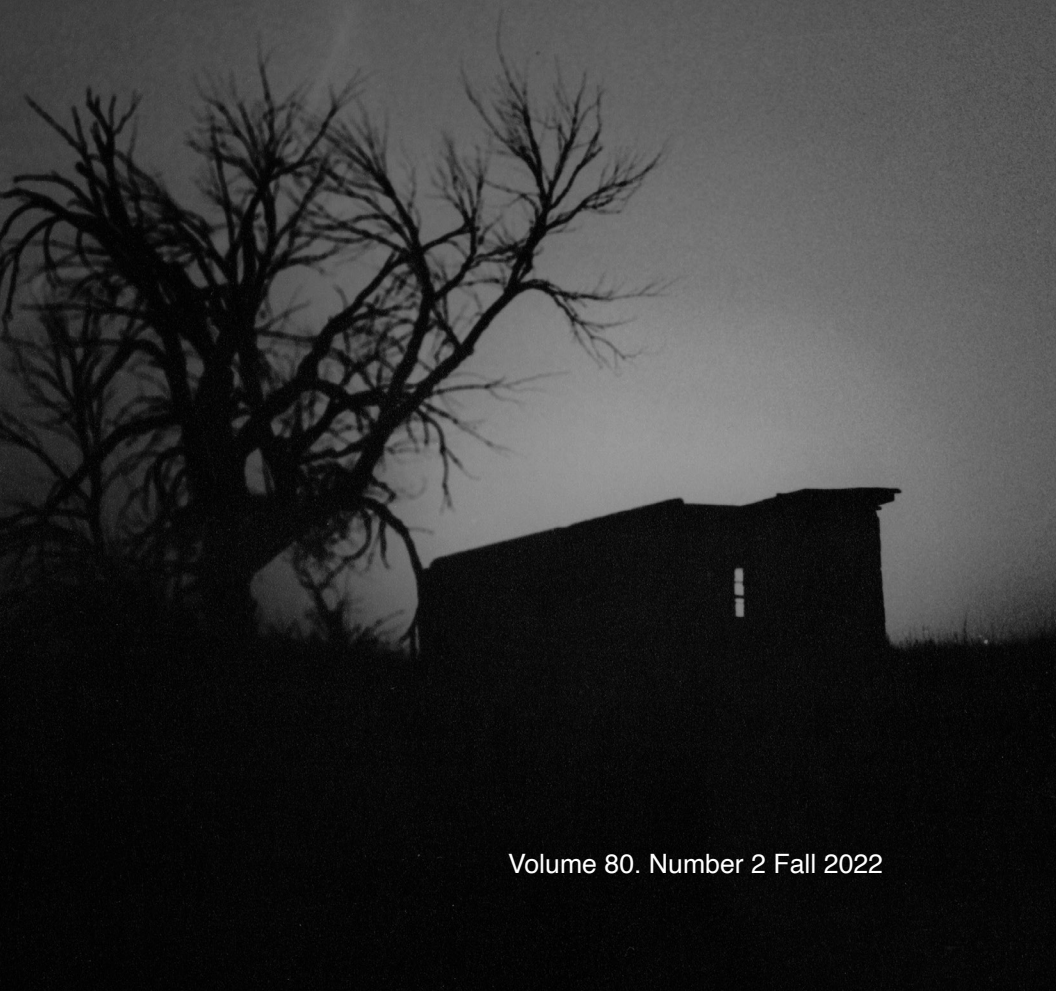


El Portal



Volume 80. Number 2 Fall 2022

El Portal

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About El Portal

El Portal offers a unique venue for the original work of writers, artists, and photographers. Published biannually, El Portal is funded by a generous grant from Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at Eastern New Mexico University.

Founded in 1939 as the creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of ENMU, it was Dr. Williamson who gave us the name of El Portal, along with his vision to showcase the region through art. Since then, we hold a soft spot for the West, but our eclectic tastes make us open to everything. Consequently, views expressed in this issue do not necessarily reflect those of ENMU.

Our mission is our name: El Portal is a door to poetry and fiction, photography and art, non-fiction and flash works striving to transgress boundaries, straddle borders, and most importantly, move us. El Portal is accepting original, unpublished short stories, creative non-fiction (<4,000 words), flash fiction (<1,000 words), photography/art, and poetry. ENMU students, national, and international writers are welcome to submit their works for free. ENMU students are eligible to win cash prizes awarded to first-, second-, and third-place winners in each category.

Guidelines

Please submit all written work in .doc or.docx format. With the exception of poetry and art/photograph, 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 Prose, 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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Category Winners in this Issue

Poetry

First

“It’s All Confetti”

Tiara Bollig

Second

“An Anguished Hmong Woman”

Gerr Yang

Third

“False Hope and Horoscopes”

Amanda Owens

Photography/Artwork

First

“New Mexico Free”

Sophie Goodman

Second

“Fragility”

Bethany Giesler

Third

“Untitled”

Allison Miles



Student Success
That's what we're about!

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Crabby Trees

Tiara Bollig

The crab apple tree in my old
backyard is probably still standing.

I remember it as more
than just the object standing to
the left of the back door of a blue-grey
house. It is the tree I first learned
to climb, using the gnarled roots
as steps toward reaching the next
lowest branch. It is the broken branch
which was too weak to hold my tiny
7-year-old-body's weight.

It is the feeling of free-falling
through the air
toward the concrete. It is the memory
of no memory—blacking out as my head
smashed against the concrete, the
now-dead branch underneath of me.
It is the lesson learned to not
climb trees ever again, lest
they break my trust a second time.

It is the feeling of becoming a fallen and bruised crab apple.

It's All Confetti

Tiara Bollig

I am only one person.
Made up of trauma
and
childhood and
mistakes.

I am made up
of more bad things
than good.

But more than
the bad, I
am made up of
confetti.

The yellow pieces
are the rays of sunshine,
the moments of
uninhibited laughter,
the pure happiness,
the elation, the fun, and
the joy that preserves
itself within me.

The red pieces
are the bloody noses,
the scrapped knees, the
sliced flesh, road rage,
and the absolute anger that
spills out of the top
of the bottle when it can
no longer be
contained.

The green pieces
are the ripped-out chunks
of grass, pulled-off leaves,
my mother's eyes, moss
from the lake I fell
into my sophomore year,
and jokes about the

jolly green giant.
The orange pieces
are the sunsets and
sunrises watched with
friends and family
over the years, the first
time I colored my hair
at the age of eight, and the
favorite color of the person
I hate most in this world.

The purple pieces
are the cotton candy skies,
lights on carnival rides,
handmade blankets, a vase,
and the main connection to
my soul.

The pink pieces
are the glass roses,
the bedroom walls in
varying shades, hearts drawn
on school notebooks, the dress
I wore to “adult” prom with
my soulmate, and the most
innocently pure color of my
cheeks for all emotions.

The blue pieces
are never-ending Kansan
skies, a
trampoline only meant for
sleepovers, the ocean that has
seen more of me than most
people, and the absolute sadness
that will never fully leave—but
that can be healed.

These are the bits of my
life all shredded into
colorful pieces of
confetti

The Dichotomy of a Half Breed

Sidney Abbott

My skin is white as snow, my eyes dark as doe
often a chameleon, but always a coyote
I am scared of what they see
How easy it is for them to perceive when I intend to deceive

My skin white as snow, my eyes dark as doe

Sanchez. Balluff. Abeita. Cooke.
A tainted lineage affects my white privilege

My skin white as snow, my eyes dark as doe

The juxtaposition of my own apparition
When I am with my mother, they see me as another
When I am with my father, they see me as the other

My skin white as snow, my eyes dark as doe

I do not fit an archetype
Dark or light
Hispanic nor white

My skin white as snow, my eyes dark as doe

My grandmother dreamed we would assimilate
So, her descendants would not experience their hate
She's proud my white skin conceals,
the shame of our shared Spanish name

My skin white as snow, my eyes dark as doe

Equality I will only ever know partially
The dichotomy of me

Taste of the Southwest

Monica Garcia



Monica Garcia Tasty Cakes

Still Miss You

Amanda Owens

It's not what you left behind,
It's what we can no longer build together
It's a shame life doesn't send you reminders like a smartphone to
'make sure that you get
the most of your day, it's your last one!' but I suppose that defeats
the lesson to be learned-to do it anyways.
And yet here I sit, reliving our last moments like a one of a kind VHS
tape, begging for a reminder and a time machine...
I focus so hard on what I should've done when I had the chance
that I can barely focus on doing anything now.
I reflect on what was robbed from us and our future, when I should
be making my remaining moments count.
I just can't. and I wish I could.
...god I wish you were here.

False Hope and Horoscopes

Amanda Owens

I am a Pisces, therefore I am a dreamer.

Last night's dreams consisted of mythical creatures and the power of flight.

Today's dreams consist of being anything but

a pisces

a push over

a pansy.

The pansy: an edible flower; smells heavenly; makes a great syrup.

The Pisces: too many feelings; very empathetic; forever a people pleaser.

Door mats are very useful, after all. Just can't help but wonder what it might be like to be the one walking upon one some day.

But there I go dreaming again,

I will just continue to be thankful to be capable of such compassion and imagination.

Don't forget to wipe your feet, please.

Little Sun

Chase Williamson



An Anguished Hmong Woman

Gerr Yang

A story of my mother.

And I.

The blood of an anguished Hmong woman runs through my veins
and keeps my heart beating.

This is the blood trickling down the calves of a joyful little girl
skipping in the highlands of Laos as the rice leaves slash her while
harvesting.

This is the blood that gathers in the cloth wrapped underneath her
every month to be washed in the river for 7 days.

This is the blood of the scratches and surfaced bruises when the
Hmong man is allowed to steal her and purchase her life and her
innocence from her family for money, rice, and meat.

This is the blood, all over the village shed dirt floor, after hours of
pushing alone, to give birth to the next Hmong woman.

This is the blood of the innocents splattered on her while fleeing her
homeland to escape persecution.

This is the blood from the barbed wires that cages her, her family,
and her people, for safety, in refuge.

This is the blood that bled from her shoulder with the vaccine
needles she needed to bring her family over the ocean.

This is the blood of the two children she couldn't afford to have
because she already had to feed six.

This is the blood on the hospital bed after birthing the seventh.

This was her blood.

Her blood runs through me.

The blood I know of but have never bled.

My blood is of an anguished Hmong woman.
That means

My blood is wild,
My blood is brave,
My blood is resilient,

My blood is forever unstoppable.

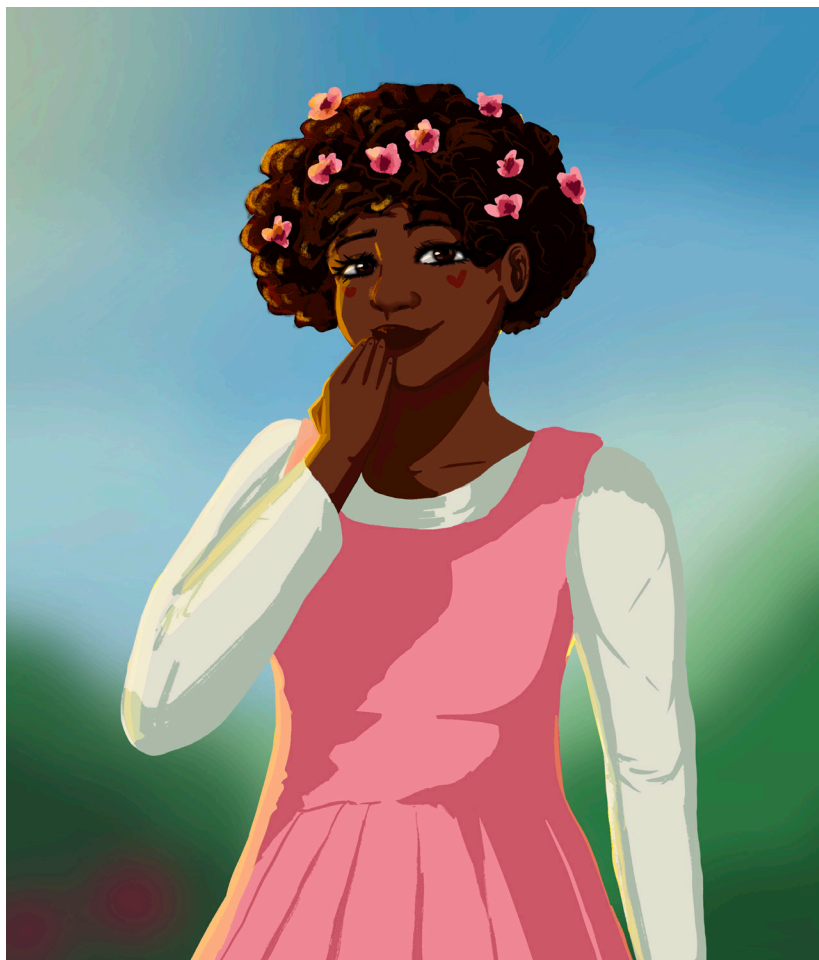
My Home

Brittney Juancho



Spring Happiness

Brittney Juancho



Single Stroke

Bradley Wise

And in some turning point,
The change of seasons,
Or the volta of some quiet sonnet,
Everything begins to make sense,
And incomprehensible all at once.
Scorching sun and scorching life,
All raining down at once,
Stumbling through that expanse
Looking for home, or some Promised Land
Down the forbidden road disguised as truth.
But as I walk down that road
I look out on all sides
And there is no beacon in sight,
No standing rock or flowing waters
Nor dews or manna of Heaven.
And as I make my way to the turning point,
The only thing I can do
Is to look up, tracing the clouds
And tracing what has been of my life,
Foreseeing that infinite line forever and ever.

Fragility

Bethany Giesler



Triple Dog Dare

Bethany Giesler



Raining

Dominique Wingerd

M laughs, girly under the higher showerhead
“Look! It’s like it’s raining on me, but it’s not.”
Genuine happy smiles
created from her core
beaming from her face
to my receptive one

J focuses, boyish adoration toward his elder
replaces her spot, impish
“Look! It’s like it’s raining on me, but it’s not.”
chest toward me, gaze stuck on her
hoping for her response
mirthful and proud

Same lines, different speech
He desires her enjoyment of his flattery
One day, his gaze will shift to another
woman of his future heart
when his love expands further
defining eros reserved
for his future companion

Same lines, different speech
She creates unbidden
One day, her impish joy drawn in
like iron filaments magnetized
toward another, her future prince
Mischievous pranks, doting love
pure hearted understanding

Until my budding nations
leave childhood behind
may they glory in their innocence
pure love
expressing our own inner child
desiring to be pursued
and have our own love engulfed

Sept 11, 2022 about full moon. Daughter is 7, son is 3.5 years old.
Sometimes we shower together, and one will wait for the conditioner
to set in while the other gets their long hair done. This moment

summarizes many for me in how these two interact as best friends. I hate how tv writers continue to twist more shocking stories for the reviews, including incest. This I write to confirm these two are not perverted but protected. And I am immensely grateful they have each other during a time when isolation, shaming, and cursing is rampant. It is a privilege to witness the type of love these two create in the world.

Splitting of the Sun

Sophie Goodman



New Mexico Free

Sophie Goodman



Bean

Tenika Heidelberg

My body consumed you like food.
Eating at the flesh most valued.
Sharp pains gliding across my abdomen,
and you, too small to defend.

It set off no alarm or warning.
But I'm stripped of you now,
left mourning.

My body is hollowed, empty.
The abandoned home of plenty.
Gutters full of regret, clogged weeping.

Truth? It was always you that I was seeking.
My body consumed you relentless.
My Baby.
My Bean.
Heart Beat-less.

Untitled
Allison Miles



Buffalo Soldiers

Don Kunz

When the 9th and 10th Cavalry rode out
From Fort Riley or Fort Hays or Fort Lyon,
Cheyenne and Kiowa, Arapaho and Comanche
Knew them by their dusky hides and wooly heads.
These tribes called them “Buffalo Soldiers”
And fought them along the Smoky Hill River,
The Platte, the Arkansas, the Cimarron,
The Red, the Big Sandy, and the Washita—
Anywhere there was water, small game,
And Buffalo themselves bellowing
As they chased them over jumps to their death,
Or where white settlers squatting in sod huts,
Tried to cultivate Russian Wheat or field corn
In the Great American Desert which they
Plotted to make into a garden
Because they believed rain followed the plow.

When Buffalo Soldiers rode out
From Fort Huachua into the Sonoran Desert
Of Arizona Territory through Saguaro,
Cholla, Agave, and Mormon Tea,
The sun burned the colored troops blacker.
Cochise and Victorio’s Apache waiting in ambush
Behind sandstone boulders in dry canyons
Where buffalo had never roamed
Still used the name Buffalo Soldier
Which they had learned from plains’ tribes.
Wherever the 9th and 10th cavalry patrolled,
The desert silence was broken by the scrape
Of hooves on rock, the creak of saddle leather,
The snort and chuff of horses, and wind whisper
Beneath vultures’ wings in the turquoise sky,
Circling like some prophecy of Jim Crow.

The Boy General, George Armstrong Custer,
Called Sun of the Morning Star, refused to command
A black regiment. General John J. Pershing,
Who commanded the 10th Cavalry in Mexico,
Begged a transfer to escape the stigma
Of his title, “Black Jack” Pershing.
In the Spanish American War Spaniards

Called the 9th and 10th Cavalry “Smoked Yankees,”
As if the fire of battle had forged them
Into Anglo weapons, dark men fighting dark men.
Colonel Teddy Roosevelt praised his
Colored Troops’ courage at Guasimas,
But when he campaigned for President,
Claimed Black success was owed to white officers.
After long, steady service in multiple wars,
The Buffalo Soldiers rode into a final darkness.

¿Quién Es?*

Don Kunz

William was an orphan at 14,
Mother dead from TB, Father an absent drunk.
He rambled through foster homes,
Rented rooms, bunk houses, jails,
Trying on surrogate fathers—
McCarty, Wright, Antrim, Tunstall—
Like scuffed work boots on a dusty trail.
He found none fit for wearing.

Chance offered companions:
Cowboys, rustlers, horse thieves,
Vigilantes, fugitives, gun fighters.
He chose his brothers carelessly,
Grew a twisted family tree,
Pruned it with the tools of his trade:
A single-action Colt 44, a Winchester 73,
Carried in scabbard and fast-draw holster.

He rode across the West—
Wichita, Silver City, Santa Fe,
Fort Stanton, Bonita, Lincoln,
Mescalero, Mesilla, Fort Sumner—
His eyes restless behind a fast draw,
Behind pistol and rifle gunsights,
Until murdered at 21, still a kid.
Billy the kid.

* Spanish for “who is it?” were Billy the Kid’s last words spoken into the darkness of Peter Maxwell’s home in Fort Sumner as Sheriff Pat Garrett ambushed and killed him with two pistol shots.

The Sixty-Seven

Saramanda Swigart

The engine stuttered before idling down to silence. Jill turned the key again. Again, the engine complained and then chugged out. She pulled the keys out of the ignition with shaking hands. The keys dropped below the wheel. Blindly, she felt around the Mustang's floor.

"Go!" Bill hissed.

"Sometimes it takes a while," Jill said. She found and inserted the key. The car coughed. She should have brought the Altima, goddamn it. Instead she'd wanted to show off for Bill.

Her 1967, 289-horsepower gas hog.

The front door of the house opened. Light spilled into the darkness. Pierre, in the doorway, held a baseball bat. The whole street—the whole night—pulsed with threat. Slowly Pierre swung the bat like he was in The Warriors—who were they, the Baseball Flunkies? Or... Baseball Junkies?

"Turn it on," Bill whispered.

"Can he see us?" she said. She turned the key.

"He knows someone's here. Look at him. No, don't. Just turn it on."

"We got to push the car," said Jill. "We got to roll it out of here."

Bill opened the door. They could see him, but were partially concealed from Pierre's view by a copse of trees at the public park with the playground that never had children in it. All the sand beneath the play structures filled with dog shit and soda cans and glass. When Jill and Pierre were married, they'd never taken Frankie to that park, preferring the one near the municipal pool on Swanwick Street, near City Hall. Bill pushed the car. It began to roll.

Pierre's head turned toward them. He cut a fine silhouette, coming down the cement walk to the street. He still had that posture. He looked left, but the street was dark with elms. Nothing moved except a plastic bag in a tree branch. Pierre looked toward them and Jill froze, though the car kept rolling.

Jill steered. She couldn't tell if Pierre could see them, but he definitely saw movement. He swung the bat, stepped forward.

The Mustang picked up speed. They were close to Oak Knoll Elementary now, and Jill risked turning the engine over. It caught this time, stuttered, caught again, rumbly and friendly.

"Get in," she said.

When Bill was inside, Jill gunned the car, and it shot across the school parking lot and out the other side. Then down the block with the Waterman house, all boarded up, that Frankie had been sure was haunted.

"Furies!" Jill said suddenly.

“Furies?” Bill said.

“No. Just: The Baseball Furies,” she said.

“The what—?”

“I was trying to remember,” she said.

“Do you think he knows?” Bill said.

“I think he knows something,” Jill said.

“Did he know it was us?” Bill said. “Does he know about us?”

“I don’t know,” Jill said. “I doubt it.”

In the back, where they’d put it, was the 55-gallon drum they’d just dug up from Pierre’s backyard. Jill tried not to think about its contents. Earth and grit contaminated the seats and carpeting below. It hadn’t been as heavy as she’d expected. Two of them carried it easily to the car. The drum was so much like a passenger that she jumped each time she spied it in the rearview.

“You should have left the engine running,” said Bill. He was using a wet wipe on his hands.

“I want a baseball bat,” Jill said.

“There’s a sporting goods—”

“No, not now,” she said. “Anyway, more in an existential way.”

A nervous silence uncoiled.

“Oh!” said Bill. “The Baseball Furies. From that movie.”

Jill didn’t answer. They rode in silence. Past the defunct movie theater; past the open-all-night veterinary clinic; past the donut shop, Pepe’s Pawn, the FedEx Kinko’s. Frankie used to spend allowance money photocopying his hands. Weird hand pictures had festooned her refrigerator.

They turned onto Palmyra Street, and Jill slowed because there were always patrol cars waiting for speeders.

“If I don’t pee I’m going to explode,” said Bill.

“Now?”

“I wouldn’t have said it if I didn’t mean now.”

Jill looked at the gas gauge. It was an unreliable tool these days, but it was on empty and had been for a while. “Shit,” she said.

She left the engine running while filling the car. Bill took his time in the bathroom. So much time, in fact, that Jill wondered if he was calling the police. The lights glared down into the car, and the drum glowed blue and dirty. She took a blanket from the trunk and covered it. She brushed off her clothes and wet-wiped her hands.

Bill came back. “Are we going to the lake?” he said.

“The lake? Why?”

“To put—you know.”

“No,” said Jill. “There’s a place. I know someone.”

They drove over the railroad tracks. They drove along the country road for a good long while. There were no cedars on Cedar Street.

Jill left the engine on. She rang the doorbell. Within the house she

heard a grinding sound. The doorbell was broken. She knocked.

“That you?” A woman’s voice.

“It’s me,” said Jill.

“Do you have it?” the voice said.

“In the car.”

The door opened. The woman had sleepy eyes and a scar from hair to chin. There was no hair growing around the scar, but the woman didn’t conceal it. It gave her power.

“Just leave it around back,” the woman said.

Jill and Bill heaved the drum and rounded the house with it.

The darkness was absolute. They left the drum on what felt like a swath of patchy grass and returned to the front.

“That a 289?” the scarred woman said.

“Yeah,” said Jill.

“Nineteen sixty-eight?”

“Sixty-seven,” said Bill.

“Well, that’s that. I’ll take it from here,” the scarred woman said. She saluted. “Let’s never meet again,” she said.

The engine was still running as they left.

Jill’s engine would stay running for the rest of her life.

A Mother's Complaint

Marie Bacigalupo

“Motherhood: All love begins and ends there.”

—Robert Browning

Come in, Come in . . . No, you're not disturbing me, not at all. I welcome the company of a new neighbor. Let me put on some coffee. Once I get my husband settled, we'll have a nice visit. Don't mind him thumping up there. He's been sickly lately. Bangs on the bedroom floor for attention, just like a kid. I have to lock the door to make sure he gets his rest.

I told the doctor, I said, Doctor, my husband hasn't been himself since we lost our five-year-old son six months ago . . . Thank you. He took it hard. You passed my late son's photo on the foyer wall when you came in. It was taken at the beach the summer before the accident. He seems so alive, don't he? Yes, he was a looker. Took after his father, same dark eyes. See how he's smiling? It was me taught him to smile even when things didn't go his way.

He wanted to wear his Batman mask for that picture, but I said, Absolutely not. He gave me quite a time, pissy eyes and all, but a child must bow to the parent, not the other way around. My mother made sure I learned that lesson. But my husband spoiled our son. He even put in a backyard pool, but the boy never took to it.

He liked his Dad better than me. He seemed to like everybody better than me. He'd open up to shoppers on waiting lines, to people stopped at traffic lights, to strangers on the street, for God's sake! With me he threw tantrums. You'd think I was an evil stepmother instead of a woman trying to raise her kid right.

When I think about it, life's unfair. I gave up a good job as a practical nurse to raise him. My husband, when I told him I was pregnant, said, Let's have it. Afterward my life was turned upside down. I was the one stuck in the house all day, the one had to discipline the boy, had to show him actions have consequences—Goddamn that man! Let me see what I can do about the banging and cursing . . . No, don't leave. I'll be right back.

#

There, I gave him a pill. Put up quite a fight, but in the end he took it. Now what was I saying? Oh, yeah, discipline. I remember one particular time I had to teach the boy right from wrong. He loved to

play in the sand box in the backyard. If you turn your head, you can see my garden and the sandbox from the kitchen window. I told him he could play in the sand if he didn't mess with the flowerbeds. I take great pride in my garden. What the little devil did, though, he dug into the dirt and uprooted my pretty merry-bells. He shoveled them into his pail, he said, because he wanted to look at them all the time. I didn't mean to hurt them, Mommy, he whined. Don't talk back, I warned him, just don't talk back. That was the last straw. Days of work wiped out in a few minutes! He slept in the sandbox that night, you can believe it.

My husband, as usual, thought I was too hard on him. The man has a disposition—how to put it—too quick to let things slide. He got real mad. Enough is enough! he yelled.

Oh, yeah? I said. Get off your high horse! I said I bet the kid don't go near the flowers anymore, is what I said. In fact, he never used the sand box again.

I gotta admit, my husband and me, we used to fight over that boy a lot. Before he got sick, he'd yell like a banshee. Accused me of hurting my own son. Come off it! I told him. Every kid gets bruises, so don't get so high and mighty. He even blamed me for the accident. But, for sure, I did everything I could to save the boy. I gave him CPR like the professional I am. When he wouldn't breathe, I thought I better call 911.

