returning to normal that day, Cristo remained on guard despite the smile that greeted him whenever he looked at her.

The next morning, when he awoke, Cristo reached for Elena. Her side of the bed was empty. As he rubbed the sleep from his eyes, he padded into the hallway calling her name. Receiving no response, he began searching the house. The sound of his strained voice and rapid footsteps echoing in its hollow rooms confirmed she was gone.

Cristo convinced himself that she'd return in a few days. When that didn't happen he reported her missing to the local authorities. As weeks passed, he wondered what he'd done to make her leave? He posted public notices, followed-up on every reported sighting, but they yielded nothing. Abuela told him to pray and have faith. But as time went by his faith steadily weakened.

A year passed, then another. Cristo watched the garden Elena had resurrected wilt and die. Though friends encouraged

him to remarry and start over again he knew he was empty and incomplete without her.

Cristo first heard about the person who haunted the basilica in El Valle de Los Caidos shortly after Abuela died. The rumor was the woman came daily bearing a bouquet of flowers and never spoke to anyone. Folk tales being prevalent in Spain's society, Cristo initially dismissed the reports. But they burrowed into his mind during his solitary years in the ghost town.

Shading his eyes with his hand, Cristo stared at the landscape. In every direction, the parched and barren earth was covered with large cracks crisscrossed by jagged fissures. Leaving the roadway's shoulder, he headed southwest – into the wind.

Reddish-brown dirt stinging his face and body, he pushed on, his backpack feeling like an anchor. Squinting, he pulled out his bandanna and tied it over his nose and mouth. As he approached the crest of the hilltop, he spotted the stone cross that marked the pilgrimage site. Then the entire memorial built by convicts during Franco's regime came into view.

Cristo descended the valley's rocky wall. On the Esplanade, he paused to rest. Sorrow, grief, and pain clung to the ground where forty thousand unidentified casualties of Spain's Civil war were buried.

Staring up toward the base of the 500-foot-high cross, he could see the statues of Saint Matthew with a man, Saint Mark with a lion, Saint Luke with a bull, and Saint John with an eagle. In the center of the hillside, the grieving Madonna held the broken and lifeless body of her son in her arms.

Cristo crossed the open expanse and entered the basilica carved into the base of the granite wall. In its dimly lit foyer, he

walked past the sword-bearing angels guarding the entrance to the church. The faint scent of incense, citrus, and spices filled the nave. Softly glowing beeswax candles in tiny glasses aligned both side aisles, carrying the prayers of the faithful heavenward. Other than Cristo, not a single soul was present. Not even one of the black robed Benedictine monks from the adjacent monastery.

Cristo removed his backpack, placed it on a pew bench and sat down beside it. In the center of the transept, atop the altar, lay a bouquet of dying flowers. Reaching inside the backpack's flap Cristo pulled out the faded photograph. Holding it in his hands, he stared at the sacristy, said a silent prayer, and recalled Mateo's final words to him, "Remember, you are all she has in this world."

He was prepared to wait for Elena, however long it took.

GOD SAID NO

Lucy Ruth Martinez

Heaven was not what they said it would be.
On my last breath
a stairway of coal appeared before me.
Tormented screams kissed my ears till they began to bleed.
Going further up, they faded slowly.

At age four father Lalo would preach,
"When you pass on to the next life,
God will open his arms
accepting you within his reach."

Heaven was not what he said it would be.
With every step, a glance below brought another memory
Earth coughing thick dreary clouds
reminded me of the ebony rivers that coasted through the streets.

Antarctica, was turquoise blue
something my nana explained as beauty,
yet before dying, the History channel just previewed a series
about the extinction of wild polar bears.
Now they only live in cities, trapped in four by four walls,
scientists called it a place of safety

Before I knew it
glistening gates cooked my eyes.
There was nothing this bright since 2035
when Nixon the third had gotten rid of environmental safety.

Taking the last step,
snowy clouds spread for miles ahead
I imagined stepping on a cloud

would be soft and heartwarming.
Instead it was like a trampoline,
with no bounce ability.

Heaven was not what I thought to be.
The gatekeeper was rangier than the golden pillars
and had Skin waved like monstrous seas
he halted me
with a staff oak tree

I bowed in respect
ready for my destiny
He laid his crinkled fingers on the tips of the tree

Heaven is no longer what it used to be
The folds of his face began moving
The cloud shaking
He claimed,

“Too many souls
were Given mercy

You travelled
You lived
and life was great when promised energy.
That is why God says no entry.”

His voice so loud,
the clouds dissolved rain
I could not find my footing

With every word he spoke
Reality became unsettling
He told me,
“Man pollutes precious life
that took intricate thinking to work properly.