Then the sirens start screeching and everybody comes running out of their houses and somebody yanks the boy out of my arms, rude-like. Before I know it, I'm in the hospital with a lot of nurses and doctors screaming at each other. My husband shows up and before anyone can stop him, he grabs the dripping body and pulls it off the gurney. Then he gives me a funny look. I should have locked the pool gate, he says. He's rocking the body and crying like a baby, sobbing so hard he can't catch his breath. An EMT rushes to retrieve the body and another practically carries my husband to a chair. There, there, she's cooing like a mother bird, there, there. Pretty soon the police show up and ask me how it happened. I say he disobeyed me, that's how. I told him never to go near the pool without my permission.

#

Mmmm. Coffee's ready. Smells good. I'm so glad you decided to visit. Since the funeral, my neighbors act real cool toward me. I won't let it bother me too much, though, especially now I have a new friend. Come on, have a doughnut.

Dammit! Listen to him! Like son, like father, right? I'll go give him another pill, make sure he don't . . . What? So soon? A quick cup? Ah,

too bad. Maybe another time then, when my husband's not making so much noise.

On your way out take another look at my favorite photo of the boy, the one with his back to the surf—Yes, yes. I know you're busy, new to the neighborhood and all. If you get a chance, put in a good word for me with the others. Like I said, I could use the company.

Ties

Matthew J. Spireng

First tug, I knew. Bow knots on ties
holding the thin, worn cushion
to the old wooden chair, knots

snug, reluctant, tied by my mother,
dead now over twenty-five years. Knots
I was untying Mother's work,

ties that have long held, knots
not to be undone easily so it seemed
I could feel them being pulled tight.

Crosses along a Highway Far from Home

Matthew J. Spireng

At the side of the road, small
white wooden cross with first name
in crude black block letters

on the crossbar, date vertically
below, a wreath of faded artificial flowers
almost as tall as the cross

leaning against it so the cross
tilts slightly in weeds grown up
where it stands. Three more

of weather-worn wood together
at the edge of the woods bearing
only first names, the same date

as the white one, what appear to be
remnants of a real wreath in the bushes
where the trees begin. Imagine

that night, police and firefighters,
bright lights flashing, and the story,
buried now for strangers in archives

of a local paper, still fresh for those
who have lived here long and drive
each day past names they fully know.

Childhood's Past

Diane Webster

Childhood photos collaged together
on poster board for all of us
to match number with name
black and white, color
separate generations for a clue,
but we all look the same
except to our parents.

A group of children forgetting
yesterday's injustices
grown up today
learning to hold a grudge,
tallying each comment
as back-biting bitching
instead of wanting to play again
tomorrow.

Chasm Walls Scowl

Diane Webster

Can they get along better
apart glowering at each other
like two puzzle pieces
knowing yin/yang fits
together but never desire
reunion forevermore?

Separation rubble litters
chasm floor, party-after
confetti mess left in dust cover
with only rain to clean surface.

Inept stone throws between two
tumble in silence to bottom
echoing accusations
of he said/she said
together in Big Bang,
separate in millennial erosion.

The Invention of Weather

Marte Carlock

In the early years after creation, God realized something was missing. “The human race is too undisciplined,” he mused. “I need to think of some way to express my displeasure. Something not too destructive. But really inconvenient.”

“No fire or brimstone?” whined Beelzebub, who was really disappointed. “No floods?”

“Tried that. Something smaller scale. Not permanent. But easily repeated.”

“Disruptive. Something that brings life to a halt.”

“Just temporarily. Ideal if they think they have to deal with it. Get rid of it so life can go on.”

“Has to cause them a lot of work.”

“But unnecessary work. Because after they do the work—maybe a good while after—it does go away. And maybe comes back without warning. So they have to do it all over again.”

The Devil pondered in his sniveling way and said, “It shouldn’t be pretty.”

“Maybe it will be at first. Children in their innocence will welcome it. As time goes on it becomes corrupted. Gets ugly.”

“Turns black. The best color. And gritty.” Beelzebub had not enjoyed himself so much since the expulsion from Eden. He had another inspiration.

“Come to think of it, you’ve forgotten the best part. It should be unbearable to their miserable bodies. Hot as, what else?”

He grinned evilly. “My domain, of course.”

“No, cold. Colder than the end of Creation. Mighty winds.”

“All right. Sounds perfect,” cackled the Devil.

“What else would you expect from Me?”

Satan sneered, “You have to admit I helped.”

God smiled indulgently, stretched out his hand and said, “Let there be snow.”

Homage to Cathartidae

Timothy Dodd

In my bedroom I can hear the vultures disappearing treeside. It's not that our ubiquitous cars can't create carrion fast enough. Or that we want to clean carcass

ourselves. It's not that we want to wipe up our own dirty work or oversee a sexier sanitization of the land. Quite the opposite. I mean, think of Linda beside me:

she wouldn't get out to remove a carcass of any kind from our nice driveway, much less bend over to sniff it or pick up with her teeth and carry over the hillside.

Not saying I'm much better necessarily, but this bird is outcast now, exiled in our updated mind. I wonder where the disappeared fly to? Or do they drip to bone?

Sacred in pharaonic Egypt; symbol for the foundation of Rome; a talisman for happiness in ancient Greece. When, why, did this illustrious beak get blackballed?

Dead body of my own, place it on a Tower of Silence, Parsi practice. For if this so-called harbinger of death dies out itself, we, too, are the short road to extinction.

Breathing Today's Plants

Timothy Dodd

The trees inside your mouth
are now wires, tubes, metal
mined underground, a silver
urge to chop it all down, fill
the forest with a new might

and the walleye swimming
under your tongue have lost
their shimmer to guardrails
crisscrossing teeth, fishbone
spines floating dead liquid.

Pull out the roots, chop off
crests and caps, nickel pour
to creek; the line of our elms
pushed farther back to blur
the void, cold-stripped, chill.

Inside I am full on log haul,
cavity-carried to bottomland
where a bleach in my throat
rolls the copper far away, my
grave, elderly visit unknown.

In the mirror, to look closely
at a gap in my dentistry, rides
the river over my gums, seed
swallow in marigold, daffodil
words caught in crocus, left

on our fossils falling to recess,
tighten up today, teen braces
in requiem, the foreman sits
at the gate. Let nothing pass,
but smelly fumes filling old air.

vestiges

Ron Torrence

milky way
a disc
spiraling
through the universe
trailing
cosmic dust

earth
a sphere
elipsing
through the solar system
trailing
hydrogen and helium

i
a particle
darting
through a cloud chamber

trailing

a few scribbled lines

my children's photos

otherwise

empty

rooms

without love

Ron Torrence

fear rules
multitudes

hijacking
minds
before
they can think

warping
values
before
they can guide

igniting
hate
before
love can heal

would be kings
take
center stage
haloing themselves with divinity

offering

protection
leadership
enlightenment

grasping

boundless wealth
limitless power
total domination of women

sucking
civilization's
blood

until death

The Hour of the Star

Richard Wirick

for Nicole Krauss

I believe I am good Honduran wife. Perfect? Not probably. But what is perfect? All people all the time, especially those north of the Border, look for perfection in life. Father Hidalgo talks of this much. He says he feels sad for them and that their quest is ridiculous. We inhabit this earth, he said, to learn and to assist all others who come to us. And we learn only by making the mistakes. Perfection is not life. Like a leather belt with no scuffing is not a real belt. It is the ideal belt, in Heaven, like the Plato writes. Life is steps and struggles and marks of the tooling we put into our efforts as we get better.

To find perfect we must wait. The afterlife is where we look around, gaze on the perfect. A child who is always obedient. The high palm that has the perfect symmetry. There, not here. It waits for us. Unlike the mistakes of the earth, where all of it has the changes, Heaven will not surprise us with changes, or make anything go away. The after-life waits for us, not caring, but also not letting us touch it just yet.

We have four children, two sons and two daughters. My husband does not say so, but I can feel his pride in having sons. He says he wants our family's name to last until the last day on earth, which he says might be soon as the next rain. He worries for our jungles. If he were a giant he would hang their high canopies with crepe.

So bright is the sun today that people walking by the open door float flat and quick as shadows, flecks of black. But less of the people visit now. There is only the standing doorframe that I see, a square burning orange in the jungle air.

The army men come at night. Their guns are large and black and I have never been up near them when they make the firing. A lot of the soldiers have brown-green spotted clothes—"camo" they call them—and the other men with them are dressed in black, with bulges under their arms beneath the black jackets. The top button of their uniforms are always fastened.

They look through the house, the tips of their guns almost touching the ceiling. There are no warrants. There are no orders or missions. If you want to stay with your family, to see them again, you are doing as they have told you. I never knew anyone who did not do that, and yet came back. Actually, there are no such people. They become part of the many vanished.

My husband is inventing a new exercise, at least that's the way he says it. He claps his hands twice, large hands that are very loud, and

our four children lay down on their stomachs. This is so no one can see us through the front windows. Our neighbors do the same. Most of the families have many more children. It would be difficult to have that many in the house, if everyone had to go flat. The daughters go flat in different ways, their arms going up and down, like when they make mud angels on the riverbank.

Adela lies sometimes so very still it is like she is dead. She says that was what she was trying to do. To be dead. To be the very thing we go flat for, so it will not happen. She tightens her eyes closed. She puts her hands together like a prayer, like the church steeple in the finger game. Or she puts her arms along the side of her body, like the real dead, who clear a place on their chest for the soul to be able to fly up neatly through the bones. The souls of the dead rise, of this I am certain, for it is fashioned by our God along with our bodies. The soul, rising, shivers at first like a rustling dress but then throbs and throbs into its brightness, a star over the grasses of the plano. Like the poet says, our death is the hour of the star.

The boys grow up faster. They walk the streets of the town by themselves, but mostly they try to stay together. They have seen some things. Once they were walking, I saw, the one behind the other, like cars of a train. Father Hidalgo was an apprentice priest in Tegucigalpa. He came here for training with the senior Jesuits, who came to instruct in the Latin and other holy language—ones we ourselves have kept pieces of from the days when our people worshipped the jungle creatures. Father says the closest the Church of Rome comes to that was Saint Francis. He was the priest of the wild, both of plants and of animals. But mostly animals. He loved even snakes and the Capybara, the large, wet ratlike thing that the Yanomamo in the south kill and eat. St. Francis would stand in the sun, says Father, and the birds came down to sit on his fingers.

My sons and his friends were walking beside the long-porched bodega, and Father Hidalgo and Father Pio were walking the same, on the other side of the street, when it happened.

Someone shot Father Pio in the head, a single bullet. The sound of it from the gun made an overlapping crack. The top of his head exploded and pieces of bone flew many feet, some hitting the boys and the long bodega rail. Then he fell forward. No one, not even his fellow priests, came out to get his body until after the dark. Blood pooled out like a tiny pond where he lay, the gush of it sometimes strong enough to move the folds of his cassock.

The boys ran. Some together. Others scattering. The air was filled with the smoke that comes out of the gun. Cordite. Things with beautiful names, with science names, seem to swarm up around us

these days like the air of Hell.

Men from the city's policia the next morning talk to the shopkeepers working where the Father had fallen. The store workers take turns coming out and cleaning with buckets, and spraying hoses.

My children, all children, wonder what happens next, when they walk by the buckets of bloody water, sponges floating in them. What happens next is nothing.

It is the national police, the army really, who are making these things happen. They believe the priests feed the guerillas, taking the food on the backs of burros with blankets and water. The guns and maps are keeping in the boxes behind the back wall to the far little chapels in the jungle. Some of the chapels are no larger than rooms, with floors so narrow only two men could sleep on them side by side.

The struggle has gone on for so long. Our leaders have only one fear and that is the communism. There can be disease. There can be none of the clean water. The stores do not have medicines and the food in cans come from far off somewhere. It is always tasting old.

But it is only the communism, they think coming from Cuba or Venezuela, that makes them frightened enough to be terrible. To shoot down a priest! Where else does this happen also? Nowhere, not even in the countries where the priests and monsignors are banned. It was not allowed in the Russia I was told of when a child, this killing of priests. Only here. Only now.

So this is why we do not let our sons go outside. It is safe for the girls. My daughters will not be taken or raped. But boys are taken away, to be taught the life of the guerilla. The authorities, the small circle around the caudillo, think they are given a schooling in the communism, and that they spend most of the days learning to shoot. Big guns, and bombs by the side of the road to blow over the tanks and burn the men inside. You can see the bodies on the road if you go high enough. These are the fighters who have fought to the last, who have left the world in the hour of the star.

There is much building now in our small city. We have money from the U.S. that the caudillo says will be used to pave roads, to strengthen the sewers with stronger walls. So much of the building is underground. Not even the children, the little boys, can go and watch the working of the yellow trucks.

But most of the money, we know, is for the army. They are to keep us safe before the building can continue to happen, and to make our lives better. The army's trucks are green, but the dust has coated them by nightfall. It is in darkness that the army comes, and the

guerillas also. It is in these blackest and moonless months that the army will come to take your son. And if he does not come with them he runs. And if he runs it may simply be his time to be with our Dios, his hour come round at last to the hour of the start.

The guerillas lose many of their gunners, and must do the replacing with new young men. The rifles are heavy to carry. The shots come out of the leafy air. The fighters hide behind their armored doors after an ambush by the army, where the tanks come out and stop to block the cars. The guerillas crouch behind their armored doors, still shooting when they cannot get through. But the army has been trained by the Americans, and have taught them the round-skipping shots, shooting the asphalt in front of their jeeps so that the bullets fly up into the legs of the hiding men. It is like boys skipping stones on a pond. There is no body armor for the legs and knees, and so the men bleed out in pools of bloody fronds and gravel.

The greatest terror, and this I know, is the war between the sides in the borders of your own country. Because it is the battle to capture boys to be soldiers. Whose soldiers? Father Hidalgo says, "Who gets there first." In each section of the town, just as in Tegucigalpa, the logs of male children are kept as in the Bible times, the time of Herod. Signs on the doors. White hands. The beat of the wings of angels passing over in gestures of rescue.

Imagine the people in the Salvadoran church, the Father's back shot through as he lifted the Host. The Body of Christ. The Body of Man. The blood that saves the world from the world. The body of someone born as a boy.

If a boy must be dragged by the army from out of a house or a hiding place, they are screaming and punching their arms in the air. But they know enough not to resist too much. They know that their father would be shot before their eyes. So they stop their screaming. They go like men. They allow themselves to be taken.

What is a city without its sons? What is a father without his son? "In the blink of an eye," the Father says, "that swiftly will each of them be taken.

My sons are too young for now. To be taken. My husband and I think of paying some men, putting the boys under the loads of the melon trucks driving over the plano to Guatemala. Not even the army would try for them now. Though tiny boys a thousand years ago would be taken. They would be trained that early by the Turks. Castrated. Servants of kings. Dressing in robes with plumes like the Quetzal's feathers.

The strain of it puts the pressure on my husband and me. It is hard

to be normal. But we must keep going. Sometimes our life sounds like a joke we are saying. We go on walks together. The army men are digging and patching the flagstones where we walk. But they never raise their heads and meet our eyes.

My husband works hard in the quarry. The stone he brings up is the stone the caudillo uses for projects, for silos above the ground and the new, great silos that are buried in our black soil, that swallow the waste of the building projects.

My husband drinks the Mezcal. In time when we can afford he buys a bottle of Rompopay, thick like a yellow syrup. He is faithful unlike the many husbands. It is hard for me to be close to him, so great is the stress. I put my hand on the back of his neck that is so hard and hot. I want him to do the same to me. The massage and the touch. Just the touching of his fingers is good enough for me to feel his love.

My secret place will sometimes close when I am specially afraid. My husband thinks I am making exaggerations. So I submit to his wishes. One night he wanted me to get on his knees and put my hands against the wall for the sex. Like a perro. But I am used to it now. I do not wish to see him sad or angry.

Our neighbor's boy was taken at the end of spring. A good thing to know when that happens is that the army traces him, tells you where he is. They will pass your letters to him. They tell you his division, maybe even his platoon. But it can mean nothing because they are moved. To confuse the guerillas. To keep the ranks of the army alive. To make the surprises in battles, the ambushes with machine guns smoking on their little tripods.

But if a soldier for the army dies, it takes a very long time to reach you. To reach the familias. Or they know and they do not tell you. It is like a lie. Do you want it to be like that, so you can make into hope what might be the lie? Or do you want the officers to come in pairs to your door, to tell you he has come to the hour of the star?

* * *

Sometimes the caudillo's officers have celebrations of the new buildings and projects. They wish for quarrymen like my husband to be there, to be shown off in the crowds and parades. The officials give them pressed shirts of linen and have them stand in rows while the caudillo talks of the projects, brags of the new Honduras.

There are cameras that are sunk in the loam and go deep, deep, to make pictures of what is in the silos. The lenses are put into holes and face upward. The pictures the cameras are taking go up on a high screen above the celebrations. How many silos of stones do the people need to see? The same thing over and over that the world does

not care about. We are a small country that no amount of building could make large. Poor, that no amount of progress can make rich. Or even normal.

We are the thin waist of the Americas, the belt that fastens the great southern countries, making their own actual continent, to the rich large lands of the north. The land to which many of us travel, or wish to. Stories come back that it is above us as Heaven is above us. Full of abundance. Of infusing peace and happiness. Of not wanting. There is more to the life than to want.

I am at one of the celebrations, with the parades and the and the sitting, honored families with their standing quarryman husbands. I watch with appreciation the big screened images. They are framed after an event like this, mounted on hard boards and their fronts covered over with glass or a glass-like plastic.

I see underneath the bleachers a row of the framed pictures, waiting there to be stored. One is leaning with its front turned toward the bleacher frame. Usually a soldier stands guard, stacks them or dusts them off, wrapping them up with canvas to be transported. But on this day there is no soldier. When I crawl down to it I walk back and forth for a minute to be certain no one is coming.

This one had a larger camera lens. It points downward and upward also. I see, as in all the others, the boulders in the silo's top. Some are stacked neatly and others are in a jumble, splitting apart. Underneath them is something different, something I've never seen. I know that forests are cleared to make space for more rock pits, more streets and more buildings and walls. These are the limbs that the great yellow buckets bit off before going down to rock.

I look first at the leaves, which have so many points like no leaves I have ever seen. Behind them are the limbs, some of them still straight and some of them snapped in two or three pieces. They are things we have seen before. So there is none of the uniqueness here.

How many are the five-pointed, five-petaled flowers! They rise up behind the new small opened one like a field of lilies in water, like the Monet. And then I know. And with knowing the sickness comes over me, a sheet of black grief. What seemed at first to be the hand was really a hand, floating there in its dark bucket of blood. What seemed like an arm is really an arm, and there are too many to see, a hundred or hundreds of hundreds. Their color is the bright flesh of the young. They are signing to me, signaling:

Not in the face, they say. Not in the heart, where the Savior is seated. I am ready for this though I am a mere boy. I am one out of many who will see me soon after. Not pieces, not broken. Burning. Not burnt. Alive with the light I brought into the world. Alive and alive with the still lasting light.

Aphid

Christian Ward

The aphid fluttering
like a birthday candle
is happiest in this moment.
Oblivious to any Spider-man
eyed ladybugs, it flutters
in its bubble of contentment.
Flies from one corner
of the bus window to the next,
irregardless of the threat
of a rolled-up newspaper
or a hand poised to strike.
It owns this moment
and not even an arrow
of sunlight piercing through
can take that away from it.
Sometimes, when apocalypses
are accumulating by the front door,
I dream of the aphid and its psalm
cupping me in contentment.

Her Toast Untouched

Thomas Elson

Her toast sits untouched
Pills not taken
Orange juice glass on the counter
Where they remain during the day
And the next
And the one after that
Toast, pills, and glass untouched
Not mentioned
By their daughter when she visits
To help
To talk
To assess
To clean the counter
To return her mother's glass
To replace her pills in their containers
To leave her toast for the remaining birds
To take her father to visit his wife scattered by the river.

One Morning Each Week

Thomas Elson

One day a week, my family did not begin our mornings with bacon and eggs or even a bowl of cereal. I would wake to complete silence, followed a few minutes later by mumbling, feet shuffling, then stomping across floors. Palms slapped doorjambs. *Stay in bed. Stay quiet.* A few angry yawns. Throats clearing. More shuffling. But no sounds from the kitchen.

The three of us prepared separately. Then a few muttered questions. *Avoid this part. Do not respond. Do not engage.*

Eyes flashed toward wall clocks.

Do not think.

More bathroom sounds. Doors closed. Teeth brushed.

Remain silent. Just do what you need to do and be quiet.

Stools flush. Water runs. Doors open. Hangars move across dowels in the closet.

Voices:

Father, "Hurry up. Aren't you ready yet?"

Mother, "Just be patient."

Father, "We can't be late for church."

Mother, "It's only a few blocks away."

Father, shouts at me, "What the hell takes you so long?"

Pretend I don't hear. Too busy getting ready.

Voices. Words that are forbidden where we're going.

Father, "–damn it. You do this every week."

Mother, "Just wait in the –damn car."

Repress.

The kitchen door to the garage slams against the wall, does not close. Garage door rolls open. Engine turns over. The roar of a gunned engine.

Do not feel.

Inside the house – the relative calm of an armed truce.

Do not trust.

Mother, "I'm about ready."

Me, "Me too."

Quiet.

Until the horn honks once.

Horn honks again.

Horn blares constantly, then stops.

Do not ask.

Horn honks again, twice, then again, and again.

We walk to the garage together.

There's nothing wrong here and don't you dare tell anyone about it

Palindromemordnilapish

Philip Kuan

I, a man grown into a boy that once was, find myself wading through a dirty lake while pressing a frog to my skin. The cabin up the hill shivers and steels itself to my encroachment.

I remain outdoors because it is locked, or because I'm not inclined to throw rocks at its abandoned-seeming window. Or perhaps because I'm a snake with stubs for hands. I find myself coming up other such excuses as I chase a gopher around the yard. I eat it when I catch it.

Here comes the cabin's owner. I've been expecting him to be repulsed by my textures, but he's surprisingly not. Turns out gophers have been chewing up his garden roots. He invites me in, dragging me by my undetachable tail.

As dinner is served, I remain coiled and salivating. He's eating steaks with his wife but they pay me no mind. While hungering in my empty haze I somehow realize that they're telling me to fill up on rats later, after bedtime.

When they retire to their beds I prowl the living space, in some palpable dark. The rats, they're too clever, they shelter in unreachable crannies. Finally I see movement, so I slither up as best as I can to take a nip.

The yell that follows belongs to the cabin owner's wife! She yells again.

I am chased away, and my nerves are shaken. For the remaining hours I search half-heartedly in a few nooks, without success.

Breakfast is bacon and eggs. As I brush by the owner's leg I suppress the urge to beg, but it's too hard to tell if they've noticed my restraint.

Right after breakfast he tells me that it's time to leave. His eyes have the ambivalence of someone who cares not a lick about how much he's hurting me. I exit that place with my tail tucked between my stubs. Their back door swallows me like a python consuming a porcupine.

I spit myself around the garden for a bit. I am one foul-tasting spoonful of stew. My wits deteriorate, perhaps from maturation. Generations of gophers rise out of the ground, like a horde of hamsters. While leaving, I convince myself that they look angry or undead.

Only thing left to do is to crawl back into the dirty lake. It looks cleaner than how I'd left it.

Meeting at the Train Station

Catherine Parilla

Two trains traveled under a September Italian sun, one heading south and the other heading north. Giovanni's journey began at dawn as he boarded the train in his small village of Marcellinara in Calabria on the brief ride to Sant'Eufemia, where he changed trains for the seven-hour ride to Salerno. Leonora, too, left before the sun peeked through with her five-year-old daughter, Angela. They boarded in Chivasso in Piemonte and changed trains in Milano for their lengthy southern journey.

The steam engine hissed and gusted, struggling like a pack animal to reach the inclines and rushing down declines. Brakes shrieked at every stop, causing Angela to cover her ears. Soot spewed from the smokestack. The engineer yanked a chain to sound the whistle before entering tunnels, forcing Leonora to jump up to shut the windows to keep the black grit from coming into the car. She folded and refolded her hands incessantly, then wiped away a furtive tear before her daughter would see it. She adjusted her long skirt and ruffled collar tirelessly. Between the windows hung heavy, short-cropped drapery panels in beige/black print tied back with threadbare ropes that Leonora untied when the afternoon sun turned the car into a heat box.

Angela played with the colorful ribbons on her frock. She even sang a nursery rhyme until the constant rocking of the train put her to sleep. Leonora watched the countryside slip by in between each station. Her ivory skin, dark eyebrows, and soft lips were reflected in the glass as the cloudy steam evaporated quickly on that sun-filled day of 1896 when Leonora would meet the man who committed a lie of omission.

She lowered the window further when pulling out of the Rome train station at high noon, six hours into her eight-hour journey. Her dark brown wisps of hair fluttered near her temples, but her tight bun never released a single strand. On the other train Giovanni's window was open from the start as he brought the stifling heat of Calabria with him. He had placed his suit jacket and felt hat on the overhead baggage rack. Loosening his tie, he unbuttoned his stiff collar and wiped his brow repeatedly with his linen handkerchief. The wooden bench seat for two was all his, and he leaned his head against the window, allowing the rumbling metal wheels to lull him to sleep. The couple had made a joint decision that would impact Angela for a lifetime. It would fuel a haunting question that dwelled on the edges of her mind well into her graying years.

Two years earlier in 1894, the couple had lived as man and wife in Brazil. Both had emigrated from Italy in 1888, she with her parents and brother; he had arrived alone. Their port of entry was Santos, where countless Italians had come, seeking work. Most of the passengers came from northern Italy with their families to start a new life. At the Port of Santos, these weary immigrants boarded a train to Sao Paulo, where their name, age, departing port, and name of the ship they sailed were entered into a registry. Each person was given an identification number. This hostelry was a meeting place for employers to match up with workers. The lines were long and the process, trying. Body odors from the crowd mingled with the smell of cheeses and salamis. Children were restless, circling their parents, and babies cried. The sounds and smells ascended to the peak of a warehouse roof only to crash onto the concrete floor. Brazil had subsidized the journey for these immigrant workers. Giovanni had been one of them.

The sea winds had filled his lungs and blown his hair, sometimes stinging his cheeks. The journey from Naples to Santos, the port of Sao Paulo, took over two weeks of rocking, then dipping through an ocean storm. He shared a cabin with three other men all from the Veneto region of Italy. They sought each other out for meals and often gathered at the ship's stern to smoke and compete in topping each other's stories. Giovanni was not as gregarious as the others, but held their attention when he recounted his experience in the mines of South Africa. Their camaraderie made the sea voyage tolerable. On his lone train ride to meet Leonora in Salerno, the many hours of swaying, slowing, and stopping reminded him of the ship voyage on the Napoli. At one of the train stations, he bought a panini and a gassosa, dismissing the basket of food Dora had prepared for him at home. He craved the salami sandwiches and fizzy lemon soda the vendors were selling. This meeting with Leonora and Angela didn't include Dora, but its outcome would change her life forever. Giovanni had a firm mindset.

Leonora and Giovanni greeted each other on the train platform with only a polite handshake. The time for love at first sight was over. This meeting was to fulfill an agreement. Angela was happy to see her dad but reticent to run into his arms. They'd been separated for nearly two years. The last time she saw him was at their home on the plantation (fazenda) in Brazil. Foremen were given small homes apart from the barrack housing where workers and their families lived. These long, low buildings were former slave quarters when Sao Paulo had become one of the major producers of coffee beans in the international trade. Immigrants filled

them when slavery was abolished in 1888. Standing barefoot by

her mother's side, Angela waved goodbye as Giovanni boarded the wagon that would take him to the train for Santos and his return to Italy. His departure was a mystery, but the downcast faces on those around her were unmistakable. The stranger from Italy who had come to get him took him away.

Stretching from her nap, Angela whined: "Are we there yet?"

"Be patient," her mother offered. "It won't be much longer." Vendors hawked the train in Naples as Angela stood in front of the window of their cabin.

"Mommy, can I have a gassosa?"

"Not now," her mother whispered. "Here, have a plum and a bottle of water I brought from home." Leonora flipped the wire that held the small, round, white porcelain top that sealed the sweating bottle and poured it into a small glass.

Angela ate the fruit while her mother wiped its juice from dripping down her arm onto her pretty dress. Staring at the vendors with wooden trays strapped around their necks containing paper-wrapped sandwiches, she laughed to see their antics. The vendors avoided the doors where passengers were getting on and off the train and focused on those in the cars. Arms waved from the windows, holding money to catch the eye of the sellers. The humming of the idling engine and the commotion of people kissing and hugging forced the food vendors to shout louder, Panini, panini. Angela's eyes were wide as if watching a performance, and her broad smile reached across her fair-skinned face. As they pulled out of the station, she exchanged waves with the people on the platform, motioning their goodbyes to their loved ones. Her mother offered her another plum from the worn carry bag she'd brought with them. Their luggage consisted of one small suitcase.

When Giovanni had left his family on the plantation in Brazil two years earlier for the train to take him to the Port of Santos, his wagon held a steamer trunk and a carpetbag filled with items he'd brought with him, plus photos of his life in Brazil. His journey from Italy had not been motivated by hunger and desperation for work. He was an only child raised in a family of property owners in the hills of Calabria. They were fortunate to have their storerooms filled with flour to make pasta, fruits and vegetables from their farm, eggs daily, and chickens always available, plus olive oil to share. They crushed grapes to make robust wines from local vineyards. The lower the vine, the stronger the wine was a common phrase among the Calabrese, but the grapes' high sugar content fortified its strength. Each year his family raised a pig until it was full grown, feeding it chestnuts and figs plus the scraps from their table until the

annual January slaughter to make the soppressata, sausage, roasts, and blood pudding. Giovanni's shoulders were broad, and his hands were so large, someone had to clean his ears for him. Muscular, he could do the work of two men. All this land would be his one day. According to his mother his future had been planned, including an arranged marriage with a homely, petite woman, Dora, who spoke an Albanian dialect. Her family owned property as well.

Leonora's passport photo showed a woman with dark eyes, lovely features, and fair skin, an Italian beauty. Her wavy, collar-length hair matched her eyes and sat gently on her high-neck dress. The sepia photo made it impossible to see the dress's deep color. She appeared a young woman of marriageable age, with a kind and subtle smile. Whatever attention she elicited from Giovanni, it was enough to halt his letter writing to his mother after one year of his departure.

Another telling photo in Giovanni's possessions from Brazil showed him standing tall and handsome. His hand rests on the high back of a chair. He must have whistled while putting

on that cravat tied under the bent tips of a stiff collar in his fine suit and weskit, the same he wore years later on the train to Salerno. Smiling for the camera must have come easy since photos taken at a studio were reserved to mark a celebration. His straight, fine nose and high cheekbones were repeated on Angela's sweet face. They shared similar light-colored eyes explained by their translucency in his sepia photo. An attractive man, clean shaven, except for a moustache, appears alone because the person seated in the chair next to him has been cut out. His hand is visible, resting on the back of the chair. The photo speaks volumes of this neatly dressed man on a special day, but the person who vanished suggests so much more, possibly a wedding in Brazil.

Absence had made Angela reticent when she saw her father in the waiting room of the airless Salerno train station. She was not aware of the agreement her parents had made. Hiding behind her mother's skirt, she smiled sheepishly until Giovanni picked her up and kissed her, tickling her cheeks with his mustache. Giving in to his charm and affection, she giggled, ultimately wrapping her arms around his neck for her biggest hug. The only people missing from this reunion were the nearly two-year-old twins who Leonora left with her aunt in Chivasso, a small village in Piemonte. Leonora and her children had returned from Brazil a few months earlier and settled in with her aunt. From there she exchanged letters with Giovanni, ironing out the details of this meeting.

"You are looking so well," Giovanni greeted Leonora with a smile

reflecting joy.

“So are you” was all she could say.

He guided them to a corner of the room where two empty benches faced each other. The station corralled a large group of travelers who boarded a waiting train. Giovanni’s train had arrived an hour earlier. Angela sat next to her mother across from her father. Leonora played with her daughter’s hair, petting her head as she spoke to Giovanni.

“The babies are doing well. They are with my aunt.”

“How are your parents and your brother?”

“They are doing well, thank you.”

“You know we could have continued our life in Brazil.”

“Not after that young man knocked on our door.”

When Giovanni had stopped writing to his mother, she had feared the worst. After three years she convinced a young man, Saverio, to journey to Brazil to trace Giovanni’s steps in the hopes of finding him or at the very least to find out what may have happened to him. Brazil was rugged country, and Giovanni was a fearless journeyman. It was his second adventure. His first one took him to South Africa to work as a foreman at the mines. He stayed only one year before returning to Italy and succumbing to his mother’s formidable will and the arranged marriage she’d contracted. Within six months he left for Brazil, the second adventure that had very nearly turned into an escape.

Saverio had a slight build and wore round glasses, carrying himself like a professor. He wasn’t, but he was a notary with an office job. He sailed to Brazil on the same ship Giovanni had taken years before, hoping to find someone, anyone in the crew who might have remembered him. The well-dressed young man, suit, cravat, and hat, showed Giovanni’s photo to many of the stewards, crewmen, and waiters, but with so many faces coming and going, no one recognized him. Saverio thought that Giovanni’s impressive size might have lingered in someone’s memory. In their Italian village everyone knew Giovanni. Even the mayor and the council approached him shortly after he’d returned from South Africa to discuss the problems the villagers were having

with the highwaymen who robbed them when they left the village at the crossroad. Giovanni agreed to meet with these brigands. Alone with his rifle he met up with the leader of the group. No one knows exactly what transpired, but the villagers were no longer held up by these criminals. Giovanni’s reputation was impressive.

At the Port of Santos, mild-mannered Saverio took a train to the hostel where Italian immigrants were housed until they found employment. There he asked a worker to guide him to the address on the last letter Giovanni had written to his mother. Saverio took a bus across town to a multi-family building where he met a bent-over old man who recognized Giovanni's photo. The old-timer couldn't verify if Giovanni was alive or not, only that he'd moved a distance away a long time ago to San Jose, a city north of Sao Paulo in the heart of one of the oldest coffee plantations. Here was the first clue Saverio had gotten that he was on Giovanni's trail. Wiping his brow, he made plans to leave the next day via a bus instead of a train. He cleverly decided he could descend the bus at every stop and flash Giovanni's picture to any vendor he saw. When he reached San Jose, a laborer who was meeting someone on the bus recognized Giovanni, his foreman, and directed Saverio to the house with the gate across from the barracks.

With his small satchel he walked the dusty dirt road for nearly a mile. Parched and exhausted, he knocked on the door. Leonora greeted him, carrying an infant. An older woman at the other end of the room was carrying another infant. In a corner off from the fireplace, a little girl was playing with a teapot on a bench below the small, curtained window. The rustic room was inviting, and Saverio wanted nothing more than a glass of water and a chair. Holding up Giovanni's photo, he greeted the woman.

"Hello, signora," he graciously asked after removing his hat. "Does this man live here?"

"Yes, he does."

"I am Saverio DeLisa, a friend from his village in Italy."

"Please come in," she urged. "You can wait for him here." She rushed to get him some water and offered him a seat in the hand-hewed wooden rocker by the fireplace. After taking a long drink of water, he sighed.

"Thank the Lord. His mother and wife will be so relieved to hear that he is still alive."

His words fell to the floor in the silence of the cabin. Not even the babies cried. The older woman's hand flew to her mouth with a rushed intake of breath, and the little girl studied him with a curiosity that left her still, even though she did not understand the heavy meaning in those words. Yes, two women in Italy would be greatly relieved, but Leonora in Brazil was shaken to her core. She felt her breast milk turn sour as Saverio rested in the rocker near the fire, closing his eyes in relief that his persistent and arduous journey

had ended successfully. He could not know that his discovery suddenly hurled this woman and her three children into an abyss.

At the train station in Salerno, Leonora bent her knees to be face-to-face with Angela. Holding the child's face in her two hands and holding back her tears, she told her daughter, "You will be going home with your father to Calabria."

Bewildered, Angela asked, "Aren't you coming?"

"No, I must return to the babies."

"I don't want to go. I want to go home with you."

"Your father wants you to come live with him."

"I don't want to go," Angela stammered.

Crying, she hugged her mother, hiding her face into Leonora's shoulder. Giovanni stood

quiet as Leonora picked up and held her daughter, tears seeping into Angela's hair. They rocked back and forth for some time; then Giovanni spoke.

"Come, Angela, the train is here." Pulling his sobbing daughter from her mother, he quickly exited the station and boarded the train. Angela's arm was outstretched, beckoning to her mother, "Don't leave me. Don't leave me." Leonora stood on the station holding her handkerchief to her face. The whistle blew, and the engine released its steam as it labored on to its destination. Angela's eyes grew weary with the rocking of the train. It beckoned sleep in her father's arms, her face still wet with tears. Angela never saw her mother again, and the question she still raised well into her eighties, "Why did she give me away?"

Rumors flew for years that Leonora with her son and daughter, the twins, had returned to Brazil, claiming she was a widow. There she allegedly remarried. Angela never wanted to pursue a search for Leonora while Dora was alive for fear of offending her. Instead, Angela traveled to Italy in 1953 from her new home in the United States and ten years after Dora's death. Angela was in her sixties. She went to the Chivasso and knocked on the door of the only address she had from childhood, holding her mother's photo, just as Saverio had done with Giovanni's photo in Brazil. She asked the elderly woman who answered, "Do you know this woman? She's my mother." Startled, the woman claimed Leonora left Italy many, many years ago, and she knew nothing further about her. The woman's rigid posture and her tightened lips hinted she wouldn't share any information, and she didn't. Angela parted as bewildered as the little girl whose parents had made a plan to meet at a train station.

Praying and Crying

Suzanne O'Connell

“Can you hear me?
I’m in the waiting room
by the lab in the basement.
Lots of women.
I’ve been here all day,
praying and crying.

The mammogram this afternoon
squished me like a pancake.
They kept me in that thing for 90 minutes.
She kept saying, ‘I’m so sorry, ma’am,
I’m sorry, sugar,
I’m sorry, darlin.’
She got sorrier as the time went on.
Now it really hurts and it’s pink.

Then the doctor asked do I have
anyone in my family with breast cancer?
‘Only one,’ I said, ‘my daddy’s sister.’
But I don’t know her, so maybe
she doesn’t count!
Ha ha, that’s what I told him.

I have to have my cataracts done too,
the doc said.
My eyes were fine in December,
but now my retinal has a pinhole.
Since December I’m falling apart.
Isn’t that something?
Okay, baby, they’re calling my name.
Pray for me.”

Rapids

Alison Hicks

On the Youghiogheny
my brother-in-law's sister
fell out of the raft.
My sister-in law fell out,
scraped her knee on a rock.
My husband fell out,
ended up in the trip video:
What is that man saying?
Throw me a rope!
I crouched down in the raft
as far as I could.

We managed to stay in
on the Tuolumne
outside Yosemite.
The guide steered, calling out,
Forward on the right,
backward on the left.
We passed fire-scarred banks,
trees burned-out matchsticks
stuck into the hillside.

In Colorado, I was pulled
backward into the Arkansas.
An inconceivable volume
of magnificent water
kept passing over my body
every second.

Someone grabbed my paddle;
the guide hauled me up
by the shoulders of my flotation device.
I lay facedown on the floor
gasping. Story of my life.
I thought it was the altitude
or adrenaline, didn't consider
the cold until later.

When You Die

Sam Ambler

When you die,
I will pick the butterfly kiss
off your eyes
with my soft fingertips.
I want your light
and your dark storms
to wash over me, pure,
one more time.
I will sit holding your hands
until I feel you gone.

I will walk again
in the sand of your hair,
among the dunes and tule reeds
where once we lay together.
I will smell the sea
and hear the waves' laughter,
indelicate, strong.
I will take the life you had,
and you will live on.

I will float again
in harmonies you sang with me,
our voices brash and confident
as once we merged in clouds.
I will bathe your cooling body
until it rings of frankincense,
warming at my touch.
I will watch you in twilight
and you will burn candles.

I want your sleep to be an answer.
I want your dream to come a-waking.
I want your death to be the door
we open together.

I will stand on the threshold,
waving,
and then I will let you go.

Cannibal Stew

Rob Armstrong

She was no fun; who needs her anyway?

The pub claimed to be the oldest in Scotland, but Boyd knew three other pubs made the same claim. He picked this one because it claimed to be haunted by ghosts. It was a whitewashed, mismatched pile of stone and timbers adorned with ugly effigies and wooden signs—a tourist stop on the way to Inverness.

She complained the whole time after we left Edinburgh.

Boyd walked a secondary road that paralleled the shoreline of the Moray Firth inlet. Fifty yards away the sea crashed against the jetties. He walked a lot that day, sore feet attesting, crushed beneath the weight of his backpack. Boyd hoped the pub was still serving food; it was well after dark, and it was doubtful that the nearby hostel where he hoped to crash had anything more elaborate than pickings from a vending machine.

I left her at the train station in Nairn. She could figure out the rest of her life from there. I could never be Jack Kerouac if I stayed with her.

He dropped his pack by the door and pulled at the brass knob of the distressed green door. Inside the low-ceiling main room, a scattering of people huddled at the bar and ate at tables.

A bunch of half-witted locals.

“Are you still serving food?” Boyd asked the bartender.

“Relax a bit. First things first, young man. You must order a pint, then comes the food. Food should be only eaten to keep drinking.”

Everybody itches to give you their opinion.

Boyd knew he should have chuckled—that was the polite thing to do, but he did not have the energy to be fake, not after the week he had. Writing a paranormal guidebook for a second-rate press was deflating. Needing money corrupted his integrity. Traveling among coastline villages collecting half-concocted ghost stories from drunk stiffies was a further reminder that he was light-years away from the creative freedom to write whatever the hell he wanted.

“Let’s go with you telling somebody to scrounge around in the kitchen and dig up a shepherd’s pie before I pass out.” Boyd slid onto a barstool and pulled off his outerwear.

The bartender’s smile faded but his words were still polite. “The colder fall weather takes a bite. A shepherd’s pie will warm your bones.”

A few minutes later a seemingly pleasant woman placed steaming food in front of Boyd. “My husband tells me you need comfort food.” “Something like that. I’ll take a pint now; something local with a

catchy name.” Boyd shoved a forkful of the shepherd’s pie into his mouth.

“I’ll send Hamish over; I don’t pour.”

As soon as she turned around, Boyd called out, “What’s this meat? It tastes too sweet to be beef.”

“It’s goat, taken from a farm up the lane. It’s healthier for the heart than chicken.”

“You don’t say?” Boyd mimicked the banal responses he heard from hicks like this woman all week.

The food police have arrived in Scotland. Next will be a vegetarian version of blood sausage made from tofu.

“The Sisters brought goats with them when they fled the Baron of Castlehill in 1635 because of religious persecution. Coastal pirates and marauders were fed goat meat in this very pub. We have always needed strangers to make our living.”

“Great, thanks. Good to know,” Boyd said, hoping she would hurry to go back to the kitchen.

I wasn’t interested in a cooking history lesson.

After an awkward silence as she studied him, she nodded and retreated.

Hamish returned and plopped down a mug of foaming beer on the oak counter. “I bet it gets lonely out there backpacking by yourself. This is bleak country, especially when the fog rolls in.”

Nosy—even for a bartender. I would love to tell him to piss off, but I’m here to collect dopey ghost stories. I must make a charm offensive because I need a paycheck.

Between bites of food Boyd said, “I had a lady friend bail on the trip. Not her cup of tea.” He snickered at using a very appropriate idiom within the United Kingdom. “I left her behind in Nairn to sort herself.”

“A handsome young man like you will survive just fine back in the wild. The next tavern holds a lassie for you, I’m sure.”

“Getting lassies has never been a problem.” Boyd sucked down a few swallows of beer. “My walkabout has a literary purpose. I’m working for a publishing house back in London desirous to collect ghost stories from rural areas around Inverness. These stories will serve as a compendium of ghostly tales for would-be paranormal hunters and supernatural believers.”

The bartender hooted. “We’ve got plenty of ghosties around here; seventeen, to be exact, if you believe dogs and cats can come back.”

I’ve got a real live wire here.

Boyd placed his cell phone on the counter. “Would you mind if I recorded? Please tell me about each.”

“I’d be glad to; I’m used to that. Every so often journalists and the like stop by to hear about the pub’s history and its ghosts. Tourist

buses stop here, mostly in the summer. We sell lots of beer and souvenirs then. The kiddies like the T-shirt of the ghost pirate Captain Finley; that's a seller. My wife and I have owned the pub for quite some time."

I imagine you add another ghost story each season to market new trinkets.

"Let's start with the ghost of Finley. Your wife tells me the pirates were big fans of the goat meat."

"Finley and his crew were a foul lot, a real scourge of the Moray Inlet in the mid-1700s. One night the captain and a few of his crew came ashore for food and drink. As the hour grew later and they were quite deep in their cups, an argument broke out among the men. Blades were drawn and two of the sea dogs were dead in a matter of minutes—one of the dead was Captain Finley, killed by his first mate. They say it was over a woman. I've never seen Finley's ghost, but my wife has many times. Old Finley comes on the anniversary of his death and sits right in front of the fireplace, drinking from the same cup he used before he died. It sits on the mantel over there today." *Not bad; I'll have to do a little background research on the pirate captain to add bulk to the story. Pirate stuff is good.*

"Who is the oldest ghost?" Boyd lifted his mug to drain it. "This is some good, strong beer. Can I have another?"

"I make the beer myself. Call it Stranger's Delight; very high alcohol by volume." The bartender dispensed another mug of beer and continued, "The oldest ghost we have is a sad tale. That ghost is a little girl, a prior owner's daughter, back in the 1300s. She would play outside the pub, along the road, with her dog so she could wave at passing travelers. As the hour grew late, her father neglected to fetch her one day because he drank too much with a patron. It was dusk. Wolves beset the girl and slaughtered both her and the dog. Both of them were buried over there where the old bar was located. The very place where the neglectful father served his drinks. He chose that spot so that he would never be too far from her again."

The bartender pointed to a granite plate on the floor with the date 1323 and the name *Liza* engraved on it.

"Have you seen her?"

"No, only my wife and the occasional patron see and talk with the ghosts. I'm not interested in talking with the spirits. My wife says that the girl's ghost is afraid to leave the pub and keeps forbidding her dog from leaving."

I need to interview the wife as well.

The bartender continued telling the history of all the pub's ghosts throughout its hundreds of years of existence. He grew the most animated when he spoke of a traveling troubadour who, while reciting a love sonnet, was stabbed by a local lord fixated on revenge

for the man who seduced his wife. When the stories ended Boyd realized that he had ordered way more beer than he should have drunk. But he was pleased with the material he collected. The bartender turned out to be less of a dolt than he first thought. Boyd's head was spinning from the beer.

"Can I ask your wife a few questions now before I turn in at the hostel?" Boyd yawned, wanting desperately to put his head down on a pillow. He needed to stay on schedule with his hiking and go to a few more villages before his assignment was finished; his editor insisted that he not use a car to lend a sense of authenticity to the voice of his writing. One of the goals for the book was to capture the angst of living in the stark countryside.

Living in the middle of nowhere, ugly-ville doesn't require experiential research.

Hamish darted his eyes to the mantel clock. "Catriona's done in the kitchen and is on her way home. I could take you back for a quick chat in a bit when we close; it's not far from the hostel. My wife likes interesting new people like you."

"That would be great," Boyd said. "And maybe she could introduce me to one of those ghosts she has met."

The bartender did not seem to enjoy his joke but said nothing.

Too much beer; I've got to rein in the sarcasm.

At that moment the outer door to the pub opened, ushering in a blast of cool air. An American couple, so identified by the Nike swoosh on their shoes, hurried inside and went straight for the bar.

"Are you still serving?" one of the Americans said.

"For a bit. What will it be?"

"Give me two Cannibal Stews." The man smiled over to his companion.

The bartender lowered his voice. "What an odd name for a drink. I've never heard of it."

Matching the bartender's lower volume, the same American said,

"The broker told us that you would play coy." He placed what appeared to be a vintage coin on the bar.

After pocketing the coin, the bartender reached for the highest shelf behind the bar and selected a nearly empty crystal decanter of what Boyd thought was whiskey. Hamish half-filled two cocktail glasses and ordered the Americans to take the farthest booth in the back of the pub. "Closing time is soon. I will lock up and turn out the lights and everybody else will go. Come sun-up I'll be back to collect you. Under no circumstances are you to leave or let anybody else inside."

The Americans quietly giggled. The one who gave the coin said, "I can't believe this is happening. Thank you."

The Americans hurried to the booth.

"I couldn't help but hear. What was that all about? A most unusual exchange," Boyd said to the bartender.

"Tis nothing—merely tourists seeking distraction," Hamish said.

"Best for you to hit the pisser now or else the cold winds will freeze your privates if you have to go outside. Closing time is in ten minutes, and then you can get your interview with my wife."

What are the latecomers going to be doing all night, alone in the pub?

After the pub closed Hamish turned several deadbolt locks on the rear door of the pub and shoved the keys into his pocket. He pointed Boyd to a path that led up a hill through shoulder-high grasses and brush. "Our house and stable are atop the bluff. From there it is an easy walk down to the village and the hostel."

The overdrinking of beer had made Boyd's legs unsteady and his mind thick. It was an effort to climb the hill; his muscles had hardened after hiking all day. His backpack, if it could be believed, seemed heavier. Boyd struggled to catch his breath. After several minutes of silence, he huffed, "The coin the American gave you seemed like an antique coin, probably worth a lot of money. Is a taste of Cannibal Stew some highly prized whisky I've never heard of?"

"Very much so," the bartender said. "Only vetted people through the broker are allowed to taste it. It is much more than collectible whisky."

"How so?" He was becoming annoyed with the bartender's vague answers about the Americans.

Pausing for a moment before speaking, the bartender said, "People who drink Cannibal Stew are seeking out knowledge on ghosts just like you. Unfortunately, I'm going to ask you not to write about the Americans if you want to interview my wife."

"I won't write about them without your permission. I'll respect the need for discretion as any news journalist would," Boyd said, not entirely sure he would honor his commitment if it turned out the reasons why the American drank Cannibal Stew was a juicy tidbit for the book.

At last they reached the top of the hill. Hamish pointed to the stables, whose white-painted sides were vaguely visible in the starlight. "My wife is looking in on our horses before bed. You can chat there with her."

As they passed the lit-up main house en route to the stable, Hamish said, "To answer your question, drinking Cannibal Stew will allow the Americans to see the ghosts that inhabit the pub. The few allowed who can pay can also converse with the dead during the night they drink it."

Boyd laughed out loud. "Are you kidding? Is the pub wired for ghostly special effects? I won't say a word to ruin your lucrative thrill show."

Both the bartender and his wife are scam artists who prey on traveling strangers. Maybe I could sell the story to a tabloid.

Inside the stables were a half-dozen horse stalls. Catriona was shoveling hay into one of them when they entered. Hamish called out and explained the wish for her to answer some questions for the ghost guide that was being written.

“Your husband tells me that you have seen and conversed with the ghosts in the pub. Tell me how you do it. Are you drinking Cannibal Stew or are you a natural clairvoyant?”

I chase after kooks for their made-up ghost stories; it is so embarrassing. I'm meant for better .

“I was given the gifts to serve as a handmaiden to the dead; such service can be traced back nearly four hundred years to the first coven that fled the Baron of Castlehill,” Catriona said.

This is all some steaming pile of cow pies but it's a great story.

Boyd fought the urge to laugh aloud again. “Why do the dead require a handmaiden?”

“They need help resolving the reasons as to why they can't move on.”
Isn't that what every charlatan says when asked for a reason why ghosts exist?

“So you're like a social worker for the dead?” Boyd said.

I'm an idiot; the beer is talking again.

“You are a rude little man who deserves what ill fortune he has wrought,” Catriona said.

Boyd realized his snarkiness was ruining the interview. “I'm sorry for making a joke. Excuse me; I've drunk too much. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.”

Without warning Boyd was struck hard on the back of the head. He teetered; his vision blurred and he slumped to his knees. Through a haze of pain, Boyd saw Hamish holding a billy club.

Who are these people?

“Darling, I did what you asked after he was so rude about your goat shepherd's pie,” Hamish said. “I found out he was alone and led him back here quite tipsy. Nobody saw us leave together. And from the way he comports himself, no one should miss him much. His editor will think he stumbled blind drunk off the bluff on the way to the hostel.”

Hamish stripped a dazed Boyd of his backpack, cell phone, and wallet.

Boyd was struck again across the shoulders, and he fell facedown to the floorboards. As he tried to rise, his head still spinning, the bartender pounced on him and snapped manacles onto his arms and legs. As Catriona opened a hatch through the floor, Boyd was dragged toward it. A dangling chain attached to an overhead winch was clipped to his hand manacles so that he could be lowered.

What is happening? What are they going to do to me?

The walls of the underground room Boyd found himself in were made of brick; the smell of soot pervaded the dank air. The owners of the pub stood above him after climbing down a ladder.

“What is this place?” Boyd blubbered. “Why are you doing this?”

“You were an easy choice for what we need because you’re a self-satisfied, boorish man,” Catriona said.

“You’re kidnapping me? All because I was rude about your shepherd’s pie?” Boyd said. “This is crazy town. I’m sincerely sorry for not showing respect. It’s been a long, tiring week and I got snappish. Please let me go.”