Humans were supposed to be
His next best discovery
and became his most detrimental species.
Now is your time to descend to an eternity
of living in hell
or Earth as you call thee.”

Before I could speak
His fingers hugged the tree
To connect to the clouds crying for sympathy.

Plummeting

Screaming,

 God I am so sorry!

I grabbed for hope.

 Please don't send me back there!

My body broke the atmosphere

 a whisper went into my ear

 “Try again, maybe I will let you in here.”

Hitting the biosphere

the burning light hit my eyes.

Crying for air,

 The doctor said,

 “It's a girl!”

 Just what the mother wanted to hear.

THE ASHES

Alex Mager

3 years.

36 months.

1,095 days.

26,280 hours.

1,576,800 minutes.

The average person breathes 12 to 20 times a minute.

That means I have brought life into my lungs 31,356,000 times since the night I tried to take my own.

I have built myself up from nothing but am still learning how to fly.

I still sometimes fall but I never stay down because staying down means defeat and defeat means the end.

I don't consider my suicide attempt a mistake, I consider it a rebirth.

Like a phoenix rising from its own ashes, I too rise.

Like a star exploding into life from the collapsing of its molecular cloud, I too shine.

I stand on the bones of my trauma and shout a righteous "fuck you" into the void that tried so desperately to consume me.

I burn with the will to survive and breathe fire onto the demons who tried so hard to kill me.

I am a phoenix and a supernova wrapped into one.

I'm all talons, fire, and stardust merged into one motherfucking queen who is willing to fight for her happiness.

I fight because this phoenix deserves to fly.

I fight because this supernova knows she has starpower.

I fight because every single time I breathe,
I get closer to the person I was always meant to be.

Every second I am alive,
is another chance to soar.

YESTERDAY, FATHER MICHEL

Steve Scarano

yesterday father michel our chaplain
told me this story
that probably has no useful end
and it went

this homeless guy
 has a regular job where he works real hard in construction
 sends his paycheck to his son in college up north
and morning day before christmas goes into McD's for coffee
 gets thrown out by the manager because old people in there
 don't like stinky hoboes
so he raises a stink and goes outside to wait for the cops
 who tell him he has 3 warrants and he says
 no they have been cleared up
and the cops say no & they put him in jail for the holiday
from where he phones his dad halfway across the country
who calls the homeless guy's son up north and says
 You better drive down there and get your dad out of jail

so the college boy starts on down
& gets killed in a car crash.

and so on monday the homeless fellow is in court
and the judge figures out that he was right all along
there were no warrants they had been cleared up after all like he said

well father michel goes to the manager of the mcd's and says
he's not blaming him but just wanted to tell him how
the coffee thing ended up
and the manager says he didn't mean anything by it
says it was store policy
and calls the owner

who fires him
for telling the priest it was store policy.

GUARDIAN

William Barrette

“After Ocean Vuong”

Determined Guardian don't be afraid.
Where is that lion's courage, that held
the bulwark when no one else would?

Where is your armor, soldier? The one
that is battered and bloody, but every morning shines
bright and new. From hardship each night of repairs and
prayers that go unanswered. Yet there on the wall
you stand gleaming and tall, protected. But never without armor.

Where is your sword, warrior? That sharp piercing blade.
Never sheathed, as long as demons fight.
I know the battle's hard.
But never once has that sword failed you.

Where is you shield, guardian? That old hard wood shield.
Other shields of gleaming silver have lain before you,
better and stronger; is you shield. Never has it failed to defend,
to protect, you this ancient bulwark.

So, Guardian are you ready?
To strap on your armor.
To pick up your sword.
To raise your shield.
Be determined guardian, because no one else can.

SWEET INTERSTELLAR ABOVE

Hongri Yua

translated by Manu Mangatt

The Time has come to blossom and flourish
In my garden the stars will gather
Each star is a singer
From a mysterious country.
The giant from the City of Platinum
Shall bring a bunch of stone-necklace
This then is a song of the soul
On the stylish sweet interstellar above.

甜蜜的星际之上
时间开花的时候
星星将聚集我的花园
每一颗星是一个歌手
来自一个神秘的国度
那来自白金之城的巨人
将带来一串宝石的项练
那是一曲灵魂的歌谣
流行于甜蜜的星际之上

LUCKY

Tyne Samson



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Adrianna "Izzy" Irizarry is an Air Force veteran with a life-long dream of being a novelist. She was born in Puerto Rico, raised in Georgia, and has called several places home over the years. Currently residing in New Mexico, she attends ENMU in the pursuit of a Bachelor's degree.

ALEX MAGER

Alex Mager is a Vocal Performance major at ENMU. She is constantly trying to grow and improve. She wants to dedicate her poem to her younger self and to anyone who is struggling with mental health: keep your head up, it gets better. You can make it through this.