“Dogs get snappish,” Hamish said. “A man should be accountable for how he conducts himself.”

Hamish gripped Boyd beneath his shoulders and dragged him toward a brick kiln located in the corner of the room. The bartender pushed Boyd inside the oven with a violent shove and slammed shut the grated iron door.

Boyd pulled against the bars. “Let me out of here. You’ll go to jail for this. If you stop now and release me, I won’t press charges. You’ll never see me again.”

Catriona laughed. “All of you chosen pretty much promise the same thing.”

“Chosen for what? How many others have you kidnapped?”

“Since the original coven came to the village in 1635, the handmaidens have required sacrifices to craft Cannibal Stew. Since we are guardians, we do not take people from the village, only strangers. Selling the drink to a special few affords extra money in the cold months when we cannot send men out to fish,” Catriona said.

“You’re going to cook and eat me like savages? Is that why your drink is called Cannibal Stew? Are the Americans going to join you?”

Catriona shook her head. “The handmaidens do not crave human flesh anymore to perfect their magic. Now we will cremate you and mix your remains with trace amounts of the ashes of those who came before you. This human mix becomes part of an alchemic tincture with the whisky,” Catriona said.

“This is madness,” Boyd said. “Ghosts, witches, and magic are not real. You’re just hoodwinking tourists to make them think they are talking to ghosts. And you’re outright, perverted murderers.”

“It doesn’t matter if you believe, or the tourists, just so long as the tourists continue to pay for the experience of being with ghosts for the night,” Hamish said. “Nearly all the tourists, I believe, think it is a thrilling show. Nobody really cares about what is real or not anymore; all that matters is the feeling of the experience—the coven has always adapted with the times.”

I must say something to make them stop. I've always been able to talk my way out of anything.

"My cell phone will be tracked here. The police will piece it all together," Boyd said. "Just let me go, please."

"We've heard that argument before. Hamish will walk your phone along the sea walk bluff. After that, all evidence of you will be burned and destroyed."

"When they trace my steps, it will lead to the stables. Maybe the police will get lucky and find this dungeon and this burning box," Boyd said. "The truth will come out eventually, if not for me, then the next time. Let it end with me—I'll go quietly and say nothing about you or your pub. You can still make money grifting people into seeing ghosts."

"What do you think, Catriona?" Hamish said.

"I'm wondering if you have enough propane to toast this asshole."

"Sure do, sweetheart. I filled the tank up the other day when I noticed the decanter of Cannibal Stew running low."

"I hope you both burn in hell!" Boyd roared at the top of his lungs. Catriona cackled, "Maybe you will haunt us? There's always room for more ghosts at our pub."

Perennial Incantation

Kelly Talbot

I emerge from the cement stream
and shake off droplets of sidewalk.
My lips part. Afternoon emerges,
and I am conjuring July.

Stems of graffiti stretch upward
along city walls, their blossoms
already fading, waiting
to bloom again next year.

You meet me there,
dusted in the fragrance
of laughter and petals unfolding,
just as last year,
just as today.

Here with you
I was, am, will be,
continuously.
When I open my eyes,
your smile is infinity.

Marginalized

Rick Kuening

Fox locks eyes in the garden, brush tail held low.
Blackbird commands the housetop, public pulpit, declares ownership.
Spider spins a silken haven, silver whisps in slanting daylight.
Squirrel, distracted, dashes, hectic, hides treasures from himself.
Hedgehog, meditating, trundles there to here, at ease.
Kestrel, paper-thin, floats across concrete and commercial signage.
Hunting spider flattens under the wrought steel garden railing.
Heron, regal, knife-bladed, rises from an urban streambed.
Woodpecker, soldier-straight, green-gold, clings to a concrete curb.
Songbird and bee, bellwethers of decline and slow death, disappear.

Hidden, resident, refugees encamped at the edge of our kind—
They await our apotheosis, rapture, departure—uplifted,
transcendent—
Gone in the crescendo of greed and rapacious stupidity defining
our kind.
Those who remain know themselves, their place, the center.
They will repair from the margins, recover loss and disruption,
This corrupt dominion of God's worst choice,
Our broken covenant with God's good Creation.

Awakening: Early Apprenticeship

Mary Ann Dimand

...and the spring day opens
with a fluty whistling, as a sapsucker
tastes the coming dawn.

I've wakened early, to my world
where kills are not so clean
as a rabid fox's bite. Where humans
blame the spider for a web
that gums the mourning cloak,
and blame the flies the spider catches,
and praise the tender sweetness of a fawn,
while wondering where the sassafras's shoots
have gone, down what bedeviled maw—
and say how cruel the children are
as they repeat what parents teach them.

Sees

James DeMarse

Going home to Rochester to visit my mother who has Alzheimer's. The train leaves Grand Central in ten minutes. I get settled in my seat, organize my reading and my notebooks. It takes about eight hours to get to Rochester.

* * *

It's been three months since I last saw Mom. We talked on the phone the other day and it took her a while to figure out who I was. I knew I had to see her, the sooner, the better. In the last several months I had been a little more relaxed about my visits, I felt she was in good hands with my aunt and friends from church who took care of everything she needed, but I realized she needed something more than what they could give her.

After the call, I thought I might try to get a temporary place in Rochester for longer visits. My cousin offered me the couch in her family room in the basement. It was nice of her but, no, thanks. I didn't want to live with someone anyway. My visits were a balancing act because acting jobs were sporadic, and I couldn't afford to turn down any offers. Then I thought I about finding a part-time job—that thought lasted about a minute. I didn't want to spend a lot of time there. It's not that I don't like Rochester, it's just that the place stirs up complicated memories, some tough and unpleasant.

It is a big city of about two hundred thousand, but we lived in a township near the lake that felt like a small town—Irondequoit. There were even farms on the other side of Irondequoit Bay, south of Pittsford and west around Henrietta.

Lake Ontario was about a twenty-minute walk from our house on Tamarack Drive. Across the street was an empty lot where we used to play baseball when I was little; our small weed-infested baseball field looked over the gully, which had a little stream running through it at the bottom, a couple of old baseballs were more than likely embedded in its banks; beyond that was the vast Durand Eastman Park.

The park spread out from there for hundreds of acres all the way to the beach, filled with not only fields and forests but three ponds stocked with some large-mouth bass and brook trout. Mom loved to take walks along its horse trails and woodland paths. In the winter, my friends Bobby and Ronnie and I would trudge over to one of the larger ponds there, shovel the snow off so we could skate, then play some kind of weird hockey.

I shared my mother's love of the woods and always thought my future would somehow contain forests, streams, hills, and valleys instead of subways, noise, and traffic.

Farther down on the lake was Dreamland with the famous Jack Rabbit roller coaster overlooking not only the lake but also Irondequoit Bay. When I was smaller, my friend Butch and I would ride our bikes down to the bay and fish from the old dock for carp. I never caught any. Butch did and bashed their heads on the rocks because he said they helped pollute the bay.

There was a strong, wicked undertow that ran through the outlet from the bay into the lake. I remember a little boy drowned there. I saw them pull out his awful white body, floppy like a doll, then try to cover him up before people could see.

* * *

The train slowly pulls out of Grand Central Station with the clack-clack of the wheels on the track. Clack-clack as it moves through the tunnel into the scattered light of the train yard. Clack-clack across the bridge in the full morning sun with the Hudson River ahead. The engineer opens the throttle and we're off.

* * *

When I visited Mom at home before her Alzheimer's accelerated, she used to applaud my meager successes, laugh at my stale but, I thought, well-delivered jokes, and puzzle at my outbursts of rage over politics after I had downed a few beers.

I remember my mother's devotion to the Catholic Church. When I was in the seminary, she told me that Jesus absorbed every minute of her day, even when she scrubbed dishes or floors or walls, did laundry in the basement with the water draining into that slate tub, every mundane task. Over time, my mother's devotion to the church infected me like the bug: I attended Mass at Saint Salome's two or three times a week; prayed every day as if it were food—three meals a day, along with snacks and desserts; and imagined fishing with Christ on the Sea of Galilee.

* * *

I feel tired because I got up early to catch this train. I start to relax somewhere around West Point or Cold Spring. I look at the cliffs of Bear Mountain across the river. Farther on, I can almost feel the trees sway in the river breeze. I remember how much Mom loved her trees.

She used to hum whenever she looked at those three pines in the front yard that she planted many years ago. Now she lives in an

assisted living facility in a room overlooking a parking lot.

As I study my reflection in the window with those trees passing by beyond, I look for answers to questions about my own forgetfulness.

* * *

The safety of the church was my true home, so it was not too hard to figure out what I would do after eighth grade—join the seminary! The rules were strict—no girls, black suits with black ties, only seminary friendships were allowed, Mass and communion every day—a total immersion into sanctity.

At first I embraced the rules, plunged into prayer, exalted in daily Mass, and sought forgiveness of sins in weekly confession; and, sadly, I did not see my friends outside the seminary. My devotion sustained me, however. I spoke to Jesus who gave me comfort when I heard my father berate my mother or throw plates, lamps, or toasters. Somehow, I managed to hold on through all the upheaval, remained somewhat calm because, ultimately, I knew there was an answer. But all that changed when I quit the seminary. The worst part was my mother's profound disappointment.

When I visited Mom at the facility three months ago, I stayed at our old house on Tamarack Drive for the last time; I had sold it after much thought about Mom's condition with the realization that she would never be able to return there, plus the sale would enable her to get Medicaid. Most of Mom's furniture had been sold or given to the Salvation Army, so I slept in the attic on an old army cot. It would be the last night I would spend in that house, a way to say goodbye to the last vestige of my childhood: to remember her hand on my forehead when I was sick, her laughter when I did pratfalls on the lawn, her quiet tears after a bout with Dad, her bravery in the face of her illness. I felt anxious when night came. The empty house echoed the wails of ghosts. The old night terrors came back, the sound of slamming doors, shouts, crying. Silence. Then that feeling of waiting, waiting for something bad to happen. That was then. I made it through without a scratch.

* * *

But tonight I would stay at a hotel in downtown Rochester near where Mom was staying.

After Poughkeepsie and the Catskills, we pass Albany. I see the Adirondacks in the distance, and I remember one of the rare vacations we had when Dad rented a rustic cottage on Indian Lake. We swam in the chilly waters, so clean you could see the bottom no matter how far out you went; we ate fried perch in the local eateries; Dad made pancakes for breakfast. I remember the clear air, fresh

pine smells, even the smell of the water as it gently rippled along the rocky shore; I remember that one time when I felt that I was a part of a family.

* * *

When time had passed and I was finally out on my own in New York, I was not a good son. Mom had told me in one of our heart-to-heart talks before I left for the big city that when she and Dad were first married, he got what he thought was a great job in Georgia with great potential; he drove all the way down there only to find that the job was not what he had been promised. He also experienced the ugliness of segregation. He turned around on the spot, drove all the way back home, straight through without sleep; on his return he had a nervous breakdown. After an examination and tests, the doctor told Mom that Dad was schizophrenic and warned her not to have any children. I was shocked, but the shock took time to sink in.

After that I didn't visit her often, but when I did I always challenged her with questions: Why did you marry Dad in the first place? Why couldn't you take care of my needs as a child? Why didn't you comfort me, hold me? Why didn't you leave, for Christ's sake? I demanded she make up for the lost time of neglect, which of course was ridiculous. I experienced a lot of bitterness then; eventually she explained with tears and anger as best she could: "He was sick. His heart. I was scared." After that, I worked to understand, so things got better.

* * *

As the train passes the mountains, the land turns flat—marshes, wetland reserves where blue herons stand feeding in shallow swamps, flocks of geese suddenly fly overhead, and ducks float on tranquil ponds.

* * *

For a long time, I have looked into my mother's eyes for answers. I have imagined that if I looked long enough, deeply enough, she would suddenly smile and say, "Sweetie pie." Last year she did, not this year so far.

I remember, after my father died, how my mother blossomed. She got reacquainted with her neighbors and friends, made cookies for the nuns, taught catechism to the kids at the church, and sang every Sunday in the choir. I bought her a notebook and a pen to encourage her to write about her walks in the park, to write about the trees, the birds, and the deer by the pond. She did.

I watch my mom's faith slowly disappearing out of her life. Soon she

will no longer have her prayers or her Mass, not much of anything to hold on to. All I'm beginning to see are her frightened eyes. What replaces the nurturing of her soul, the replenishment of grace?

I bought Mom a box of Sees candy. She would always say she didn't like them—"maybe just one chocolate-covered caramel," she'd say, then eat the whole box when I wasn't looking.

* * *

Now, passing by my window are fields of wildflowers. Queen Anne's lace, tiger lilies, pussy willows, and cattails spread out beyond the train into the horizon for what seems like miles. As we get a little closer to the city, civilization begins to show: acres of farmlands with those large mounds of hay, fresh-tilled soil, cows, and every once in a while a farmer driving his tractor. I hear the clack-clack of the train moving faster, then slower. Clack-clack. We arrive in Rochester. The view of the horizon is restricted now by steel and concrete buildings and barriers, smoke, piles of railroad ties, and various sheds, workstations, and iron detritus. Then it all disappears as we enter the tunnel at an incredibly slow pace.

* * *

I checked in at the desk where Mom was staying. A pleasant woman told me that Mom was expecting me and hoped I would have a nice visit. She told me to go directly to the visitors' room, and Mom would meet me there. The visitors' room was like a stage set of a pleasant middle-class living room with a fake bookshelf, credenza, sofa, and easy chair. The two windows had frilly curtains and "looked out on" a large print of trees. The walls were painted a calming blue.

I waited for her there for a few minutes before they wheeled her in. She had got her hair done and was wearing a nice dress with a necklace of fake pearls around her neck. She seemed a little concerned but then warmed up. I don't think she recognized me at first, but then she finally did. That's when I kissed her. It made her smile, but no "sweetie pie." I sat down and began talking about my life in New York. I told her that my wife would visit next time. A little hectic at home. I told her about my train ride and the writing I was doing about my time as a young man in the seminary. As I spoke her eyes lit up. She had this look—I don't know what kind of look, how to describe it, but this look of brightness and recognition, not Alzheimer's. She focused, looked into my eyes.

"Did Saint Salome's burn down?"

"Yeah, Mom, a few years ago now."

"The pastor was very fat. He genuflected on Good Friday and had trouble getting up."

“Well, I don’t know. He was nice.”

“No more seminary.”

“No, Mom.”

“Kodak is gone.”

“No, Mom, but they are in trouble.”

“Do you remember your father ripping up my dress?”

“Yes,” I replied, not at all happy that she had brought this up.

“It was a nice dress.”

“Well, today is a new day,” I said, shifting uncomfortably in my easy chair.

“But we had a pretty good time.”

“Yes, we did, Mom.”

“We had a good time.”

“Yeah.”

She looked at me briefly then said without expression, “I’d never do it again, though.”

I couldn’t help but laugh.

She looked at me, puzzled. “What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing,” I said, as I kept smiling.

“It turned out all right.”

“Yeah.”

“Are we happy?”

“Sure we are.”

“But it can’t always be happy. Can it?”

“No.”

“Did we fight?”

“No, we had a good life.”

“Some tears, sometimes that are good,” she mused as she looked out the fake window.

“Mostly times that are good,” I responded.

“Mostly times that are good,” she repeated. “I never see him,” she added.

“Who?”

“Your father. Why isn’t he here?”

“Well, he’s gone now.”

“I loved him.” She cried a little. “That was my sin. Loving your father.”

“Mommy. Mom.”

“I have sinned. It’s too late to be forgiven. That’s what love does. Makes you sin.”

We sat there for a while in that unreal room, that room to make one feel at home, comfortable, and safe, but it wasn’t. I handed her the Sees candy to break the spell. She took the box, looked at it, and placed it carefully on the chair next to her.

“I’ll give it to Bernice. Is Bernice here?”

“No, Mom.”

“I’ll have one. Just one,” she said, as she looked at the box.

“Okay,” I said, “just one.”

Maybe...

Lynn Glicklich Cohen

To break your fast,
to loathe your pain,
to overfill the coffee mug,
to call the handyman...

...to walk your dog,
to harvest your kale,
to monitor your heart rhythms,
to curse your insomnia,
to binge-watch Breaking Bad for the third time,
to peel a butternut squash...

...to wish to be other than you are...

you must be at least a little
in love with the world.

Birthday

Lynn Glicklich Cohen

Seven generations, maybe more,
prepared for me, raked clear
fallen cypress and ginseng,
confiscated promises so
I would learn to endure
all that is brash and beautiful.

In time, nostalgia's seductive
harangue expired quietly,
leaving a languid pair of
flippers whose only
reserves fluttered homeward.

Spies and chivalry were part of it,
stonings, mandatory sentencing,
waterfall witnessing too. Who is to
say what is deserved, having
been born perfect into a world
designated for pain?

I sometimes despise my life;
it is one and the same as my
worst thinking. Broadcasting,
bread baking, sitting still in
corners, receiving summonses,
standing up straight, the
gorgeous gray waves of winter.

In the best of times, we
are given no choice. The body
takes its care, knowing when to
shut down and funnel possibilities
into a single electrified stream,
raging and dangerous.

I have learned to harness
barriers and punt obstacles;
my confusion lies in the
aftermath, having been picked
by ancestral hands. Nothing
is understood: Enter faith,
a chasm of folly. We cling
to the air as we fall.

Teleconference

David Reuter

Our bulbous faces burble through
the fishbowl world our screens allow.
We stay encased inside
those squared-off spaces,
drowning in our pixeled place.
We're close at hand, across the way,
displayed amongst us
on this muddled morn.

The static stops the fevered flow
of talk into the cells
where we are forced to dwell.
The choppy, hoppy words
that surge on through
and skip across in diced-up spurts
can barely pass the frozen screen
where we exist behind.

The more these living portraits preach
into the shimmering, silicon void,
the less I hear the garbled voices
straining hard across the fray.
They swim to me across the line,
defined by hollow, gaping tones
this network never lets me know
quite the same way that it came.

Credo

David Summerfield

Art is the expression of one's self
as it emerges through daily living—
artistic expression being that compelling intuitive force
or desire that one has to be creative,
which comes to term in the mind as thought and emotion
of a heightened or enhanced quality,
and does not necessarily manifest itself
in the construction of art objects, but comes out
in daily life as part of a normal routine
in which one's individual and practiced attitudes
is the common denominator of his life
as a true artist, or, one is an artist
having created himself first.

Reclaiming

Kim Venkataraman

Pulling weeds from between stones in the rock wall was surprisingly satisfying. Even though he knew the moment he stopped, the vines of bittersweet would immediately resume their growth, spurred by the moist island air and summer sun. The long Maine winters were just a brief pause in nature's relentless mission to reclaim every inch of the island. If allowed, everything would be erased, like on the nearby rocky islands where spruce trees shaded ferns and long-abandoned cellar holes, and the tide advanced and receded witnessed only by seagulls. Jay tossed the brush over the banking and walked toward the house.

Realizing he was running late, he showered quickly and went to pick up lunch before Ann Marie arrived. He parked his parents' old Jeep in front of the store, no longer having to be self-conscious about his BMW with New Jersey plates. After being four months behind on the lease, he'd driven it down to the dealership in Portland and turned it in. It was the last tie to his old life—well, except for Ann Marie. Six months ago he'd had a job, a condo, and a life busy with friends and travel. He'd bought and done anything he wanted. He realized now that it had been fun but unsustainable, a fact that was easy to ignore when he'd had plenty of credit cards in his wallet.

So things would be different when he went back but different would be good. He was more than ready to get off the island and back to the real world. He wasn't a teenager on summer vacation; those days had passed a long time ago. And being here had reminded him how small the island was, not just in size but in room to live your life. Privacy and anonymity didn't exist on the island, and it was exhausting to live in a place where everyone knew your business, or thought they did.

* * *

The bells on the shop door clanged when he pulled it open, and the owner looked out from the back room. "Be right with you."

Jay nodded but she'd already disappeared. He went to the counter and looked at the sandwiches artfully stacked on wooden platters and the huge bowls of various salads. He checked his watch again. Ann Marie was due any minute now but she usually ran late.

"What can I get you?" The woman's hair was covered with a red bandana, and she tucked a stray curl behind her ear.

He ordered sandwiches and a container of potato salad, and as she wrapped everything up, Jay glanced outside. A car stopped to let someone cross the street, and the driver flipped down the visor to

look in the mirror. She touched her hair and turned her head side to side. She closed the mirror and started to drive away, and it was only then that Jay realized it was Ann Marie.

* * *

His mother and Ann Marie were in the sunroom when he returned. Ann Marie smiled and stood. "Darling, you never told me this place was so charming!" She wagged a finger at him as she approached in her pencil skirt and silk blouse. They reached out at the same time and awkwardly banged arms as they leaned toward each other, she for a kiss and he for a hug. Finally they hugged and she kissed his cheek.

"Look at you," she said, mussing his hair, "you've gone native on me!"

Taking a step back, Jay ran his hand through his hair. It was longer than it had been in years, probably since college. He was actually getting used to it.

"Nothing a visit to Joseph's won't fix when you're back," Ann Marie said brightly. "But at least you won't have to pay him for highlights!"

"Yeah," Jay said. Wanting to say that even in the days when he got a haircut and massage every week, back before things fell apart, he never highlighted his hair.

"Mm," he finally said, "I'm not sure I'm that hip anyway. I'll go grab our lunch."

* * *

The next day Jay suggested they pack a picnic for lunch at the beach, but Ann Marie's response of, "Eat lunch...on the sand?" and the way she tilted her head made Jay immediately say, "Or we could go to the beach club."

After she went for a run and made a few work calls, they left for the club, taking the road through the middle of the island. Passing through a heavily wooded area, Jay saw cars stopped in the road ahead and slowed the Jeep. The sheriff's car, the island's fire truck and ambulance, and several cars were parked haphazardly across the road. Jay slowly moved closer and stopped.

A navy pickup truck had gone off the road. Mounted in the back was a hand-carved wooden flagpole flying an American flag. It was Randy Townsend's truck. Randy was an old lobsterman who did woodworking and carving during the winter. Several people were standing in the road, talking, and Jay recognized many of them. It seemed like nearly all of the island's year-round residents were volunteer firefighters or EMTs. Some said it showed the island's self-reliance and the tradition of neighbors helping each other out, but

Jay thought that for most of them, it was a way to be in the middle of any excitement or crisis.

The sheriff approached the car, and Jay rolled down the window. “Hey, Jay.”

“Mike, what’s going on?”

“Car accident, single car. Late last night it looks like. Road’s gonna be closed for a while, we’re waiting on a state examiner.”

“Shit...” Jay said. He knew that meant there was a fatality. His body felt as if he was vibrating, and he thought he might be sick.

Jay looked away and noticed Ann Marie watching him, a look of confusion on her face. Then, in the next moment, he could tell she’d remembered his sister’s accident.

Jay’s thoughts were a jumble. “Oh God, it must have been a deer or something...poor Randy.”

Mike looked away. “Yeah, well...there were no tire tracks.”

After a moment Jay nodded, and he wasn’t sure if he said anything else. The sheriff moved away and Jay turned the car around in the road and went back the way they came.

Jay didn’t come out of his fog until they were sitting at a table overlooking the beach. He suddenly looked at Ann Marie like he was surprised to see her there.

She smiled. “You okay?”

He exhaled deeply. “Yeah, I am. Sorry, I just...”

“Don’t apologize. It must be so hard to be reminded of what happened to your sister.”

“True, but honestly, when I’m on the island, I don’t feel like I ever stop thinking about Frankie and what happened. But it’s not just that.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“What is it?” Ann Marie asked.

Jay shook his head. “It’s the suicides.”

“What?”

“There have been so many fucking suicides.” His voice was louder and angrier than he’d intended. “When I was in high school, one of my sailing instructors hung himself. Last year one of the elementary teachers OD’d on pills. And there have been others. Randy was the second lobsterman to kill himself in the last few years, I think.”

“Oh, God...” Ann Marie said quietly.

Jay just nodded.

She reached out and took his hand. “God, this place...it’s cursed.”

Jay removed his hand from hers. His immediate reaction was to disagree, to defend the place he’d spent part of every year since he was born, the place closest to what he imagined “home” to be. But maybe she was right. The island and loss were intertwined and always would be.

Ann Marie turned to face him. “Jay, you need to be rid of this place. You need to get back to the real world, your real life. I’m so glad you’re coming back, you’ve been away too long.” She leaned in and kissed him.

He looked at her and nodded. “You’re absolutely right.” Hesitated before adding, “It’s just weird to know I don’t have my old life to go back to, and I have no clue what I’m going to do next. I don’t even have any interviews lined up.”

“So what? You will.”

“And all of my securities licenses are gone.”

“Screw your securities licenses! You were sick of your job, and now you have a chance to do something new. Like I told you, my brother said he’d hire you in a minute—you’d be great at renting office space. But if you don’t want to do that, there’s a million other things you can do.

“Hey, I know things will be different,” she said softly, squeezing his hand. “But sometimes a new start can be the best thing. You’ll stay with me until you get back on your feet and get your own place. Or who knows, maybe we’ll like living together...”

She reached out and pulled him close, wrapping her arms around his neck. “I believe in you. You just have to too.”

He smiled and leaned in to kiss her. “Thank you. Of course, you’re right. I’ll finish packing tonight.”

That night before he fell asleep, he realized he felt calmer than he had in a long time. And he knew it was because he’d finally made up his mind. Not that he hadn’t known since he came back to the island that it was a temporary visit—what was he going to do, live with his mother and help her with yardwork? No, leaving was inevitable and he took comfort in knowing he was going back to a world he knew, and knew how to live in.

* * *

“Jesus, what a wreck,” Ann Marie said, stopping in the middle of the field. She’d been stepping carefully through the grass like it

was a minefield. Jay looked at her with surprise. It was true that everything was overgrown, and the roof of the old cottage was in bad shape, but the gentle slope of the land down to the small harbor and the view of the islands beyond was one of, if not the best on the island.

Jay continued walking toward the water, and after a moment Ann Marie followed. There were several small buildings spread around the property in varying states of collapse, most covered in vines. Another example of the island reclaiming itself, Jay thought. Ann Marie joined him at the top of the sandy banking. The banking showed signs of erosion; it would need to be shored up. Lost in thought, Jay didn't realize at first that Ann Marie was speaking. "Sorry, what?"

"Why in the world did your parents buy this place?"

Jay watched a sailboat pass in front of Spar Island. "They wanted a smaller house for them so Frankie and I could share the big house when we had families."

Jay was surprised how hard he had to fight to keep from crying.

Ann Marie took his hand and squeezed. "Well, your mom should sell it. I'm sure someone would buy it but God help them."

"Yeah, the plan is to do some basic work on it and list it for sale. Although if someone had the time and even a little money, it could be pretty amazing..."

Ann Marie's laugh interrupted him. "Oh, wait. You were serious? Oh, God, I thought you were joking. The house is practically falling down, and it would take years to make it even livable!"

"Yeah, you're probably right," Jay said as they turned to leave.

* * *

They arrived home to find Jay's mother and her friend Gladdy sitting in the sunroom.

"Is it wine o'clock?" Jay asked with a smile, bending down to kiss Gladdy's cheek.

"Isn't it always?" she responded with a laugh.

"Gladdy, I'd like you to meet Ann Marie."

"It's so nice to meet you," Ann Marie said. "Jay has always said you're one of his favorite people."

"It's mutual, my dear," Gladdy said, holding out a trembling arm to grasp Ann Marie's hand. "I can see, Jay, why you're anxious to get back to New York," she added with an exaggerated wink.

Jay's mother stood and poured two more glasses of white wine. "Join us for a bit? I'm going to run Gladdy home in a half hour."

"Aren't I lucky to have a chauffeur?" Gladdy said. "If you're going to get old and frail, I suggest having a friend like Jean at your side."

Settling into the wicker chairs, Jean said, "I was just telling Gladdy about the contractors I've lined up to talk to about the cottage. One of them cancelled on me twice already, but hopefully they'll both come tomorrow before I have to leave for my doctor's appointment."

"Want me to meet with them?" Jay asked. "I'd be happy to."

"Really? That would be great, honey," his mother said. "You know more about what we should do with the cottage than I do."

He looked at Ann Marie. "I know we'd talked about maybe heading out tomorrow, but we could push it until Saturday morning, couldn't we?"

Jay watched her force a smile. "Of course, no problem."

"Well, in that case, Jay, would you mind taking an old lady to Randy's wake tomorrow afternoon?" Gladdy asked. "As long as you're not still tied up at the cottage. I always considered his wife, Linda, a friend, and he was so kind after Stephen passed."

"Absolutely. For you, anything." Jay kissed her cheek as he stood to refill their wine glasses.

* * *

"Well, the greenhouse is toast." The contractor paused as he and Jay walked toward the cottage. "But the barn might be salvageable, and the cottage has great potential."

Jay watched him take in the house. Thank God, Jay thought with relief. After the last meeting he'd been ready to give up hope. The first builder had shown up twenty minutes late and before he'd even looked around said, "Teardown for sure. You could easily get a four-to five-thousand-square-foot house on this lot. The dock, the well, landscaping, and a few other things would be outside the scope."

He nodded seriously as he scanned the yard. "Depending on the finishes, you could get it done somewhere around three hundred to five hundred dollars per square foot."

Jay turned to look out at the water. This guy had been there for all of two minutes and hadn't even looked at the house. Doing the math, Jay realized he was saying it would be \$1.2 million at a minimum, possibly more than double that.

Jay took a breath. "That's not really the direction we, my mother, is thinking about going. The plan was to do some work so it could

be put on the market. New windows, insulation, a functioning kitchen...”

Before Jay had even finished speaking, the builder was shaking his head. “No, there’s no

upside in that.” And Jay’s immediate thought was, For whom?

“Nope. Teardown’s the only option here. If you’re interested in moving forward, let me know.”

Bringing himself back to the present, Jay realized the second builder was talking about enlarging the windows. “And how great would French doors be off the main room with a stone patio here,” he stuck his arm out, “with this view?”

Jay nodded. “Yeah, exactly.”

They walked through the rest of the house and the barn, and when they finally wrapped up, they’d been talking for more than an hour.

“It’s a special spot,” the builder said seriously.

“It is,” Jay agreed.

“As I’m sure you know, timing is the issue. We do great work but with our backlog, we wouldn’t be able to start until fall of next year at the earliest. And I have to be honest, there’s a good chance it wouldn’t be until the following spring.”

“You’re saying you probably couldn’t start for a year and a half?”

He nodded. “Yeah, and you’re looking at some serious money here.”

“Ballparking it?” Jay asked. “I know we didn’t get into a lot of detail, but what do you think we’d need to spend?”

The builder sighed heavily. “To be completely honest, business is good and everyone, including some people who shouldn’t, are doing renovations. Prices are sky-high. But to do it right without going overboard, you’re talking around three hundred K, and it could easily go up.”

After he left, Jay walked through the house again and then across the lawn to the rocky beach. With his hands in his pockets, he stared over the rippling, dark-blue water, lost in thought. He couldn’t stop thinking that the cottage deserved to be brought back to life. But as he’d learned a long time ago, just because something should happen didn’t mean it would.

* * *

“Thank you again, Jay. Randy was such a nice man. He adored his sweet Linda, and I don’t think he ever got over losing her.” Gladdy

stared out the passenger window as Jay pulled out of the funeral home parking lot.

Jay reached out and squeezed her hand. "I remember one day when I was little and fishing on the stone pier, Randy gave me a squid to use as bait when he was heading out in his lobster boat. I caught the biggest striper of my life with it." Jay laughed. "I kept that fish for two days, insisting I had to show it to him, and by then it was absolutely reeking." They both laughed.

"Isn't it funny the things that stick out in your mind?" Gladdy commented, and Jay watched out of the corner of his eye as she tried to control her shaking hand to lower the window.

Jay nodded. "Yeah. I do feel like most of the memories of my life are from the island. They're not all good but it feels like the place in the world that is most the part of me."

"That makes sense, it's a unique place. And your family has a long connection here, both good and bad."

"But it's not the real world."

"Ha! What the hell is the real world?" Before Jay could answer she added, "Your life will unfold wherever you are; what you make of it is up to you. Where you live can matter, but it doesn't determine nearly as much as you'd think."

Finally, as they were pulling in the driveway, she added, "You can be who you want, wherever you are."

* * *

The next morning Jay carried the suitcases downstairs and placed them in the trunk of the car. He began to ask if Ann Marie was sure she had her phone and charger but remembered he already asked. "You're sure you don't want a bottle of water? Or maybe a protein bar? It's a long drive..."

She shook her head.

His mother stood next to him in the driveway and she hugged Ann Marie. Then Ann Marie got in the car, and his mother put her arm around Jay's shoulder as they watched the car pull away.

Spoiling for Liberty

Christopher Barnes

Relics beyond walls.
Unlearn they existed.
Mob of the docile.

I honour tight spots.
Fingers rumble on birch;
Lackey hawk-eyes - utter malice.

Prowling beams leave no void.
Greasepaint drips.

(after Riot Days by Maria Alyokchina, Pussy Riot)

Fall in New York

Celia Meade

It's
Fall
in
New
York.

Everyone has pumpkins on their doorsteps and stretch class had spooky Halloween music. Sometimes I check the weather in Hawaii just to torture myself and see that it's 80° F almost every day, but: Oh, the sweet smell of leaf mold, kicking through drifts of wet leaves, talk of pumpkin spice, waterproof footwear fished out from the back of the closet, toying with scarves and the unending quest for a knit hat that looks good. Chrysanthemums. The wind that blew my hair across my face, so I tripped on a tree root and fell on my face; so I lost a gold crown. Dreams of shepherd's pie. Hot chocolate. Candles. Halloween bonfires I have stood before. The impossibility of snow. Skating. Worrying about breaking a hip on ice. Wondering where that extra blanket went to. Boots. Fisherman sweaters. Watching Agatha Christie murder mysteries while branches tap on the windows. The black night of the evening. Dusk; walking home to a night of stew and red wine. The never-ending knitting project stuffed in a coffee table drawer. Fondue. Yodeling on the ski hill. A deer and her fawn bounding across the road and into snowdrifts on the other side. V's of geese overhead. The lingering dark of a cold autumn night. Long evenings, so that we light a candle in the front window, so we can see all the candles
in windows as
we make
our way
home,
us in
N
Y

Aspects of Lonely in Sault Ste. Marie

Ken Meisel

Somebody could get lonely way up here
in the fingernail of Michigan – the UP –

where the SOO locks open two big arms
for ships passing through to elsewhere.

“Just passing through,” is what she whispered
to me one night, forty odd years ago

when I visited her on a sales call
for some hidden, alien part of me

I can't recall or confess to you now.
She stood there, in her old sandals,

outside the Alpha Bar, circa 1920.
Her face, the shade of a false lily

of-the-valley & her smile, crooked,
like a row of spilled bar nuts.

I'm not saying she wasn't pretty.
Just a little caught up in the other

side of hardship which, she explained
to me, was a result of too much

Psychedelic music & slack dope.
“Love's fraudulent, it's a knot of madness”

is what she said as we stood there,
watching a big ship heave itself

through to the other side of the locks.
Under the SOO Theater two kids

kissed & lit up smokes in the clipped
autumn air &, at the Savoy Bar,

two drunks tumbled out of it, fighting,
& ended up hugging afterwards

for a good bar brawl & a smoke.
I'm not saying that's sane. It's just

Autumn's catastrophe releasing
Nirvana. Meanwhile, at the Alpha Bar

my woman friend dunked herself in an
affordable bottle of Burnett's Vodka

& at the Motel Seven Seas, a couple
fell over one another as they draped each

other in old blankets to fortify warmth.
& my woman friend dug in her purse

for a smoke (it was in her makeup kit)
& she said, "the 70's were a long waste

for me – all they did was initiate me
into a mystery I haven't ever come out of –"

& then she confessed to me that
she'd once OD'd in the Ojibway Motel

on Spruce Street, & the last full
song she heard before she drifted

into a paradise-haze made of silk & plastic
& honeymoon music on some island,

was Stairway to Heaven. "But there's
no Heaven here," she said. "Just glimpses

of rapture – like a campfire that flares up
& burns out & that's it." I told her Kerouac,

that flame thrower, would like this,
but she didn't hear me. She was drifting.

Said to me: "The dreamer dreams symbols,
& the rest of a life an interpretation

of them." We spent the night together,
but we didn't have sex. Later, next

morning, we had glazed donuts &
coffee at the Sugar Daddy Bakery,

& something about that made her
smile a smile I couldn't quite revise.

Boundaries

Kathleen Glassburn

My older sister Gloria calls this evening. I have a brunch planned for just the two of us tomorrow. She has been in Seattle from San Francisco the past five days. This is her token annual visit to our widowed mother, and it will be the first time, this trip, to see my sister. I would have liked this to happen sooner, but I am glad about the brief respite from Mom.

After going back and forth on the time for our brunch, I say, “Can we please discuss Mom’s problems?”

“What problems?” Gloria says, followed by a rushed, “Later, Rachel. Gotta go. Cal’s ready for wine.”

So much for a discussion beforehand.

* * *

As Gloria walks in the door to my one-hundred-year-old Dutch Colonial and heads for the kitchen, she examines every corner. My lack of decorating sense (or at least in comparison to hers) amazes Gloria. I can tell by the way her eyes squint that she finds needlepoint-covered pillows on my sofa particularly unappealing. Her condo, by contrast, takes minimalism down to a new level. I like how it always looks sparkling clean, but it also has little of a personal nature.

Gloria sits down at the table and shifts her focus to me. Scanning my face, she stops at my forehead, nose, jaw, and chin.

Uncomfortable with this scrutiny, I keep on standing despite everything being ready to serve. With hands clenched behind my back, my fingernails dig into my palms.

The food’s going to get cold, so I sit down and pass Gloria an omelet.

“You used to look so much like Mom.” Gloria picks at a dog hair on her red cashmere sweater. “How can you stand all these animals?”

I shrug. We have three mutts of various ages and sizes as well as a couple of stray cats. It’d do her good to have more responsibility.

“Don’t I look like her anymore?”

“Not at all,” Gloria, whose light blonde hair and sturdy build came from our father, says matter-of-factly. “Mom’s fallen into old age.”

“Why do you think...?”

“Dad’s death.”

“That was ten years ago. It must be something else.”

“Isn’t that enough?”

I don’t answer, wishing she’d agree that we have issues to solve—mainly Mom’s drinking. My thoughts turn back to appearances. I do look like our mother’s younger self, with dark, almost black

hair, light blue eyes, and fair skin. On me these characteristics are calm and understated. Mom used to be called “stunning.” Dad’s Scandinavian genes mellowed my features, and his stoic personality subdued my disposition.

“We had a fantastic trip to London and Paris. Can’t wait to go again.” Gloria changes to her favorite subject—where they’ve been, where they’re going.

Without being asked, I say, “Paul and I and the kids and, of course, the dogs are off to the beach soon.” We have twin adolescent boys and a ten-year-old girl. Dad left keys for the Camano Island cottage to me because Gloria and Mom have no interest in the place.

“I planned on buying a trip to Tahiti at the symphony auction.”

Gloria skips on to her own life. “Someone outbid me.” With no children, she and Cal travel somewhere exciting every month or so. Why can’t she come here more often? I push fruit salad around on my plate.

She always says that her charity work leaves plenty of time for these trips. Doesn’t charity begin at home? With your family?

Tired of her trip talks, I get up and scrape our plates. Turning on the disposal, I appreciate the grinding that drowns out Gloria’s voice.

When I sit back down, I say, “Mom did have that setback in her career plans. Maybe that’s why she seems so lost.”

“That was a long time ago.”

Mom often says, “Scoliosis caused my biggest disappointment.” Her dance career with the Pacific Northwest Ballet ended before she reached twenty. In addition to this, she still studies her reflection in a magnifying mirror every day, lamenting, “I never used to have these wrinkles around my eyes.” Her social interactions, before Dad’s death, depended entirely upon him. “Thank goodness your father does so much talking,” she’d say. “I only have to tag along.” Since he passed, she rarely goes anywhere or has anyone in. Back in the days when Mom still cooked,

she would moan, “Everything I make comes out either burnt or underdone.”

Dad used to say, “It’s fine. Ease up on yourself.”

* * *

An hour into Gloria’s visit, the only relevant thing we’ve talked about is our father’s absence. During a routine physical examination, he succumbed to a surprise heart attack. No previous symptoms.

I squeeze my eyes shut, recalling the shock and anguish of those following months. This started the constant monitoring of my mother. I was only thirty-five with two young boys and a baby girl on the way. It got so busy, I had to give up my career as a real estate agent. Recovering from the memory, I ask myself, for about the

hundredth time, Will Mom ever adapt?

Gloria returns to her earlier observations. “Your features have accentuated a bit with age. Mom’s have collapsed.”

“She’s only twenty-five years older than me.”

“It might as well be fifty.”

“You’re right. She isn’t aging well looks-wise. But what about the other things?” Does Gloria have any notion what I’m going through here?

“What other things?”

“Her isolation and her drinking.” There! It’s said.

“She’s an adult. She’s not mentally impaired.” Gloria picks up her purse. “I have to leave. Cal’s waiting.”

“You’re flying home tomorrow, right?”

“Late.”

“I want to talk more about Mom.”

“I can take you out for lunch. Cal has business calls to make. How about that French restaurant down the hill.”

“I have an appointment to show a house in the morning, but I can make it.” I wipe my hands on a daisy-printed towel and follow Gloria to the front porch. After we hug, I press, “Do you really think it’s Dad’s death and nothing...?”

“Absolutely. They were married almost forty years. He took care of everything for her.” Gloria pauses, her brows pinched together. “She doesn’t need so much attention, Rachel. Give yourself a break—some space. Have a little fun.”

As her red rental car backs out of the driveway, I watch from the living room’s bay window, deflated. So much for support.

* * *

“Did you get anywhere with your sister?” Paul winces as if he actually added—can’t expect anything positive. We’re in our bedroom. He’s changing from his gray business suit into darker gray sweats.

“Not at all.” I can’t think of one positive thing about Mom that came from our conversation.

“What is it with your family? Why can’t they talk through problems?”

“If nothing is said, nothing is real.”

“You have to find someone to help.”

“I don’t know who that would be. Every time I mention a counselor or AA meetings, Mom goes silent until the next time I see her.”

“You have so much going on with the kids’ activities and working on your career.” He takes his slacks off the vine-patterned bedspread and places them on a hanger. “I hope you can cut back on some of this attention to your mother.”

Threadbare cuffs glare at me. Paul sees lots of clients at the accounting firm where he works. A new suit will have to fit into

our budget. I recently renewed my real estate license and want to specialize in old houses. I haven't become established enough to help much financially.

"I appreciate your concern. Gloria doesn't feel the same sense of duty that I do." I hesitate. "Maybe you could talk to Mom."

"Are you kidding? Your mother hates me, Rach—ever since I took you away from her plan."

I don't contradict him. Mom believes that Paul stole my opportunity for a career in dance. She doesn't get that I've never regretted turning down the scholarship. I only feel sad that I disappointed her. "You're stuck here. Does Gloria understand the situation?" I know Paul wants to help.

"She must. They've been staying at Mom's house for five days, and she's seen it up close."

"I'm pissed off that she doesn't acknowledge how hard this is on you." Our whole family. "I keep wondering what Dad would think."

"He'd say, 'Tell your mother to buck up.'" Paul ties his running shoes with a firm jerk. "Let's grab a pizza after our three miles."

"Sounds good." I slip a jacket over my pink sweats. "Gloria is taking me out to lunch tomorrow. We'll see how that goes."

He gives me a big hug. "What do you want her to do?"

"Reason with Mom. Get her to listen to my suggestions." I burrow my face into his fabric-softener-smelling chest. "Let's talk about something else. I need a rest from it."

"Fine by me. Running and pizza will help." He says this as if exercise and food can cancel out my brooding.

"I have to make some calls for the boys' soccer team later."

"Tonight?"

"There's no other time."

* * *

Gloria and Mom are seated at a table in the corner of Cecile's dimly lit dining room when I arrive five minutes early the next day. Why did Gloria bring her? Didn't I make it clear that I wanted to talk about her? Both of them hold half-finished martinis.

I give Mom a peck on the cheek. "Good to see you."

"Good to see you too, Rachel."

There are only a few other tables occupied, so Cecile comes over immediately. "May I get you something to drink?"

"Water's fine." I give her my meeting-a-buyer smile.

"I'll have another one of these." Mom holds up her glass, spilling a few drops of vodka on the white linen tablecloth.

Gloria covers her arm with a hand. "Let's change to wine."

"Well...whatever you want."

She's always so agreeable with Gloria.

“A carafe of your house white,” my sister says.

“Three glasses?”

“None for me.” I turn back to Mom and Gloria sitting side by side across the table. “I have to pick up the boys from soccer practice this afternoon.”

“You spend so much time dragging those three ruffians around and now working at these houses.” Mom grimaces. “Not to mention what you do for that husband of yours.” Since our daughter dropped dance in order to focus on her own soccer, my mother lumps her with the two boys. And, she can’t understand why I want to get back into real estate. “You could have been...” She starts her same old story.

“Good time for you to do real estate. The market is booming,” Gloria says.

Thanks, big sister.

We all order the special—onion soup, bibb lettuce salad, and a shrimp crepe.

While waiting for the food to arrive, Gloria and Mom polish off their carafe.

“I want some more,” Mom says.

“Sounds good to me.” Gloria orders two additional glasses.

It’s obvious that our mother’s well-being is on me. Then a thought sneaks in. What if I had taken that scholarship and gone to New York? Where exactly would she be? Sunday, after my open house, visits to her should begin again. Or will they? What if I give her some guidelines? I reject the idea. I can’t do that to my mother.

Midway through her glass of wine, having ignored the meal, Mom turns with cloudy eyes to Gloria and slurs, “Why is that woman staring at me?”

I look around to see who she’s referring to. A moment later I figure out—she’s looking right at me.

Gloria takes Mom’s glass. “You’ve had enough.”

“A little bit more,” Mom whines.

“Don’t be difficult.”

“Am I being difficult?”

I push my unfinished food away and say to no one in particular, “I have to get going.” Then, to Gloria, “Safe flying.” I skip saying anything to Mom. Why bother?

“See you next year.” Gloria toasts me.

“I do want to talk to you tonight—before you leave.”

“Okay. I’ll call,” she says.

“No. I’ll call you. At 6:00. Please be available.”

“Sure...right.” Her confused expression momentarily amuses me. I’m never forceful.

* * *

Once in my Honda heading to pick the boys up, I dwell on my mother's question. What have I been doing? At the end of our lunch, she didn't even recognize me. Worry sets in. Will Gloria be all right to drive? She didn't show any signs of impairment. Twenty years ago, Mom wouldn't have either.

At 6:00 when I call her house, no one answers. I try Gloria's cell. It goes right to voicemail. I leave a message: "I'm coming over. Be there in fifteen minutes. I need to talk to you."

On the third knock, Gloria opens the door. "What's the urgency?" "Come and get in my car."

"I'm in the midst of packing."

"You've got all night. I don't." Paul and I are meeting some of his work friends for dinner.

"Oh all right." She slams the door shut and marches off to my car, flops onto the passenger seat, and slams that door.

"First of all, I was concerned about you," I start out.

"Why?"

"Drinking and driving."

"I was fine."

"I guess so." I plunge in. "What about Mom? You need to give me your impressions and what you think should be done about her."

"Mom seems fine to me. Same as ever. Needy, but happy with her drinks every night."

"She didn't even know who I was by the end of our lunch. Where do you think this will end?"

"I have no idea. As long as she's healthy, why not leave her alone?"

"Because I can't leave her alone. She expects calls from me every day and visits several times a week. She expects me to drop everything if needed."

"That's on you."

"I'm the only one she has close by."

"How about setting some limits? I don't expect you to be at her beck and call every minute. She'll keep manipulating you and wanting more as long as you keep giving it."

"How do I start?" "Say 'no.' It's pretty simple. Tell her you have something else to do when she calls for immediate attention. Tell her real emergencies only." "Ignore her?"

"I'm not saying that. I'm saying you need to stand up for yourself. Visit her if you want. Call her if you want. Don't let her govern your life."

"It's easy for you down in California. Visiting only once a year."

"Why do you think I live there? If I were here, she'd expect both of us to be with her nonstop."

Gloria has a point. But we sure can't move.

"Rachel, you have a full plate—a busy family and a demanding

career. You don't owe all this time to Mom."
"I'll think about what you've said...get back to your packing."
"Love you, baby sister. If you want, I'll talk to her."
Well, thanks for that. "No. I need to handle this myself."
"See, you can say 'no.'"
I never used to have a problem saying it.

* * *

That night, after Paul's and my dinner, Mom calls. I leave her to the answering machine. Instead of calling her back, I sit down to watch an interesting travel program. I daydream about Paul and I taking a trip to Scandinavia. Maybe someday... With small separation steps, maybe Mom will have to adapt.
At 9:00 the next morning, our phone rings. On the fifth ring I pick up.
"Rachel! Where have you been?"
"I was talking to prospective buyers."
She snorts. "When can you come over?"
"Not today, Mom. I have errands that need to be run."
"I'm all by myself."
"I'm sorry about that, Mom. Maybe you should get out of the house for a while."
Why make a suggestion? She has to figure this out on her own. "I have to go now. I'll see you in the next few days."
Her sputters sound like a tiny old car trying to start. I carefully hang up the receiver. It's a beginning. Twinges of guilt seep in. Will she be all right? But also, I feel a small surge of optimism. Maybe I can take back control of my life.

What Is the Color of Tomorrow

Michael Shen

I've breathed the darkest blues
Embraced the brightest blue skies.
I've learned to ride it out
And ride the wave in.
And even though it comes and it goes
There's a hollow in my soul.
I want to know
What is the color of tomorrow.

I've plumbed the darkest depths
Crossed rainbows of golden hues.
I've seen that dark is just
The other side of bright.
And even though I've learned the game
I'm looking for the light.
I still want to know
What is the color of tomorrow.

I've stayed into the color of relief
Passed Styx and stars for shades of belief.
Yes, so much of life is just showing up
And giving out is what you get.
Even though I've seen it all,
I'm hoping there's so much more.
And I can't help looking
For the color of tomorrow.

Speak to Me of Things That Matter

Michael Shen

Speak to me of things that matter
of morning dreams and stars
of war and waste
of undue haste
of things we fancy do

Sing to me of loves gone by
of love that lingers on
of heroes' feats
and poets' beats
our dreams annealed take wing

Laugh with me of pains we felt
now but youthful folly
of drunken bouts
And ill born doubts
Angels' visions that will be

Cry with me of frittered dreams
and all our treasures lost
but laugh as well
and do not dwell
in hindsight wisdom earned

Pray with me for sins committed
in spirit and in deed
for future dim
uncertain spin
with gratefulness prepared

but most of all
speak to me
of things that matter
matter to you and me

Balls

Will Walker

Mostly low on my List of Parts
in Danger of Going Bad, except

for that moment when the specialist
takes them in his hands while we avoid

eye contact and he feels the ligatures
for lumps. For those seconds he is perhaps

an agent of the fates, set to rip these appendages
from my trunk, speaking in metaphor,

and deliver a death sentence couched
in much immediate pain.

Who is this intruder? my balls ask,
suddenly alarmed but trying to remain calm,

and what secret knowledge is he stealing?
Then the fright passes and my balls go back

to their easy perch, just along for the ride,
pretending they're invincible and unexposed,

relieved to be left alone to meditate and nap
still near the bottom of the List of Parts

in Danger of Going Bad, far down
from brain and heart and pancreas,

irradiated skin, city-smudged lungs,
arthritic joints, and aging spine.

Drifting Off

Will Walker

I lie awake at night
blessing the world.
Always the little things
to start. Then the people
who bring a smile.
Sometimes flowers,
a stately tree,
then back to
the aging instrument
of my body. Some nights,
the whole galaxy
of souls working
to spread this blessing.
What can it hurt,
to bless a bed, to bless
my wife, to smile
recalling a long-dead laugh,
to bless them all
and let go as if having time
only for the benediction
before drifting off
into that little death
of sleep?

Power Player

Cindy Muscatel

The throb of Jimi Hendrix's guitar filled the room as Richard measured out the half cup of Parmesan he'd grated earlier. He loved the music but loved the contrast even more—Seventies rock and roll played through state-of-the-art 21st century equipment. The sound hit the Frankenthaler and Pollock abstracts that hung on the ochre walls, setting off a concussion of sound and sight that filled Richard with a sense of vitality. He'd been around to witness Jimi Hendrix concerts and the Expressionist Era. Now even though he'd just received his Medicare card, he was a man of the new millennium. Richard took a taste of the Parmigiano-Reggiano. The cheese's fermentation process added a kick he found delicious. That Jessica thought it too strong was her problem.

Deftly dicing the hothouse tomatoes, he tossed them and the cheese into the salad greens. He washed his hands, then picked up the bottle of olive oil set at right angles to the chopping board. He poured oil into a bowl, adding freshly squeezed lemon juice. A pinch of salt and generous servings of chopped garlic and fresh mint finished the dressing. He whisked the ingredients together, then dipped his finger into the mixture for a taste.

The tartness of the lemon puckered his mouth. "Perfect," he said. He liked things that way—perfect.

Early on, he'd learned to make decisions to get him what he wanted. And he had the balls to discard what no longer worked. It was all in the art of making the perfect deal.