BILL DIAMOND

Bill Diamond is a writer in Evergreen, Colorado where the Rocky Mountains are both an inspiration and distraction.

CONNIE WOODRING

Connie Woodring is a 74-year-old retired psychotherapist/educator/social activist who is getting back to her true love of writing after 45 years in her real job. She has had 15 poems published in American and British presses, one of which was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize. Two excerpts from my yet-to-be-published non-fiction book, *What Power? Which People? Reflections on Power Abuse and Empowerment*, and two chapters from her yet-to-be-published novel, *Visiting Hours*, have been published.

CORYNN TENNY

Corynn Tenny is a senior at Eastern New Mexico University. An English major with a minor in creative writing, she enjoys writing speculative fiction and poetry. She has recently been accepted into the MA English program at Eastern and hopes to continue working on her creative writing during her time in the program. She lives in Clovis, NM with her husband, dog, and two cats.

CHRISTOPHER GOMEZ

Christopher Gomez is a first-year student at ENMU. Christopher is currently pursuing a degree in Psychology. He has always enjoyed writing but has a soft spot for poetry. Poetry speaks to Christopher in a way that no other form of communication does, and he is elated at the possibility that his poems could speak to someone else.

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David Romanda lives in Kawasaki City, Japan. His work has appeared in Gargoyle Magazine, Hawaii Review, The Main Street Rag, and PANK.

ED RUZICKA

Ed Ruzicka has published one full length volume, Engines of Belief. His poems have appeared in the Atlanta Review, Rattle, the New Millennium Review, and Chicago Literati, as well as other many other literary journals and anthologies. Ed lives in Baton Rouge, LA and is an occupational therapist. More works can be found on his website, edrpoet.com.

EVAN ANDERS

Evan Anders brews coffee for mass consumption in Philadelphia. His poems have appeared in Philadelphia Stories, California Quarterly, North Dakota Quarterly, and Third Point Press. He changes diapers and thinks Bob Dylan was best in the eighties.

GARY BECK

Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director and worked as an art dealer when he couldn't earn a living in the theater. He has also been a tennis pro, a ditch digger and a salvage diver. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and his published books include 21 poetry collections, 7 novels, 3 short story collections and 1 collection of essays. Gary lives in New York City.

GERARD SARNAT

Gerard Sarnat MD's authored Homeless Chronicles (2010), Disputes, 17s, Melting the Ice King (2016). Gerry's recently published by Gargoyle, Oberlin, Brown, Harvard, Stanford, Margie, Main Street Rag, New Delta Review, LA Review, Brooklyn Review, San Francisco Magazine, New York Times. Mount Analogue selected KADDISH for distribution nationwide Inauguration Day. His work also appeared in his Harvard reunion Dylan symposium.

GINNY SHORT

Ginny Short is a graduate of the Regis University MFA program in Denver, with a specialization in poetry and creative non-fiction. She is an arid land ecologist in Southern California, fascinated with all the creatures of the desert and the complicated and vastly interesting issues of water. www.ginnysshort.com

HALEY LYNN JO

Haley Lynn Jo received her MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University and continues to call Flagstaff one of the best places, ever. She has had stories previously published in Jersey Devil Press, Dark Matter Journal, and On the Rusk. She loves cats, loathes laundry, and often falls prey to periods of fierce obsession with alliteration.

HONGRI YUAN

Hongri Yuan, born in China in 1962, is a poet and philosopher interested particularly in creation. His poetry has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada, and Nigeria.

JENNIFER BATTISTI

Jennifer Battisti, a Las Vegas native, is the co-director and a participating Teaching Artist for the Alzheimer's Poetry Project in Clark County. She was voted best local poet or writer by the readers of the Desert Companion. Her chapbook, *Echo Bay* was released in 2018 (Tolsun Books).

J L HIGGS

J L Higgs' short stories typically focus on life from the perspective of a black American. He has had over 40 publications and been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Magazines publishing his work include Indiana Voice Journal, The Writing Disorder, Contrary Magazine, Rigorous, Literally Stories, The Remembered Arts Journal.

JOHN DORROH

Whether John Dorroh taught any science is still being discussed. However, he managed to show up every morning at 6:45 with at least three lesson plans. His poetry has appeared in Red Fez, Dime Show Review, North Dakota Quarterly, Dead Mule Society, Tuck, Piker Press, Red Dirt Forum, and several others.

JONATHAN FERRINI

Jonathan Ferrini is a published author who resides in San Diego. He received his MFA in motion picture and television production from UCLA.