He rolled his shoulders, loosening the tension in his neck. Cooking was a balm to him—a sure way to soothe his nerves. He made dinner three nights a week. Jessica told everyone it was because she demanded it. Anyone who knew Richard knew that was bullshit.

After he put the salad in the refrigerator to chill, he began washing the utensils. He paused a moment, the wire whisk suspended from his fingers as he thought about Jessica. She also was relentless in getting what she wanted. He'd had no problem with that, but now he felt an undercurrent between them—a struggle for control. Now she wanted to move out of their high-rise Seattle condo to a big house in the suburbs. What the hell did they need a big house for? It was just the two of them.

"Seattle is just too dangerous now," she kept saying when he refused. He stared at his reflection in the kitchen window. The eyes of a man who was shrewd and tough stared back. He was proud of that incisive expression, just as he was proud of his thick head of silvered hair, his tanned, fit body. He worked hard to keep himself mentally

and physically in shape. That along with careful planning and analysis had made him pretty much disaster proof. So many people he knew had crashed along with the economy in 2008. Not him. And despite the pandemic shut down, he'd made more money than ever. Life was on his terms. If things weren't right, he made them that way. Like when he

found out Diana was cheating on him. He'd been hurt, sure, but not humiliated. The affair with her ski instructor had been an embarrassing cliché, nothing more. He not only weathered her defection, he grew stronger from it.

When he met Jessica, he'd been divorced for two years. He'd jumped with relish into the whirlwind that surrounded her. For the first few years, he reveled in the lifestyle that was like his own sons'—the snowboarding in Aspen in winter, the waterskiing in the Lake Tahoe summer home, the golf and tennis all over the world. He'd even loved the constant clubbing—the dancing, the noise, the Mohitos—the frenetic energy that so defined Jessica. But if he were honest, he had to admit it was losing its appeal.

He first realized this when he and Jessica were in Dubai, staying at the Burj Al Arab hotel. His business concluded, they'd celebrated with champagne, caviar, and sex in their suite, which was as large as the house he'd grown up in. Satiated for a moment, Jessica had fallen asleep beside him on the sheik-sized bed.

In the silence, he'd come up against an unwelcome truth. Instead of feeling triumphant at his skilled negotiating, he felt nothing. He looked at his forty-year-old wife with her perfect body, and also felt nothing. Just relief that she was asleep, and he didn't have to talk to her.

He looked away from his reflection. Was he getting old? He obliterated that awful notion by turning on the faucet full steam. He gave the whisk a vigorous shake and set it on the drain board. It was unlike him to let negative thoughts get him down. It had to be the phone call he'd received a half hour ago. It put a different light on his marriage.

"Oh, Richard. You are here."

Richard looked over his shoulder. Jessica stood in the doorway, a weary expression on her face.

"You're home early," she said, leaning against the doorframe. "You texted that you'd be late."

He shrugged. "I put the Claremont deal to bed by two o'clock. Had a late lunch with them, and decided, what the hell, might as well come home, and see my gorgeous wife."

"But I wasn't here."

"Yeah. You weren't here." He dried his hands with the jade-green kitchen towel, not looking at her. He wanted a moment to marshal

his thoughts. Normally he entered a negotiation with his plan fully worked out.

Jessica wandered into the kitchen. “Is there any wine?”

Richard motioned to the butler’s pantry. “There’s some Cabernet open I just opened.”

“That sounds good.”

She walked past him, head down. Richard watched her, looking for signs that she’d been with another man. She looked almost defeated, he thought, then rejected that idea. Jessica defeated? Never. More likely it was guilt.

She came back with the wine and took a sip. “Mmm, tastes delicious.”

She looked delicious, he thought. Now that she was in the room, in the flesh, he had no difficulty remembering why he’d married her—she tantalized him. She wove a goddamned spell around him. He joked that she was a much better prescription than Viagra, but it was true. Even now, aware he was thinking of cutting her out of his life, he wanted to fill his hands with her.

“You look tired,” he said.

She yawned. “I am tired. The program was so boring—mostly speeches. I could barely stay awake.”

He slapped the towel against the counter. “That was a stupid lie, Jessica. So easy to check

on. But it makes me wonder how many other lies you’ve told me.”

Jessica straightened. “What are you talking about? What are you so pissed about?”

He reined in his emotions, unclenching his fists. “We had a call from Barbara Wilson about twenty minutes ago. She wanted to know if you were feeling better. That you’d called and said you were sick and couldn’t attend the fundraiser.”

Jessica’s mouth opened, but no words came out. He’d seen that look before, usually on the face of a CEO trying to hide an impending bankruptcy. Richard let the silence build. He’d already said too much. The fourth Law of Power was to say less than necessary. He followed the rule now.

Jessica rallied, composing her features. “So what? Just because that old busybody called, you’re all suspicious?”

“I just want to know why you lied to me,” he said.

“No, no—it’s more than that. I know you. If something is slightly off, you immediately go to how Diana cheated on you.” She shook back her long hair as if shaking off his words.

“I’ve told you before, Richard, I’m not like Diana. If I wanted to have sex with someone else, I wouldn’t hide the fact. I’d just tell you. So you can stop grilling me like I’m some slut.”

He wanted to refute what she’d said about Diana, tell her she was full

of psychobabble shit, but he held back. It would make him sound defensive, definitely not a position of strength. Instead, he went on the offense.

“I’m not grilling you. I’m not saying you’re like Diana. All I want from you is an answer to my question,” he said.

She glared at him. “Fine, I’ll tell you. I’ve been wanting to talk to you about it anyway.”

She pulled out one of the stainless-steel bar stools and sat down. “I was at the doctors.”

Richard felt a moment of fear, then dismissed it. She was young and healthy. This was probably a ploy. “Are you telling me you’re sick?”

“No, I’m not telling you that. But you don’t have to sound so cynical.”

“Forgive me, but I’ve just had proof that you don’t always tell the truth.”

“Damn you,” she said. She folded her hands and held them tightly together.

“Okay, I’ll tell you the truth,” she said without looking at him. “I took a pregnancy test last night and it was positive. I was so thrilled I went into the doctor to check.”

Richard stared at her. “What?”

“I thought I was pregnant. I was so happy.” She looked at him now, her eyes filled with tears. “But it looks like I’m not.”

“How the hell could you be pregnant? You’re on the pill.”

“No, I quit taking them a few months ago.”

“You’re telling me that you’re trying to get pregnant?”

She nodded.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” he said.

She flinched at his words. “Don’t swear at me! You have to understand—I want a baby. I want a baby so bad I can barely stand it.”

Richard’s silence this time was not planned.

“Say something,” she said.

“I don’t know what to say.”

Never in his wildest imaginings had he thought Jessica would want a baby—or that she’d go behind his back to get pregnant. “Before we got married, we agreed that there’d be no children. Remember?”

“I remember, but that was then. I’m forty now.”

“That doesn’t change our agreement.” He felt blood throbbing in his temples. “I’ve got two sons and three grandchildren. I don’t want any more children.”

She shook her head. “I never believed that. You’d have had a vasectomy if that was true.”

“What? Because I didn’t have a vasectomy you thought I wanted another child? You’re supposed to be on the pill. I didn’t need to have a vasectomy!”

“Stop shouting at me. You don’t have any feelings at all.”

“No feelings? Let’s talk about no feelings. I have three grandchildren you’ve never given a shit about. You do everything you can to avoid seeing them. Now, you say you want a baby. I don’t get it.”

“I want my own child,” she said.

She reached out to touch his arm, but he leaned away. “Richard, please. You’ve got to understand.”

He stared at her mascara-streaked face. “I think I’m beginning to. Does this have something to do with your sister being pregnant? You two have always been so competitive.”

“Of course not.” She sounded indignant. “I just need to be fulfilled as a person. I realize now I need a baby to do that.”

A discordant Jimi Hendrix twang sounded above her head from a speaker. Its incongruity triggered something in Richard and his mind began to clear. He saw why he’d been so conflicted. He’d begun living life on her terms, not his. That had to stop.

“You say you’re not like Diana, but you’ve cheated on me too. Just in another way,” he said.

“What are you talking about?” Jessica asked.

“You lied to me—tried to trick me.”

“That’s ridiculous. I just thought if I was already pregnant, you’d be happy about having a baby too.”

“You really thought that? Because if you did, we’re really going in completely different directions.” He looked at her, his mouth set.

“You need to understand, Jessica, this is not negotiable with me.”

“Negotiable? We’re not talking about one of your damn business deals, Richard. This is my life.”

He nodded. “I get that. But we’re talking about my life too. So I guess you have a big decision to make. Which is more important to you?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s fairly obvious. Which do you want more—a baby or our marriage?”

She looked stunned. “Are you talking about getting divorced?”

“I don’t know. Am I?”

“Because I want a baby?”

“You wanting a baby just points out how far apart we’ve become,” he said.

“God damn it, Richard. You can be such a cold bastard, you know that?”

He held back a response, just looked at her as if he felt nothing.

“I can’t believe you. I tell you I want to have your child and you kiss me off?”

“Your screaming is not going to help the situation,” Richard said, his voice cool with the detachment he was beginning to feel.

Fury distorted her features as she spun off the stool and headed out

of the kitchen, her spiked heels clattering on the slate floor. When he heard the bedroom door slam, he sighed.

Whatever happened, it was not going to be pretty—Jessica would make sure of that. But that he could handle. The important thing was he felt in control of his life for the first time in months.

He poured himself some of the Cabernet and went over to the refrigerator. He pulled out the lamp chops and walked outside to the patio to turn on the barbecue.

As it heated, he stood at the railing and looked out at the city. It was cold and the Space Needle, standing tall in the night sky, was barely visible. Like him, it had gotten lost in the fog. But like him, it would reappear.

He smiled at the image. It was perfect.

Interview with an Artist

Bray McDonald

She humbly admitted
she could capture the azure in a Morning Glory
and secure the pink from the belly of a baby bird.
She confessed she had scraped from the sky
the wind-swept white of a Cirrus Cloud
and sifted beige from a sea-washed beach.

She acknowledged she could make the sun rise
like a gelatinous fish extending its tentacles across the horizon.
She conceded she had carved the silhouette of the moon
on a lover's bedroom wall.
She divulged that her desire to create
was like a sprinkling of stars on a lavender sky.

She disclosed she had a passion for the color blue.
She spoke of it as an instrument of abuse
and said one could flay oneself on its palette.
She admired its' sad hue which she stressed
could coat the heart with pity
and leave ink-smears on the mind.
She said blue is the color of surrender
and it could stain the essence of anything.

Then shyly she said with a hint of embarrassment.
It seems indecorous for a painter to paint
and mix their colors with feelings.
If my trade were sentiments
I'd be a poet.
But I'm a painter and I only touch the surface.
I only shade the skin.

As My Mother Lay Dying

Bray McDonald

As my Mother
lay dying
the breath went out of me.

What the mind understands
is hard for the heart to accept.

*

I watched my Father
her faithful partner
for seventy years
stoically hold his own despair at bay

as he whispered words of love
and caressed her fevered head

doing everything
within his limited power
to alleviate her pain.

*

Can't stop the anger
despair
complete horror of life.

Don't say "wait a minute"
and exclaim how beautiful
wonderful
and what a gift...

Bullshit.
It hurts

almost
all the time

with need
want
and irretrievable loss.

Death in the Family

Bray McDonald

Seeds scatter
whether calmly dropped or wind-blown.

There are root-clingers
and those that fall far from the tree.

Some are weakened
from lack of something more than water.

Many desiccate in the sun
when unable to find shelter.

Some drown in floods
when they can find no place to plant their feet.

Seeds are things born to become
and each loss is monumental.

Dead End Country Road

Frank Jamison

It's not where we go, it's how we get there that counts.
So said Elmer Glosson a long time ago as we drove,
one hand on the wheel, down a dusty road like this one.

The sign ahead reads Dead End, as if to say I'm done for.
It leans toward the ground, bullet holes over the Ds,
The A pierced through its heart.

Our county is full of such places, and like a ghost I haunt them,
but then haven't we all walked a road, felt a chill,
seen shadows ahead, shivered, and lengthened our stride?

Running Girl

Marcelle Thiébaux

Choking on rain and tears, Daisy ran. Was this the way? Everything looked different by night, the scattered lights blurring her eyes. Rain fell in gutters and potholes. Asphalt streets gleamed like black mirrors. Needle-fine drops pockmarked the puddles. Rain fell in rivers and canals all over the city of the sleeping and the dreamless dead. Loew's Palace Theatre loomed like a lit-up ocean liner afloat. A billboard face smiled down at her, like a threat. A new man was running for the 1932 City Council. His white hair floated around his mammoth face that smiled straight at Daisy Rylska. His do-gooder grin promised citizens he'd crack down on crime. Runaways and Jezebel whores like Daisy, an unwilling paid-for bimbo in her grandmother's elite parlor house, this new man would lock them up. She kept going, out of breath. She hugged the storefronts, searching for a spot to lie down. Her teeth chattered and she shivered in her thin wool jacket, fighting her fear of the unfriendly night.

She crouched on the wet mosaic of a sheltered storefront. It was an orthopedic shop. In the window a bone-pale mannequin like a dead woman modeled a truss, a brace and a crutch. Daisy stared at the thing in horror. Along Central Avenue, she scanned the darkened storefronts. Streetlamps shone dimly. A sandwich board offered "Macaroni and Cheese, 5 cents." Rain hammered the ash cans outside the doorway of "Mott's Cubicle Hotel. Hot Showers Fifty Cents."

Then she saw it, a constellation of flashing lightbulbs. The Gardenia Academy of Dance. Dancing Nitely. Talented Female Partners. Beads of light raced through the letters like bubbles in a flute of speakeasy champagne. Smaller lights tricked out a second legend: No Women Patrons. Negroes Not Admitted.

Daisy made for the Gardenia even as the signs sputtered and winked out. It was past two o'clock. Dancing was over for the night. With her jacket pulled over her head she hopped across puddles and ran up the Avenue. The street door was still open as girls trooped down the steep flight from the second floor.

A queenly beauty stepped gracefully down. Her silver T-strap shoes came into view, then her silk-stockinged knees, then a monkey-fur jacket of aquamarine blue. Her face of an odalisque appeared with a spit curl pasted to her forehead, and one on each cheek. A lemon cloche fitted her dark hair like a helmet. Behind her hovered a whiskered gent in a bowler. She smiled at Daisy. "Closed, honey." Daisy stood aside, pressed to the wall to let the two pass.

"How do I get to see somebody? For work?" she asked the girl.

"Mr. Troyano is toting up the receipts." The girl was an alluring brunette.

At the corner of her Flame-Glo lips jutted a mole, a beauty-spot. Her escort

glanced at Daisy, not giving her a second look, and she understood she was a half-drowned street rat.

Upstairs the air was dense with tobacco smoke. The box office sign told customers that a strip of tickets costing a dollar bought ten dances, each lasting a minute and a half. Ninety seconds. Another notice read, Featured Tonite. Lawrence Lamont & Orch. Affixed to the wall the permanent sign printed in hard red letters warned, Improper Dancing Not Permitted.

Wet to the bone, Daisy sat on the steps to wait. She rummaged for her rouge and mirror to daub her wretched young face.

When at last Mr. Troyano spotted her from under his green eyeshade, he invited her to wait in his cluttered office. He let her sit half an hour. He went on chomping his cigar, hitting the adding machine, before he looked at her. His black tie hung loose. He wore a rumpled tuxedo jacket and his belly was slack, but Daisy could tell he thought himself a prince of a fellow, a boon to womankind with his position of power, his dark long eyelashes, and chin dimple deep as a bullet hole.

“What can I do for you, sweetheart?” As if he didn’t know.

“I’m a good dancer, and I’d like to work here.” She’d never asked for a job before. The only dancing she had done was in her room before her mirror and at two of her grandmother’s parties.

“What kind experience you got?” Daisy hoped this was pure gab. There couldn’t be much more to dancing at the Gardenia than trotting around the floor for hours.

“Lots,” Daisy lied. “Tea dances at the clubs, the pavilions, the Jersey shore. I usually look real good but I got rained on.” She sneezed into the sleeve of her scotch plaid jacket.

“I can see that.” He puffed his cigar. “Go home. Get fixed up. Be here at five-thirty sharp tomorrow and we’ll see.”

Daisy cast him a wan smile. “I don’t live around here, Mr. Troyano. That hotel a few doors down...” She blinked rapidly. “Is Mott’s Cubicle Hotel a nice place?” A cubicle sounded cozy.

“You ever seen a chicken wire cubicle?”

“Chicken wire? Like a birdcage?”

Rudy Troyano did not respond to the pitiful ignorance of this question.

“That, for your information, is a flophouse. Chicken wire ceilings and partitions so’s nobody climbs in on you. Your clientele in a cubicle hostelry is not choice.” He shoved up his eyeshade. “Mattress has one sheet, and you can bet it don’t get sent out to the weekly Chinee. No pillow. Plenty of crawling nightlife, bedbugs, fleas, you pick up a foreign disease walking through the door.”

Daisy refused to flinch. He must think she was green as grass.

“And you’re how old? We can’t have any girl here who’ll get us in trouble with Juvenile Protection.”

“Eighteen,” she said, prompt and brassy.

Rudy sized up this information with a twist of the eyebrow. “Well, sister, you better stick to that story. What’s your name?”

Her name! She froze. She couldn’t make it easy for the police to track her. Her grandmother would sic them on her like bulldogs. She thought fast. Cora. Mildred. What sounded right?

“Okay, look,” said Rudy Troyano, not unkindly. “You can tell me later. The girls here go by professional names. To me, you look like a—” He narrowed his fine, black eyes fringed with lashes lovely as a girl’s. “Like a Blondie. Tomorrow you come for an interview and if you work here, your name is Blondie.”

With blank shock, Daisy took in her new funny-paper persona. Blondie Boopadoop.

He scrawled on a pad, tore off the sheet. “Mrs. Rumble runs a decent boarding house on Vroom Street. Tell her Mr. T. sent you.”

Daisy showed up the next afternoon at 5:29, a vampy jazz honey. She’d slept ten hours, done her hair, and pulled out a baby-blue silk pongee tea gown, sleek on the hipbones and plunging at the throat. Mr. Troyano raked her over with his bedroom eyelashes and hired her, no questions asked. She was taken in hand by the luscious girl she’d seen on the stairs in the blue monkey fur. On orders from the management, she showed Daisy the ropes. Her artist’s name was DeLyria.

“So you’re Blondie. Perfect for you.” She looked hard at Daisy. “We ever met?” She looked hard at Daisy.

Terror gripped Daisy’s neck. This DeLyria could’ve been one of her grandmother’s weekend extras.

“No, I guess not.” DeLyria said and Daisy breathed again. “Now this here’s the lounge.”

They hauled a couple of folding chairs to one end of the barn-like dressing-room by the metal lockers. The lounge smelled muskily of girls. A long makeup table extended in front of the mirrors. Jars, cotton balls, combs and hairpins, pots of brilliantine and hair curlers littered the table. A staticky radio jabbered. Girls swarmed at the mirrors, putting on makeup, yakking, cussing, gossiping about the patrons, the suckers, the spenders, the mashers. They smoked, ate sandwiches. They sprayed on scent. They postured and studied their fannies in the mirror.

“Here we go,” said DeLyria. “We stick to our showgirl names on the job, so whatever your real name is, that’s between you and payroll. Want a smoke?” They lit up.

DeLyria smiled, her wet teeth carnivorously lovely. “Honey, you’re a looker, you’ll do real good. You’ll get the boys riled up, and if you wanted you could . . .” She flicked Daisy a questioning look.

Daisy didn’t say anything, so DeLyria went on. “Okay, your choice. Now we are a select hall. Ten cents a dance, and you get half. Main thing patrons want is a girl to be peppy.” She set down her cigarette and fluffed up Daisy’s curls with a brush. “Cute,” she said.

DeLyria had style. Her headache-band of scarlet and gold lamé set off her dark bob. Her vermilion dress cut low and short. When she smiled, which was all the time, her teeth flashed hot signals. She garter-rolled her silk stockings to the knee. Crossing her legs, she bared strong white thighs. And she had that zesty brown chocolate-drop of a beauty mark at the corner of her mouth.

“You’ll feel a thrill,” she said, “when you get your money. You can make thirty-five, forty dollars a week, plus any tips you can squeeze out of the men. You won’t get that doing piecework in a girdle factory.”

Forty dollars. It was like a rush of skunk. All the money she owned she’d tucked in her bandeau between her breasts and it wasn’t forty bucks.

DeLyria beamed knowingly. She took a last drag on her cigarette and crushed it out. “You can have romance. The fellas heap it on. I get what I can off the suckers who date me. Now, honey, you ready to have fun?” She reached for a jar of Hinds and slathered her elbows.

“Yes,” said Daisy, terrified with elation.

“Okay then, there’s the sex.” DeLyria smirked. “If you want—”

In a panic, Daisy looked down to straighten her stocking seams. “What about knowing dance steps to teach the patrons?”

“Hogwash.” DeLyria laughed. “Only the gullibles think they’re paying for lessons. Academy makes it sound respectable like a school, instead of a pickup joint where they can paw you for a dime. You don’t need to hoof it like Joan Crawford. You seen any of her movies? Well, never mind, you get by with a foxtrot, a monkey hop. Cuddle-dancing if you want to hit up your fish for tips.”

Daisy swung her gaze across the room, where a girl rouged her knees and nipples. The starting bell rang.

“Six o’clock hustle, Blondie honey, we gotta get our sweet asses on the floor.” DeLyria beamed her contagious smile on Daisy. “You’re the new girl. You’ll be the sensation until the next fresh punk comes in. Then you gotta use your sex a lot more to hook the fish. You got nice hair, is that blondined or natural?”

Daisy stood at the entrance to the half-darkened dance floor. Tiny light bulbs punctured the shadows. Artificial gardenias twined the mirrored columns and a mirrored ball turned on the ceiling, catching the lights and transforming the dancehall into a lovely trashy fairyland.

She halted, dazzled. DeLyria gave her a push toward the meatbox, the corner where the girls waited for partners. “Go ahead, Blondie. Don’t forget. Pep. Zip. It’s what counts!”

DeLyria whirled off, grabbed by one of her gruff steadies. Daisy walked to the corner hung with crêpe paper. Coveys of girls posed, thrusting their hips and legs like Hollywood beach-babes. They laughed, quacked, clamored for attention. Halfway to the meatbox, Daisy looked into the jack-o-lantern face of a hulking boy whose forehead sported a field of ripe pimples.

“You taken?” he mumbled. When she smiled, he tore off a ticket which she

tucked in the top of her stocking like the other girls. She opened her arms to the boy who said he was Billy. His damp hand clasped hers and he crunched her to his groin. She waltzed round and round, like a slice of decorated cake on the revolving pastry stand in Serena's All-Nite Grill.

Breathless, she followed Billy's stumbling footwork. No question of teaching him to dance. She fell in with his efforts until Lawrence Lamont's orchestra played a sassy flourish and stopped the music. Everyone scurried to find another partner. Billy tore off a ticket and bought Daisy's next dance. Plunged in her new life, Daisy swam the deeps of the dance hall. She let herself be swallowed in a flux of warm bodies, tobacco, stale perfume, and male need. Dancing was better than running. She took on a different man every ninety seconds. She could pivot, shimmy and hop as if she meant it. This was how a running girl stayed alive.

Holding it Together

Alita Pirkopf

I.

Wire mesh netting holds the breaking mountains together,
or seems meant to. Not only the usual freezing, thawing, age,
but fire and flood loosen the crumbly and rocky mountains.

Boulders bounce onto the mountain highway.
Rain-risen rivers flood alarmingly, above and under
the roadway—widened since our former ski trips.

II.

Many of us descended permanently from mountain territory
to live on the flat lands—to face our time, with its diseases
and wars, below the ski slopes, alpine sanitariums.

III.

Isolated by the pandemic now, and before crumbling,
being washed, wafted, away, we again seek new territory,
the high ground. I take books from my shelves, dust us off,

and travel mostly by mind, delving deeply into enclosed ideas,
mine in my head, and others' in large bound volumes—
that contain so much I missed mightily the first go around.

This is my escape and my delight. I find myself, and I find
others—from the beginning of civilization, on through
to the present. I see ideas helping to hold us together.

A cluster. Outside news reports actually bombard us:
Bees survived in their hives under lava outpourings.
We must try too. To stop up holes and live on honey.

Crows

Nicolette Reim

Black wings flapping thousands
of years ago, consoling, perhaps,
this flock mirroring time. Quirky,
come and go, illuminated in bright
skies. Jerky, strutting up below
to leftover outdoor-restaurant fries.
Claimers of battle cry remains,
they prefer cracked walnuts, mate
for life. Measures of darkness, grief,
constant, seem immune to change,
black birds in the sky, beneath
we are writing the same story.

How Amateurs Look at Nebulae

Glenn Entis

Amateur astronomers
try to define
where clouds of hot vapor
begin, and when and where
they might end

That is not
how unbridled heat
plays out in the heavens—

it throbs and it shifts
radiates into the void
defies prediction and form...

Oh, young amateur
with your scopes
and your spectrums
put all thought of measure behind
just bask in the glory
of a light
so beautiful you could stare
transfixed
for a lifetime
yet so distant that you
will never feel
its warmth.

Argument

Ivanov Reyez

You're a corner and a cigarette,
The heated mouth greeting me,
The lilac lips wrinkled and pale.
You're a jukebox still with coins.

In smoke and tears
Your honey eyes mean nothing.
The weakest kiss
Will not incite the strongest passion,
As you would want.
A touch is not affection,
An icicle not winter,
A fit not resolution.
I will not become the flood
Your finger tap expects.

So dying we meet,
Not a quiver left,
But while you self-destruct—
Your back to me in bed,
Your head under blankets,
Your nails bitten to the blood—
I quietly read and wait
For air, cloud, and sunshine.

Looking for Me

Cat Thompson Wyatt

When I refer to my father and mother, I am referring to the people who adopted me at birth, put a roof over my head, food on the table, and clothes on my back, no matter how dysfunctional our family was.

I am looking at an old samsonite caramel leather suitcase. The handle is missing, the brown leather seams bulging, and the dark brown leather edged trim dangles partially unstitched, as if the memories and the photographs within are begging to be explored. My mother gave me this suitcase the day I set sail, going south to who knows where. It was as if she was saying her final good-bye to me. I don't ever remember seeing the suitcase, it must have been well hidden, because I was a very inquisitive, snoopy child. If I open it, what will I be looking for? Me? Or will I be opening Pandora's Box? But there may be a chance of finding the elusive Pot of Gold at rainbow's end, information about me. Deciding to open the suitcase, I hesitate for just a moment, then try to slowly open it, but the latches spring open snapping my fingers. "Ouch, That Stings!" Taking a deep breath, hoping I'll find information about or photos of my birth family – missing pieces of my life. I know for a fact that I was not abandoned, that I had been adopted at birth. I had parents.

Tipping the suitcase, a plethora of black and white photos- some yellowing, some curling from age, some like they were recently taken, and even some approximately 100 years old spilled out. Maybe they were anxious to be seen or known. You can tell that these photos had been stored for many, many years, because they have that odd smell of dried mildew, are warped, different in size, shape, and color from current days. Newspaper articles from the 1920's, school annuals, Big Band dance programs, a woman's diary from 1922, memories, but whose memories? They certainly aren't mine!

Having no living elders to ask about the memorabilia in the suitcase, I continue methodically, but tentatively extend my arm, my hand trembles as I reach inside for a photograph that I think might be me. No, that's not me; and then I pick up another photo, no that's not me either, a little voice from within me says. I fear that speaking out loud, about the missing pieces in my past might break the long silence that seems haunting and elusive. My parents were always truthful, insisting I know from my earliest recollections that I was adopted. As a child, age three, adopted is just a word—and like all children of three, I was full of innocence and trust and the word adopted, just another word in my vocabulary.

Closing my eyes, I again reach into the suitcase searching for a clue of my past. I catch a glimpse of a leather-bound journal lying beneath a plethora

of photographs. Reaching down I feel a soft, yet strong, journal, chaffed only at the farthest edges. It seems elegant with gold cursive on the cover. Someone has taken great care of it. You don't see this type of journal nowadays; it must be very old. Carefully opening the journal, some of the pages crumble on to a mound of photographs, as if incinerating evidence of someone's past. Mine? I find dates, places, photos, and other memorabilia but I don't recognize any of it! And then, I find a baby's portrait in a christening gown – not me; a picture of a Celilo Indian precariously perched on a fish ladder over Celilo Falls – before the falls were destroyed; a photograph of six men seated at a picnic table drinking what appears to be beer from bottles; and several other photographs of unfamiliar faces. At this point, I think my mother has given me someone else's suitcase. But wait a minute—who is this cute, chubby little girl with blonde ringlets holding a rose? “It's me!” I exclaim, eagerly anticipating that this might be moving in the right direction—but it isn't the missing pieces I'm looking for.

Finding a picture of my Aunt Hazel—a slightly built woman with a big nose and an even bigger heart, brings back warm memories of special eggnog she made just for me. My aunt traveled to Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and East Pakistan staying approximately two years. Returning home Aunt Hazel turned it into a wondrous and educational adventure for me. And here is a photo of me opening an ornately carved wooden trunk. Her trunks, always brimming full of rare, unique, unusual treasures. Pulling treasures from her trunks one at a time, she'd tell me stories of her adventures in exotic places. The smell of incense and spices lingered long after the trunk had been opened. Holding the photo, I paused waiting, thinking if I took a deep breath, I would smell the incense and spices or hear her voice telling me about her latest adventure. But there wasn't any explanation, only silence.

Returning my focus back to the suitcase, I find a picture of me at the age of nine, because the handwritten note on the back says it is me and my age. This is also when a couple unsettling events took place in my life. My aunt adopted two young girls, and my grandmother died at the dinner table right next to me. And it was the first time in my life I began to understand what the word adoption meant. Previously, I thought adoption meant paying a lot of money to buy children who didn't have parents and lived in orphanages. I never thought of myself being **that kind** of adopted. My parents bought me at the hospital; I wasn't abandoned, and I wasn't alone I had my grandmother. And, in my nine-year old mind I reasoned that the untimely death of my grandmother was the stress from my new cousins. It is amazing how through a child's eyes their mind works.

Soon after my new cousins adoption, I began to wonder about my “real” mother. Sometimes, I fantasized my “real” mother was a movie star, her career too busy to care properly for me. I was a great storyteller of grandiose stories. One of my assignments in seventh grade was to write

about my parents and then read it aloud from the front of the class. Clearing my throat, I read that my “real” father died on the warship *USS Arizona*, when it was bombed in Pearl Harbor. I was born in 1945 - Pearl Harbor was December 1941, but I truly wanted to believe the story I was had written and was sharing with my classmates.

I just found a picture of my father sitting in the breakfast nook reading the morning newspaper before he would start calling neighbors, friends, or my aunts to see who he could send me off for the weekend, holiday, or summer vacation. Finding some other photos reminds me of my childhood, when I craved attention and looked for love in “all the wrong places.”

Dysfunctional families existed but weren’t recognized, just hidden like “closet drunks.”

What’s this envelope? I notice a doctor’s name and return address, postmarked 1945, maybe there is some relationship between the doctor and my “birth mother.” Opening the envelope, pieces of receipts drift, floating on the air currents surrounding me and onto the oriental rug. I gather the pieces, matching the frail edges, fitting the crumbling pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle in its final anticipatory stage of completion. As I do I realize these receipts are for an unnamed patient’s care with my parent’s name as a reference. I never asked my parents, and my parents didn’t share.

Through the years the desire to find my birth parents has been nonexistent. It is not abandonment nor is it an aloneness that sets adoptees apart from others. Adoptees make their lives as good or a bad as we choose but **it is our choice.**

My grown children have questions now about their biological family’s medical and ancestral history of which I don’t have the answers. So, as I sift through the photographs, I am also filtering through memories of my childhood, searching for that one special person that might look like me. I sense I am getting close to finding that missing link—perhaps a photograph of my birth mother or birth father but something inside me stills my actions and I close the suitcase, putting it away for some other rainy day, maybe in May.

Bam!

Rob Cook

Ray's the kind of guy
you'd want to know come the apocalypse.
Survives off the land in northern Idaho
hunting, fishing, panning for gold.
Doesn't talk much.
Not real fond of people.
Lives out of an RV
with Ruby his third wife,
not on speaking terms
with the other two
or his children.

But at the Lolo Montana round dance,
he loves her rockabilly skirt,
how it swirls as she twirls.
The cuer calls a double hitch.
They're in the middle of it
when the bomb goes off.

Ray hits the ground,
pulls Ruby down
to protect her.

He's in Iraq
on patrol with
his best friend Kyle
when the IED takes him.

He opens his eyes.
There's music playing,
people standing over them.
Someone breaks the tension with a laugh.
You OK there, buddy? Had us worried.
That speaker pop damn near
gave you a heart attack.

Ruby takes his hand, helps him up.
It's OK, hon. Let's get you home.

**For Cian Fallon, who always
comes back.**

DS Maolalai

I haven't heard from you
in a while again.

Dream

Rick McKenzie

She heard the call
of a blood-red loon,
and so she went out
into the road.

She looked up and down
under the sky.

She saw where the blood goes.
To this day she follows it.

Throw Me A Line

Stephen Scarano

yesterday there was this brief fantasy about
falling into a situation in which
some anonymous but needy person, floundering, flailing,
feels compelled to yell
Throw Me A Line
and so being the lifeguard i once was
immediately yelled back/without apologies to Robert Service
There Are Strange Things Done In The Midnight Sun etc
or maybe/sorry, Bob Frost
Two Roads Diverged In A
and thus neatly effected the rescue.

I Lay Here All Winter

Iris Litt

The images forsook me
abandoned me cold.
They don't care
what time it is.
It's 5 a.m.
Outside the air
is zero degrees.
I cough, I sneeze,
I freeze with the outside world.
I lay here all winter
under my kind quilt
but no images came.
I couldn't write
and I lay here all winter.
My heartbeat is very slow.
Finally, slow new swings of the heart.
It beats slowly, my heart,
like some
jungle drums.
Where the images go
I have to follow.

Poet Iris Litt passed away this past May. She died peacefully in her sleep at the age of 94 and was writing up until the very end. She would be delighted to know that this poem was being published.

The Light in New Mexico

John Dorroh

1.

You are canyon and sky,
bottomless cups of poleo tea
I drink you with morning light

fall into purple shadows,

waiting

for the rope to lift us up.
Move away from snake skins
and cactus jelly into cold dark
streams, into dragonfly gullets.

I am rock gone wild, open air
and closed in spaces, alternating
like electric current, like the light
in New Mexico where sun throbs,
pulsating sunflowers.

It is what we accept, what we worship,
what we swallow.

2.

The rental car breathes dry air,
inflated tires singing against dark gray
asphalt. I am canyoned here.
tiny man escaping from cityscapes
to peyote and rib-happy jack rabbits,
lizards and scorpions who wait for me.

My room must be scoured with smudge,
lavender, sage, designated as place of prayer
and quiet peace.

Navajo Collecting Trip 1978

Katharine L. McKenna

My hair whips in the hot wind, blown in the wide-open passenger-side window of the Chevy Suburban. We are racing a thunderstorm across the Navajo Reservation near the Utah Strip, kicking up dust clouds as we jounce along the rutted road. The storm is visible, a mountain-high, black-knotted cloud chasing us, almost overtaking us. It's a blazing ninety-five degrees out in the high desert and we have no air-conditioning. I can feel the barometric pressure changing and know anything can happen—a cloudburst, a pounding rain... I'm riding with Dan Crowe, the exhibits manager of the Museum of Northern Arizona, and Neil Goodwin, a film director and producer who is along for the ride. Dan is about thirty and has a mop of curly, blond hair. He's a good driver and exceptionally knowledgeable. Neil is older, maybe thirty-eight, balding, and a quiet, thoughtful, and observant gentleman. Neil, a Nova producer from Boston, is interested in making a documentary about the Navajo and has joined the trip. I am in excellent company. We are aiming to hit three more trading posts today to collect Navajo arts and crafts. "These dirt roads become a nightmare after a rainstorm," Dan warns. "We don't want any of these wool rugs to get wet." I turn around and look at the rear of the car. It's packed high with Navajo rugs, baskets, jewelry, pottery, and skeins of handspun wool, totaling a value of \$135,000. Some pieces are destined to become prizewinners at the Annual Navajo Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff. I turn back around, grab an icy Pepsi from the cooler, and take in the vista: miles of red buttes and sandstone cliffs, scrub vegetation and sand—Navajoland. Something called me here, propelled me into the West. Was I escaping or seeking? Sometimes you don't know until you finish your quest. Was I fleeing the East and life as I had known it? I dropped out of college back East and undertook this journey on instinct, to save something precious in myself. Was my instinct right?

* * *

Yesterday we packed the Chevy Suburban with camp gear and food in a cooler for our trip and headed out. Neil asks unusual questions about the reservation, and I listen to Dan's answers. Neil's father, Grenville Goodwin, was an anthropologist, an expert on Western Apache in the 1930s, and lived among them on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, documenting their stories and way of life. He had heard about a wild recluse band of Apache who refused to

surrender with Geronimo, but instead they burrowed deeply into the Sierra Madre Mountains. He went in search of this wild group and found evidence of a recent encampment but no Apache. He wrote several books on the Apache before he died at the age of thirty-two. Dan packs large plastic bags to wrap the wool rugs in to keep them dry. For five days we are going to collect rugs, baskets, wool skeins, and silver jewelry from trading posts up on the Navajo Reservation, crisscrossing from one post to another, logging in over six hundred miles of dirt road. Dan has done this before, knows where he's going, and is completely at home and relaxed in his driving. Since there are so few hotels to speak of, we camp out along dirt tracks that veer off into the piñon trees, even though camping is not really allowed without a permit. We do not bring any alcohol, as this is strictly prohibited on the reservation. Our campsite is simple: sleeping bags on the ground next to a cooler filled with food for breakfast and simple dinners. After we make camp Neil goes off by himself to record his thoughts for the day, Dan takes out his map to plan tomorrow's path, and I retreat to my writing.

My meticulous handwritten journal lists all the trading posts we visit, who owns them, and what kinds of rugs or crafts they are well known for. Each trading post tries to promote a unique trademark style, and many rugs are named after the trading posts, such as Ganado Reds, Crystals, Two Grey Hills, and Teec Nos Pos. Other trading posts are simply known for certain rug designs, such as Pictorials, Storm Patterns, Yeis and Yeibichais, Two Face Twills, and Saddle Blankets. I glue my AAA Indian Country Map into my journal and track our route over the dirt roads, marking the trading posts with a red pen. I document the entire collecting trip with my camera. Everywhere we go we smell juniper wood burning, a distinct and pleasing aroma, a mixture of pine and rosemary. The reservation feels very remote, and I feel like I'm at the ends of the earth, like Outer Mongolia. I can see for miles and miles. It reminds me of Wyoming.

We drive to Dinnebito and pick up several pictorials and storm patterns. We ask which way to Pinon Trading Post, and they tell us jokingly to follow the Bionic Yeibichais (electric power lines that look remarkably like Yeibichais, masked dancers who represent Navajo supernatural spirits), which will guide us to Pinon. Dan looks toward the west and sees a large thunderhead building. "We gotta go now to beat that storm. We don't want to get caught in it along these dirt roads; they turn to mud instantly and can flash flood."

We ford across Dinnebito Wash behind the trading post and then race the thunderstorm across the reservation under the Bionic Yeibichai power lines. After a while we see a lone sign that keeps us on the right track.

We see a few traditional Navajo dwellings called hogans that are made of mud and wooden poles, materials that blend easily into the landscape. We pass a hogan that is boarded up. “Someone must have died there; it’s abandoned,” Dan says.

We make it to Pinon around lunchtime, and I smell something unbelievable—spare ribs on a rotisserie. We grab a few salty ones and some Navajo fry bread and eat unceremoniously on the back steps. Inside the trading post I see the largest Navajo Yei rug I’ve ever seen. It must be twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide. After we pick up a few other rugs from Pinon, we drive off to visit Low Mountain and Smoke Signal, Salina Springs and Many Farms. Most of these trading posts have jewelry pawn and rug rooms back behind the main part of the store. The tagged jewelry pawn items hang on hooks above—dozens of silver and turquoise bracelets, rings, and necklaces waiting to be retrieved, if ever, by their owners. We head straight for the rug room.

My favorite job is to unfold the rugs and throw them across the floor for us to assess. No two rugs are the same, perhaps similar in style but individual in design. We pick only rugs that will likely win prizes because this show is supposed to demonstrate the highest quality crafts made on the Navajo Nation. I learn to identify the difference between a good rug and a great one, a coarse weave and a smooth one, curled ends or flat ones, the warp and the weft, natural dyes and aniline ones, lazy lines and spirit lines (lines, I am told, that allow the spirit energy of a rug to be released to the next rug you weave). I learn about more styles of rugs—Chief Blankets, Wide Ruins, and Raised Outlines. My hands are full of lanolin, and the rugs start to talk to me. I have fallen in love with Navajo rugs.

The trading posts exude an old mercantile-like feeling—wooden floors, countertops, and old shelving stocked with canned goods. Often behind the main counter will be stacks of satin and velvet fabric meant for the traditional dress of the Navajo. Skeins of wool for weaving are for sale as well as saddles and tack, cowboy boots and hats.

We pick up a few wedding baskets and even some Navajo pottery, along with silver squash-blossom necklaces and turquoise bracelets. We don’t pay a cent—everything collected is on consignment, as it has been done since the 1940s. I write up the consignment slips for the traders and I tag the items. By doing so I have become an expert handler, very familiar with Navajo arts and crafts.

Word is out that we are collecting for the museum. The trader works as a dealer for Navajo craftsmen who live in very remote areas of the reservation. Sometimes they come in by horse and wagon to sell their crafts and pick up supplies. While we are throwing rugs around, a Navajo woman dressed in traditional dress (pioneer skirt

and velvet top) comes in with some more weavings she has just finished. One is a beautiful Storm pattern. “We should take that one,” I suggest. The trader and weaver fix a price and then release it to us. The trader adds her credit to the credit board made of mousetraps nailed to a wooden board, a clever idea. The Navajo woman nods at us, then picks out some flour and coffee from the store. We are playing our part in the robust economy of the multimillion-dollar Native American Art market.

Tomorrow we head up to Navajo Mountain Trading Post, where the Navajo Reservation straddles the Utah and Arizona borders. This is a remote area where, in 1864, a small band of Navajo found a safe haven from the US military scouting to round up and imprison nine thousand Navajo and five hundred Apache at Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, a cruel example of ethnic persecution in American history. After five years the Navajo prisoners walked from New Mexico back to their homeland, but not without their pride and resilience. Today the Navajo Nation occupies the largest land area of any Native Americans, with a population of about 350,000.

Navajo Mountain

Navajo Mountain Road turns north from Arizona Route 98 and goes for forty miles until it ends at the Chapter House (a meeting place for local governance) and Navajo Mountain Trading Post. We pass a modern petroglyph carved into the sandstone, giving us fair warning:

Years Ago No Good Road

Still No Good Road

Still, Still No Good Road

What lies beyond is the remote wilderness of Lake Powell and the Kaiparowits Plateau. The road is made of red sand and bedrock. The sand feels like snow under our tires, and we need to gun through it so we don't get bogged down, but then we need to slow down to a crawl when we hit uneven bedrock to avoid smashing our heads on the ceiling of the car. In this manner we slowly make our way to Navajo Mountain. Once we get there the only way out is to come back the way we came. It feels like I am going beyond the very ends of the earth.

The mountain itself reaches an altitude of 10,388 feet, the highest point on the Navajo Nation. Navajo call it Naatsis'aan (Earth Head or Pollen Mountain). As we get closer the green ponderosa pines and piñon trees grow more recognizable against the mountain's distinct whale shape. It sits solo, surrounded by an expansive plateau.

We finally arrive at Navajo Mountain Trading Post, a sandstone building with a screen door where the trader lives. Madeline Cameron greets us warmly and shows us what she has for us. She will send us back to civilization with a bag full of wool skeins for

weaving and a few pieces of silver jewelry. She is wearing the traditional Navajo skirt with a blouse, and she speaks fluent Navajo, having spent her entire life on the reservation. She asks us if we would like some iced tea, which we accept. While we are in her house drinking the tea, I ask Madeline if any of the traders are related to each other. “Mrs. Townsend at Bidahochi is Allen Townsend’s mother. Allen Townsend owns Inscription House. Chin Smith at Oljato is Yolanda Townsend’s mother. Yolanda is married to Allen Townsend. Raymie Drolet is a first cousin of Allen Townsend and third cousin of Yolanda, so they are both related. Raymie Drolet owns Shonto Trading Post along with his father and aunt. His aunt also owns part of Two Grey Hills Trading Post.” (Most of the trading posts are closed now. I drove up to Navajo Mountain in 2008; the road is completely paved, much to my disappointment, and the trading post is a broken ruin, windows gone, sand piled up against the stone masonry inside and out, echoing the prehistoric Anasazi ruins.)

We move on toward Oljato and Shonto and camp at a place called Todechenee’s Water, an underground spring. After driving over a narrow, sandy road, we pull up to a flat area next to a metal pipe that sticks straight out of the sandstone rock wall with crystal-clear water rushing out of it. I wash my hair in the cool water and feel refreshed after a long, dry, hot day on the road. We fill up our water jugs with fresh, clean water from the Navajo Nation.

After dinner I roll out my sleeping bag, crawl in for the night, and lie there thinking quietly, looking up at the stars. They are so mysterious. There are so many and in the silence of the desert, they begin to speak. They are vast and distant, yet bright. I try to imagine the impact they might have had on primitive peoples. What did they think they were? Gods and goddesses? What are these night things? I have this thought that I wouldn’t mind one bit if some universal force swooped down on me and pulled me straight out of my sleeping bag, feet dangling, straight up into the night sky to join all these stars. It’s a particularly comfortable thought for me to join them, even if it meant I disappeared completely from Earth and everyone I know on it. I am nineteen years old and am filled with satisfaction.

Complicated Reasons

*Jeffrey Kingman
for Nancy Barrett*

Her first big job
a soap opera.
Closeup, lips quivering.

She played anger
played sarcasm.

The bus in Manhattan
two girls
silver braces gleaming
Autograph, autograph!
She went home and sobbed
fame she couldn't play.

Consolation of Tides

Jim Kraus

I hear you say,
“time heals.”

But, no, it measures
only extent, while

moon-driven tides
of suffering and affliction
arrive and depart.

Your cancered liver,
your remorse, remains
submerged, invisible,
a sea of tears, of troubles remembered.

Witness the sea turtle’s amphibian solitude
and your own disconsolate words
receding with the tide.

Later, I hear you say,
“At low tide, listen,
be one with that large rock
across the bay.

Climb, then jump.
Again and again,
the falling flight
and the sudden calm
of submarine silence.”

Not Stranger

Robert Rothman

He is with me, sitting in the passenger
seat of the car, standing naked beside
in the shower. What a riot! He sings and spouts
out water like a whale. His image shimmers

into a near-bodily form. Not a doppelganger.
Doesn't resemble me: six inches shorter, Indian,
with long brown hair, a paunch that hides an iron
abdomen. Brown eyes that peer right into

you. I can't hide a thing. It's my doing,
I know: I asked for him. And when he's gone
I stare at the emptiness, throw up my hands
and call him back. No response if my wish is

idle. Like a lover at an outdoor
restaurant who, if your eyes wander to another
table, takes your head in hands and lets you know
you're free to leave. Full attention and love, or

nothing. I am no fool. There is no other
who can compete. When he was absent for that spell,
it was as if a switch was turned off. The world
dulled to gray; laughter buried eight feet

under; an empty house. We are sitting now,
next to one another, deep in the deep. I am
brimming over, a fountain of bubbling
spirit. Who deserves such surprising gift. Huzzah!

Flabbergasted

Arnold Yasinski

She's late and has never
been. It will be all right but
isn't in the sense we mean.

Being serious about studies
wearies us, leverages anxiety.
We look in medical books

but find nothing. The
doctor says she's intact
so she can't be; he won't

do a test. Winter, crunching
walks on below-zero snow
compound unreality.

We plead and another
doc does the test. Deeper
into our twilight zone—

early dusk, contradictory
slants of light. Spring break,
home to give the news

in person. Then meet up to
plan. Live the cliché. Marry
two weeks into spring.

The Croatians

Anne-Marie Delaunay-Danzio

A twenty-foot tall dovecote stood in the middle of the field. I had wandered off a few miles from my maternal grandmother's house where I spent my summer vacations, away from Paris and my high school. She lived in a rural area, a hamlet called Farrou, near the town of Villefranche de Rouergue in Southern France.

The sky was a pale blue, and the sun reflected on the white stucco walls of the birdhouse. Pigeons fluttered around, perching and picking food from small alcoves. I took a picture with my Kodak pocket camera. I was sixteen-years old, two months shy of seventeen on this day in late August 1972. After I took the picture, the sky turned into a purplish indigo and the wind blew. The sunlight broke through the green of veined tree leaves. Crows shadowed the birdhouse and it felt as if a furious bull was about to emerge from the inside of the earth to gore and trample me.

I tried to run away but all of nature around me was in a convulsive state, moaning in agony. I ran in circles I could not break touching the same tree three times and feeling a fast beating pulse beneath its bark. Above a brook alive with fury was a small parcel of land enclosed by a wrought iron fence with a plaque that had strange names full of Y's, Z's and W's engraved in gold. After I broke free from the net of terror and anguish, I found my way back.

The door of the dark, damp and musty basement of my grandmother's house was wide open and inside, my father was fixing shelves and hammering nails.

"Are you making a coffin?" I asked.

He had turned sixteen on September 11, 1939, just before the war broke in Europe and joined the French Resistance under De Gaulle two years later.

My grandmother often talked about the Croatian mutineers, young men who had been rounded up in the streets of Zagreb to be enrolled by force in the SS branch of the German army. On September 17, 1943, they rebelled against their commanders and dismantled the German headquarters, liberating the town for only a few hours before being captured.

About twenty of them were paraded in the streets of Villefranche, barefoot, bare-chested, their heads covered by a potato sack. Their hands tied up behind their backs before being led to a field where they were further tortured, forced to dig their graves and executed. Others were deported or shot. A few escaped and joined the Maquis. When I fumbled into that field, I had no idea how close to home it was.

I Will Never Write About You

Annie Wood

i will never write about you
i prefer pretty words
you say you only wish to break me
like a horse
i am so young
but not so young
that I don't know
that people
should not break people
but I can be a horse
strong and magnificent
and you can be cruel
violent and rageful
and I will kick apart the corral
and escape into the night
and you will curl up inside your fist
and detest what you cannot capture
and I will know freedom
and you never will

On the Altar of the Ocean

Jill Ruscoll

remnants of lives
lived in the push and pull of waves
lay scattered in the sand

of the rise and fall of days

a reminder

as swift as the fiddler crab
sensing the approaching shadow

there are no sad toasts to the souls
of these sun-washed relics
they are at most
casual treasures for the living

a vestige
of a life free of empty rituals

free of days sliced into bits of time
free of fear of what's to come

magnificent mother

a life spent at the feet of their
who dresses in the white lace of the sun
and dances

to the singing wind

Tinder Nightmare

Jeff Vollmer

Russian Warship tried to swipe right on Snake Island. It messaged:

“This is a Russian warship. I ask you to lay down your arms and surrender to avoid

bloodshed and unnecessary deaths. Otherwise, you will be bombed.”

Snake Island considered its options. And messaged back:

“Russian Warship. Go fuck yourself.”

Into Infinity

Naomi Bindman

Winding through the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the Santa Fe valley unfurls below. Pale green lines of delicate willows leafing-out snake along the twisting veins of underground streams, etching the dry desert colors.

Honey, I'm back in New Mexico—another thing I thought I could never do without you. But I need to bring you back. So many reminders and so many incredible sights. I want to share them with you. The way the land opens up and goes on forever. The way everything glows as if lit from within.

Ellen and I flew to New Mexico a few weeks before her high school graduation. Our cousin Tenney had invited Ellen to perform at an event Tenney organized each year, called “Girls’ Night Out,” an evening of four talented women singer-songwriters performing their own songs. It was Ellen’s first paid gig, and first taste of expanding beyond familiar venues.

Everything about that trip was glorious: the breathtaking landscapes, the unfamiliar adobe architecture, the rich earth colors so different from the lush greens and flowing mountains of home, the kindness of strangers. From the moment we glimpsed the rock mesas spreading below us—soft pastel pinks, oranges and reds, beneath sharp mountain peaks, pine forests topped with snow—we were captivated. Seeing these sights once more sends me back to that trip. I pass the intersection where I’d swerved to avoid an oblivious merging car.

Mom! You MOOED! Ellen shrieks.

I did not “Moo,” I retort, struggling not to laugh. I said, “Maaah!” That car almost hit us!

You did too “Moo!” I’m going to write a list of all your “Naomi-isms”—like when you shut the car door in your face while you were still talking to me!

I roll my eyes, but can’t suppress a giggle. I say Yes to every request: a woven wool blanket, a colorful Mexican embroidered bag, a lavender T-shirt. We select a Native American drum for Ellen’s beloved teacher, Melissa. Ellen points to a cascade of boots in a storefront window. We detour into the little adobe building; when we come out she is delightfully wearing a pair of gently used, shiny black cowboy boots. She’s searching for turquoise earrings, but hasn’t found the right pair yet.