KATHERINE PERELAS

Katherine Perelas is a senior at ENMU obtaining her BFA with an emphasis in Graphic Design, and a BBA with an emphasis in Marketing in May of 2020. She has worked as the lead graphic artist of Campus Life, sold her work through Barnes & Noble, and she received the Excellence in Graphic Design Award in 2019. She is the president and founder of the ACE+D (Arts, Creativity, Education, & Design) club and was awarded the ACE+D Leadership and Philanthropic Award by the ENMU art department in 2019. She enjoys exercising her creativity by taking photos, sketching, or creating the posters that come out of her office.

LOWELL JAEGER

Lowell Jaeger (Montana Poet Laureate 2017-2019) is author of eight collection of poems, most recently *Earth-blood & Star-shine* (Shabda Press in 2016). He is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council and winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize. Most recently Jaeger was awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting thoughtful civic discourse.

LUCY RUTH MARTINEZ

Lucy Ruth Martinez is currently majoring in English with a Secondary Leisure at ENMU. Growing up as the youngest of seven children, art in all its forms has always been a part of Lucy's life. Hopefully, with this experience she can further influence children after finding success in the world of creative writing.

MARIO LOPRETE

Mario Loprete is an artist who "transferr[s his] experiences, photographing reality throughout [his] filters, refined from years research and experimentation." For more, visit: www.marioloprete.com or www.instagram.com/marioloprete.

MICHAEL BERTON

Michael Berton has had poems appear in *The Opiate*, *Blaze Vox*, *Sin Fronteras Journal*, *The Blinking Cursor*, *Gargoyle*, *Fireweed*, *Perceptions*, *Otoliths*, *El Portal*, *Agave Magazine*, *Acentos Review* and others. Originally from El Paso, he currently lives in Portland, OR.

MIKE WILSON

Mike Wilson is a writer living in Lexington, Kentucky, who has had work published in small magazines including Appalachian Heritage, Solidago, Frogpond, Cagibi, Stoneboat, and The Aureorean.

PAUL BLUESTEIN

paul Bluestein is a physician (done practicing), a blues musician (still practicing) and a dedicated Scrabble player (yes, ZAX is a word). He lives in Connecticut with his wife and the two dogs who rescued him. When the Poetry Muse calls, he answers, even if it's during dinner.

ROBERT BEVERIDGE

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in The Virginia Normal, Credo Espoir, and Chiron Review, among others.

STEPHAN SCARANO

Stephan Scarano was raised in Roswell and worked on the El Portal committee before his 1969 graduation. After service as a Marine Corps Officer, he retired as a police Captain after a thirty year career in Southern California. He's active as a Trail Angel on the Pacific Crest Trail.

TERRY SANVILLE

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, poems, and novels. Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted more than 360 times by commercial and academic journals, magazines, and anthologies including *The Potomac Review*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, and *Shenandoah*. He was nominated twice for Pushcart Prizes and once for inclusion in *Best of the Net* anthology. His stories have been listed among *The Most Popular Contemporary Fiction of 2017* by the *Saturday Evening Post*. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

TIMOTHY DODD

Timothy Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV. His book of short stories, *Fissures, and Other Stories*, was published in August by Bottom Dog Press as a part of their Contemporary Appalachian Writing series. His stories have appeared in *Yemassee*, *The William & Mary Review*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and other places. He has placed poetry in *The Literary Review*, *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Roanoke Review*, and twice previously in *El Portal*. Also a visual artist, his most recent solo exhibition, "Come Here, Nervousness" was held at Art Underground in Manila, Philippines. His oil paintings may also be sampled on his Instagram page, @timothybdoddartwork.

THADDEUS RUTKOWSKI


Thaddeus Rutkowski grew up in central Pennsylvania and is a graduate of Cornell University and The Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of the books *Border Crossings*, *Guess and Check* (winner of Electronic Literature's Bronze Award for multicultural fiction), *Violent Outbursts*, *Haywire* (winner of the Member's Choice Award, given by the Asian American Writers' Workshop in New York), *Tetched*, and *Roughhouse*. He teaches literature at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn and prose writing at Sarah Lawrence College's Writing Institute and the Writer's Voice of the West Side YMCA. He lives in Manhattan with his wife, Randi Hoffman. He received a fiction writing fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

TYNE SANSOM

Tyne is a graduate student in English and high school culinary arts instructor who lives in Portales with wife and family. He is currently working on a collection of short stories for his thesis.

WILLIAM BARRETTE

William Barrette is an English major studying at Eastern New Mexico University. He has hopes of one day becoming a successful novelist for the fantasy genre, and to be a good man for the family has now and the one he may have in the future. In his free time, he loves to play or plan *Dungeons and Dragons* with his friends as well as spending time with his girlfriend, Ashley Burke.



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