We are both savoring this time together. Like on our road trip two summers before, this enchanted land of bright colors and sunshine feels like a magic bubble away from life. But this time we are on the eve of separation. I don't know if she feels the same poignancy; for me every moment is permeated with precious evanescence, prelude to her taking wing.

We meet Tenney and the other performers for a rehearsal of *Let the Sun Shine In*, which they're going to sing together to close the show. On the first chorus, Ellen spontaneously breaks into harmony, and Tenney beams the others a huge, "What did I tell you?" smile.

At the gig the next night, the room is large and noisy. There's a bar off to one side. Tables are filled with people socializing. Some raise their voices to talk over Tenney's opening remarks. Ellen is the first performer. In her new lavender shirt, black skirt, and gleaming black boots, she glows like an amethyst. While she's getting set up, she catches my eye and nods toward her water bottle. I hand it to her, lean close, and whisper: *Go shine!*

Scowling slightly at people who are still talking, Ellen begins to play. A woman at a table near me turns to her friends and announces loudly: *She's real good! I am filled with pride and happiness for my daughter, on the threshold of pursuing her dream.* Soon Ellen tunes out the distractions and settled in. Most of the people are listening now; the room becomes very quiet.

Later, when we return to our hotel room, I'm elated, she's a bit disgruntled. I assure her that this was a hard type of venue, but she held their attention. Exhausted, I flop on one bed. Ellen bounces onto the other with her usual exuberance. As I drift, she begins experimenting with an unfamiliar arrangement of chords. I realize I'm hearing the birth of a new song.

Moments later she announces: *Mom, I wrote another song! Do you want to hear it?* We both know it's not a real question. I scoot up against the pillows, giving her my full attention.

*Today, I finally breathed.
It took so long to make me see:
I am going nowhere faster
than I've ever gone anywhere before.*

*Today I saw the sun,
but there's only clouds and fog
so maybe I'm the only one.
But I saw her brighter than the anger,
it nearly knocked me to the floor.*

*And she was golden when she spoke to me,
she was golden when she told me to see,
to look at all the beauty to understand
its meaning, it's easy, really simple
now I know it's called, Forgiveness.*

Her words float me back to the long steel bridge above the jagged Rio Grande Gorge we'd visited earlier that day, the sky uncharacteristically gray and rainy. The heavy clouds had suddenly parted and rays poured down around us. She seems to be finding a peace on this trip, I think to myself, a perspective on her painful year-long struggle with her school's administration.

*Yesterday my wrath was strong
but holding on simply takes too long,
I was going nowhere faster
than I've ever gone anywhere before.*

*Yesterday was rainy and raw
and the people in front of me were all I saw
so I had to start knocking on today's door,
and pick myself off of the floor.*

*And as the sunlight streamed down on me
I was finally able to see:
Forgiveness is golden. It's golden, it's golden.*

The next day, we leave Taos by way of the High Road, a narrow lane along the ridge toward Santa Fe. At the edge of one turn, we pull over and get out to marvel at the view stretching layer beyond layer. Ellen leans against me. I hug her close.

Mom, when you die, what do you want to happen to your body? I am surprised by the question, but not surprised. Death is not unfamiliar. I've always thought I'd want my ashes in Lake George with my mom's. But this would be a pretty nice place to spend eternity, I respond.

She nods and is quiet.

We stop again at an elderly couple's roadside stand. Exquisite handmade turquoise earrings, long triangles of deep green, shimmer in the sunshine. The woman's eyes crinkle in a grandmotherly smile as she watches Ellen pose in the mirror. Ellen leans forward to accept a matching necklace the woman places over her head, then looks over to me, her eyebrows raised. I nod Yes. We all smile.

Soon we spot the little sign for Nambe Pueblo, turn onto a dusty track lined with woven wooden coyote fences—vertical bare branches like interlaced bleached bones—then pull into a rutted driveway of a

small farm, a bright jewel in this muted landscape.

Lauren, a friend who moved back here a few years earlier, tan, lean and graceful, with silver hair and doe-like eyes, welcomes us. She brings us to a little pond, the center of this emerald oasis. Ellen photographs the scene that looks like a Monet painting come to life. Lauren snaps a photo of Ellen and me cheek to cheek, grinning together, Ellen's arm slung around my shoulders. After the accident, Lauren sent it to me.

Your black boots did not return when they brought your bag home. Your earrings, crumbled into green bits, did.

Returning to New Mexico now is a personal fire-walk and a surprisingly joyous rejourneying. I want to ask Ellen: Do you remember that rock that looks like a camel? Do you remember how we laughed when I ate a piñon nut without peeling it first? I had thought I would never be able to come here again. But like when I returned to Caffè Lena to play Ellen's music, I have a purpose. And Lauren has invited me unconditionally to her little haven.

Lauren wakes early to tend her plant starts, water fields, and do hundreds of tasks in an unending rhythm from before dawn till after dusk. I hike with Ellen's dog, Scout, in windblown fields and along dry creek lanes. Scout chases a coyote—I scream after her until my throat is raw. She returns unscathed, quite pleased with herself. I spend an afternoon splitting wood. I had forgotten how good it feels. The thwack of the axe coming down in just the right place, the pieces popping apart, jumping off the block, the steady pace, the focus on: Just. This. Moment. Right. Now.

Lauren takes a rare day off and drives us to Tsankawi, part of Bandelier National Park. We walk single file along a narrow trail worn in stone by centuries of human feet, and crawl into small cliff caves of ancestral Pueblos. High above the landscape, under an endless azure sky, we lie on a stone ledge in the sparkling sunshine. After a long time Lauren shares what she has brought me here to say.

You and Ellen were so connected, like twins.
She chooses her words carefully.

What you're doing with her music is really important. You have a responsibility to share it with the world—otherwise it's like another death.

I'm grateful she understands how I'm fighting to keep Ellen from disappearing completely, and wonder if she intuits my long-term intention to depart this world once I have preserved Ellen's music? Lauren's words stir a flutter of disquiet, like the whisper of a breeze

revealing the rub, the fly in the ointment, the flaw in my plan, as I sense without quite realizing yet that my two goals—keeping Ellen’s spirit alive and ending my own life—may be in conflict. The day comes when it is time to do what I came here for. Scout and I return to the little pond. Surrounded by willows and rushes, a pair of ducks floats unperturbed. In a dappled spot near the water’s edge, I play Ellen’s guitar. Softly, I sing her song *Night Leaping*.

*I like to run at night
with the wind surrounding me,
and no one there to hold me back,
to keep my spirit in,
the fields will never stop for me,
into infinity, the darkness protecting me,
I see now, it won’t hurt me.*

*I’m grounded
no matter how fast I’m going
I can come back.
My body can’t hold my energy
and I start flying.
But I am not afraid of where
I will end up:
my legs may take me far away,
but my soul will come back home.*

*I call it *Night Leaping*
I run until the world appears as one
runway into the sky
the clouds stretch before my eyes
and no one can stop me tonight.*

When I finish, I set down her guitar carefully, and reach for the purple and gold pouch that has pilgrimaged here with us. I kneel, holding it to my heart. Honey, you should have been able to return here in life. I don’t know why you couldn’t. From the pouch I pour a swirl of soft gray powder into the shallow water. Sparkles spread over the surface, little hard white bits sink first. Birds sing. Insects buzz. The willow weeps. The shimmering dust settles in a golden cloud.

The Mists of Forgotten

Gail Nielsen

If the truth be this,
be this
downy hush
all over us under us
for lost
we found our way
into the forgotten
histories
of each other

An old book open on your desk
in the late-day light of the north window
through the eyes of youth
I studied
you as you took me,
pulled me from the width of ages
over the narrow threshold
deeper into forgotten
I've kept
our secret
your name
and a thousand goodbyes to you
I almost said

We made no promises
just a vow
to silence
what it was,
it was
and may still be ours
until I scythe
a path through this haze
some measure of my heart will be
adrift
the dense mists with you

Though I may never retrieve the means,
morning can and shall warm us
and if the clear view
be this,
be this day given back

with gold-tipped feather touches
my arms for you,
your honest eyes for me

Never to breathe a word of it
until now
a whisper lifts itself
from the bed of my tongue,
kisses me
from the inside
as it leaves

This threshold of my mouth

God of air,
if the truth be this
and if it is good,
grant us lucid memory
with a telling voice
give us each other
and back to real time
give us
love in plain sight,
brief and eternal

Carried Away by Birds

Beth Anstanding

1.

First you see their wings,
hard-working, eager—

certain to brace and source
every shift through the wind.

Look closer though,
to the white feathers

like fingers touching
all of the places

where you need to be touched.
Yes, you need to be touched—

2.

For you to stay put here
you'd have to admit

your heart has felt
like a closed fist.

You'd have to say the words:

*My heart,
I closed it like a fist—*

Then how will you unfurl
each finger, the way a bird

drapes her wing and lets
the feathers spread?

How will you let the rain
or sun or wind recognize

then release and soften
the points of you?

3.

Put down the things
and you'll figure out

why you were picking them up
in the first place

and holding them so close—

If you watch the birds,
they carry string—

they carry dry grasses
or the coarse strands of horse tails

in their hooked beaks.
You think you need a tight grip

to get from here
to there.

But it's the lightest touch—

4.

When it's quiet enough
you can hear their wings

like the clapping of leather gloves—
When it's quiet enough

I fear they will carry you away
again. I'll have to watch

dozens of white birds
lift you into the sky,

the strings in their mouths
pulling you—

I want to tell them:

Carrying a broken heart
doesn't heal it.

All of the right words are nothing
more than a hush you can't hear.

5.

The sand responds,
spreading away from my feet,

then wrapping around them.

I could move with the ground
as it slips and leaves.

I could move with the ground
as it falls into and around me.

But I just stand there—
which seems to be enough.

There's only so much to do.

The scarf and my hair
whip into my mouth.

I stay put. It's enough
to stand and watch the birds.

Per Se

Kimberly Nunes

The heart is shouldering
today—that's not its job, per se.
Per se it dares to call mystery, *mystery*.

How to fathom heart's real job?
The mind says, *I love you*.
The heart says, *Pity, pity*

Inside the Fermata

Kimberly Nunes

In the opera at Lincoln Center last night,
there was the usual hero,
and the expected grand pause
held
over a note—so our hero

could think, ascertain the maiden—
how to save her
from conflagration.

She would have to wake up!
 from her divine sleep
as flames crept
toward her feet.

He appeared sincere but, still—
 took his time to reach her,
 and to sing.

The audience gaped, *Please, she's about to catch fire,*
her room is burning,
and the violins...pleading.

Then he freed her.

And today I'm pondering
the real world—

beyond the realm of an hour—beyond the gaze
of any lead actor, cloying
with desire—

there is always desire.

How to Sustain the Rigors of Flight

A.E. Schulz

imagine a world without wishbones
a place where a wish can fly out past your lips
but there are no V's of geese flying, no cruising red-tailed hawks,
no hummingbirds dipping and weaving through the garden

birds cannot fly without honeycombed air-filled bone,
without that fused clavicle,
without that furcula, that wishbone

imagine a world in which all birds are earthbound—
where all avian bones are marrow packed
and unable to manage lifting a body into the air

birds would trot, skitter, waddle, even swim,
with no possibility of aerial navigation
would wings become only an instrument of courtship?

imagine no gulls in the air, pause
and remember a salt-soaked feather on a beach
the wish you made in that small finite moment,
what you whispered to the grains of sand
and the small triangle of cloudy sea glass on your palm

remember the wish you made—that you wanted to fly away
remember that you did

remember that survival is determined by luck, by choice,
by summoning the strength of your marrow-filled bones
while he slept off another binge, by ignoring
the shards of glass on the floor, by piling clothes into a suitcase,
by climbing into your truck and driving down the coast

remember that moment when you walked
through the door of your mother's house
her surprise that such a mild man could be so violent,
the disbelief of your family that you had kept this secret

remember how you couldn't sleep for the first year
what would have happened if you had not pulled
that small wishbone, still hot, from the supermarket
roisserie chicken, cleaned off the shreds of meat
and placed it in that box next to your bed?

would sleep still elude you many years later?
you can imagine a world without volcanoes,
without earthquakes, but can you
imagine a world where birds cannot fly?

it is simple, or never simple, though now you wear
a reminder, a silver wishbone on a chain around your neck

when that clerk at the supermarket,
the one who bagged the rotisserie chicken,
asks if that is a wishbone on your necklace
tell her that it is

tell her that without wishbones birds can't fly
tell her that your marrowed bones
have learned to sustain the rigors of flight

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

TIARA BOLLIG

Tiara Bollig is currently in her last semester of grad school, hopefully finishing her thesis. When she is not writing academically, she enjoys writing poetry and playing with form and parallelisms. She is currently focusing on being happy, graduating, and marrying her fiancé next year. Her work has previously been featured in Lines from the Middle of Nowhere and Anthology of Kansas's Best Emerging Poets 2019.

SIDNEY ABBOTT

Sidney Abbott is a native New Mexican inspired by the culture, heritage, and arts unique to the Land of Enchantment.

MONICA GARCIA

Monica Garcia unintentionally started my cake decorating business in 2014. She would watch cake shows such as Cake Boss, Ace of Cakes, and Cupcake Wars. She would always say, "I bet I could do that". So, one day she decided to give it a try by making her goddaughter a Monster High cake for her birthday. She was proud of how it turned out, so she posted pictures of it on social media. Soon after, she was being asked what she charged for a custom cake. Since she enjoyed making them, she decided to try her hand at building a business. That's when Monica Garcia Tasty Cakes was born. Monica is also known as the "Cake Boss of Roswell." The particular cake ("Taste of the Southwest") pictured; is one of her favorites because she thinks it showcases her talent, and she loves making her customers smile. Although the part of NM she is from doesn't have this type of cactus growing naturally, it's still beautiful. To see more of her work, visit Monica Garcia Tasty Cakes on Facebook. "Baked with LOVE, from me to YOU".

AMANDA OWENS

Amanda Owens is a 28 year old Texan native with a passion for reading and writing poetry. This is her second year to have submitted to and be published in El Portal's literary journal. Recently, the inspiration for Amanda's writing has been her journey through the grieving process due to the sudden passing of her fiancée in 2020. In her spare time, Amanda likes to spend time with her young daughter dancing and baking together, as well as paint and do arts and crafts, and listen to music.

CHASE WILLIAMSON

Chase Williamson is a Freshman attending ENMU for a degree in Graphic Design. He grew up in Fort Sumner NM, where he started to take art classes in middle school. Chase slowly gained an appreciation for and a love for art as well as creating art. He also has a passion for photography, specifically nature, wildlife, and landscape photography. His passions are creating art, playing video games, and spending time with friends, family, and his dog.

GERR YANG

Gerr Yang is a Hmong American woman and a first generation student. She is currently a graduate student at Eastern New Mexico's Communicative Disorders program. Her family migrated to the United States in 1986 as refugees. She often uses free-verse poetry privately as a form of art and expression. This is the first time Yang has shared her work with the public.

Yang states that her poem is a story about her mother, a young Hmong woman, who had no rights to her own body, escaped persecution during the Vietnam War, lived as a refugee in Thailand, and moved to the United States for freedom; all the while being a mother. She wants to share with her readers her compassion toward mother's resilience through innocence, corruption, and sacrifice and how it has impacted her character adversely and advantageously as a woman.

BRITTNEY JUANCHO

Brittney Juancho is a 21-year-old Native American-Hispanic student at Eastern New Mexico University. She is working to get her degree in Graphic Design and desires to create designs for businesses and herself. She loves to create artwork from her life and whatever enters her imagination.

BRADLEY WISE

Bradley Wise is a writer from Anchorage, Alaska and is currently living in Portales (although sometimes he misses his igloo back home). He is finishing his BA in English Literature with a double minor in Legal Studies and Economics. He has an ever-growing backburner of books that he hopes to get to in the next decade or so.

BETHANY GIESLER

Bethany Giesler is a 20-year-old graphic design major at Eastern New Mexico University. Her inspiration for her artwork is her personal life experiences, and music from her favorite singer-songwriters.

DOMINIQUE WINGERD

Dominique Wingerd writes best after she's had a good cry, slathers on some essential oils, and begins by responding to the talk within her spirit. After discovering some hidden gifts prompted within her multicultural family, she only pursued writing after a neighbor poet encouraged her to keep outpouring. Uncontent to be less than influential, she is a mom-mentor to her brood, married to a faithful husband (they are writing their first family-collaborative novel), and she could spend all day singing while pruning fruit trees or just sitting in the Pacific. Riding, painting, eating, music cèlidhs, talk-story, or sharing a glass of wine during golden sunset hours is her favorite time of day. Never missing a sunset is on the bucket list. Grateful for life and the chance to witness it bravely, her first published poem is "Raining".

SOPHIE GOODMAN

Sophie Goodman is a sophomore at Eastern New Mexico University. She has lived in Portales since 2016, but is originally from Las Cruces, New Mexico. Sophie is currently deciding between a few different career paths. Although Photography is not one of those, it is a hobby of hers that she loves.

TENIKA HEIDELBERG

Transitioning into her third semester of the ENMU graduate program, Tenika Heidelberg remains working as a GA. This is her third time being published within El Portal. She aspires to become a professor like the ones who have helped her along the way- the amazing professors at ENMU. Her poetry is created so that her readers know they are not alone in the darker moments that life has to offer.

ALLISON MILES

Allison Miles is 19 years old. Allison is a sophomore at Eastern New Mexico University where she majors in Theatre and minors in Digital Filmmaking.

DON KUNZ

Don Kunz is URI Professor Emeritus of English. His essays, short stories, and poems have appeared in over 90 literary journals. He is a member of The High Desert Poetry Cell, five men in Bend, Oregon who donate proceeds from their readings and published books of poetry to local non-profit organizations.

SARAMANDA SWIGART

Saramanda Swigart has a BA in postcolonial literature and an MFA in writing and literary translation from Columbia University. Her short work, essays, and poetry have appeared in Oxford Magazine, Superstition Review, The Alembic, Fogged Clarity, Ghost Town, The Saranac Review, and Euphony, to name a few. She has been teaching literature, creative writing, and argumentative writing and critical thinking at City College of San Francisco since 2014.

MARIE BACIGALUPO

Marie Bacigalupo studied creative writing at NYU, the Center for Fiction under Gordon Lish, the New School, and the Writers Studio. She also attended summer workshops sponsored by the University of Iowa, Narrative Magazine, and One Story Magazine. Marie won First Prize among 7000 entries in the Writer's Digest 13th Annual Short-Short Story Contest for her story, "Excavation." In addition, her work has appeared in The Brooklyn Rail, Vol. 1 Brooklyn, Journal of Microliterature, The Examined Life Journal, Perspective Literary Magazine, Spark: A Creative Anthology, and other publications. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

Matthew J. Spireng's 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize-winning book *Good Work* was published in 2020 by Evening Street Press. An 11-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of two other full-length poetry books, *What Focus Is* and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and five chapbooks. He was the winner of The MacGuffin's 23rd Annual Poet Hunt Contest in 2018 and the 2015 Common Ground Review poetry contest.

DIANE WEBSTER

Diane Webster's goal is to remain open to poetry ideas in everyday life, nature or an overheard phrase and to write. Diane enjoys the challenge of transforming images into words to fit her poems. Her work has appeared in *Better Than Starbucks*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Eunoia Review*, and other literary magazines.

MARTE CARLOCK

Marte Carlock spent almost 20 years chasing facts as a Boston Globe stringer; now she finds it's more fun to make things up. Her poems and short fiction have appeared in some two dozen publications. She is author of a poem collection, *How It Will Be* from *Now On Out*.

TIMOTHY DODD

Timothy Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV and is the author of short story collections *Men in Midnight Bloom* (Cowboy Jamboree Press), *Fissures and Other Stories* (Bottom Dog Press), and *Mortality Birds* (Southernmost Books, with Steve Lambert), as well as the poetry collection *Modern Ancient* (The High Window Press). More about the author can be found at timothydodd.wordpress.com.

RON TORRENCE

Ron Torrence published his first short story at 50 and his first poem at 80. Even so his fiction, non-fiction and poetry are widely published. *the prophet bird*, a poetry collection, was published in 2021, and *Julia's War*, a chapbook of four interrelated stories, has just been published.

RICK WIRICK

Richard Wirick is the author of four books that have been translated into more than ten languages. *One Hundred Siberian Postcards* (2006), short memoir-fiction pieces, was a London Times notable Book for 2007 and nominated for a PEN/Bingham Award for best first work by an American writer. It was followed by another story collection, *Kicking In* (2010). The novel *The Devil's Water* was published in 2014, and a new novel, *Sudden Mountain: Chapters From The Ghost Year*, is forthcoming in 2022, as well as a third story collection. His collection of essays, *Hat of Candles*, came out in 2021. He writes for a wide variety of periodicals in the U.S., U.K., and is a senior voting member of the National Book Critics Circle. Originally from the Midwest, he practices law in Los Angeles, where he lives with his family.

CHRISTIAN WARD

Christian Ward is a UK-based writer who has recently appeared in *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Double Speak*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Primeval Monster*, *Clade Song*, *Uppagus* and *BlueHouse Journal*.

THOMAS ELSON

Thomas Elson's stories appear in numerous venues, including *Ellipsis*, *Cirque*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Bull*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Flash Frontier*, *El Portal*, *Ginosko*, *Short Édition*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *Dead Mule School*, *Selkie*, *New Ulster*, *Lampeter*, and *Adelaide*. He divides his time between Northern California and Western Kansas.

PHILIP KUAN

Philip Kuan is an aspiring Californian writer with a passion for befuddling readers. Some of his favorite authors include Charles Dickens, Tolkien, and Franz Kafka, among others. He has been published in several short story magazines, and is always looking for constructive feedback at <http://philkuan.wordpress.com/>

CATHERINE PARILLA

New to prose, Catherine's short stories have appeared in Paperplates, Sacramento Review, Avalon Literary Journal, and in the e-journal, Courtship of the Winds, is an excerpt from her second novel The Christmas Drive-by. Catherine's poems have been described as stills and shadows of memory and everyday life. They have been published in: Alembic, Compass Rose, Crack the Spine, Diverse Voices Quarterly, descant, Eclipse, Eureka Literary Magazine, Green Hills Literary Lantern, Griffin, Licking River Review, Painted Bride Quarterly, Pisgah Review, POEM, and Wisconsin Review. She taught academic writing at New York University and Montclair University, and Poetry and Creative Writing at Fairleigh Dickinson University where she was a senior lecturer for ten years. Catherine's Ph.D. is in comparative literature from NYU with a focus on literary theory. The Theory for Reading Dramatic Texts is the title of her published dissertation.

SUZANNE O'CONNELL

Suzanne O'Connell's recently published work can be found in Brushfire, Delmarva Review, Good Works Review, North American Review, Paterson Literary Review, Pine Hills Review, Poet Lore, Visitant Lit, Wrath-Bearing Tree, and others. Her two poetry collections, A Prayer For Torn Stockings and What Luck, were published by Garden Oak Press.

ALISON HICKS

Alison Hicks was awarded the 2021 Birdy Prize from Meadowlark Press for Knowing Is a Branching Trail. Previous collections are You Who Took the Boat Out and Kiss, a chapbook Falling Dreams, and a novella Love: A Story of Images. Her work has appeared in Eclipse, Gargoyle, Permafrost, and Poet Lore. She was named a finalist for the 2021 Beullah Rose prize from Smartish Pace, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize by Green Hills Literary Lantern. She is founder of Greater Philadelphia Wordshop Studio, which offers community-based writing workshops.

SAM AMBLER

Mr. Ambler's writing has been published in *Apricity Magazine*, *Christopher Street*, *City Lights Review* Number 2, *Euphony Journal*, *Evening Street Review*, *Glint Literary Journal*, *Headway Quarterly*, *Hearth & Coffin*, *The James White Review*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *The Phoenix*, *Plainsongs Poetry Magazine*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, and *Visitant*, among others. Most recently, he was featured in the anthology *VOICES OF THE GRIEVING HEART*. He has a BA in English, specializing in creative writing of poetry, from Stanford University.

ROB ARMSTRONG

Rob Armstrong mines comedy from his own life as a stay-at-home dad. After graduating from the Wharton School of Business, he worked in communication finance before taking an "early retirement" to look after his two daughters. His first book, *Daddy 3.0: A Comedy of Errors*, published in 2016 (Gear Press), won the 2017 Independent Author Network Award for Best Comedy/Satire Novel. Armstrong lives with his wife and daughters in the Greater Philadelphia area.

KELLY TALBOT

Kelly Talbot has edited books and other content for 20 years for Wiley, Macmillan, Oxford, Pearson Education, and other publishers. His writing has appeared in dozens of magazines and anthologies. He is based in Indianapolis, Indiana, but he spends as much time as possible in Timisoara, Romania.

RICK KUENNING

Rick Kuenning translates lifelong writing and teaching experience into poems informed by a quick and innovative sensibility. His work draws on a long career in international relations and national policy, and on his keen interest in art, culture, religious studies, and nature. In his poems, cultural and political insights are leavened with whimsical reflection and lyrical meditations. He is awed by nature, angered by injustice, and moved by the stories of those whose voices are not heard. After decades living, teaching and working overseas, Rick Kuenning lives in the Appalachian mountains near Asheville, NC.

BS USMA, MA (English) Duke, ABD (English) U. of MD. Teaching: undergraduate English and Philosophy at USMA and USNA.

MARY ANN DIMAND

Mary Ann lives in Colorado where she is turning a small horse property into a mini-farm. She's pretty happy to partner with the resident creatures, even squirrels. But though she admires the tenacity of bindweed it kind of makes her crazy.

JAMES DEMARSE

James DeMarse has been published in Evening Street Review, The Penmen Review, and Valparaiso Fiction Review. He has written a novel, *To Cross a Raging River*, a novella called, *Rescue this Cat*, and has just completed a collection of short stories. As a playwright, he has had Actors' Equity Association showcase productions in New York of two full-length plays: *Knock 'Em Dead at the Image Theater* and *Breaking Through the Clutter* at the 42nd Street Workshop, where he was artistic director for several years. He has also had numerous productions and readings of other full-length and one-act plays. His play *Existing Privilege* was chosen for the Elia Kazan Film Festival at the Actors Studio and given a slot at the Berkshire Playwrights Lab.

LYNN GLICKLICH COHEN

Lynn Glicklich Cohen lives, writes, cooks, listens to podcasts, swims, and walks her dog in Milwaukee, WI. Her poetry and other writing has been published in *Trampoline*, *Front Range Review*, *Saint Katherine's Review*, *Oberon*, *Peregrine*, *Evening Street Review*, and *The Los Angeles Times Magazine*. Her novel, "A Terrible Case of Beauty," was published by Treble Press.

DAVID REUTER

David Reuter has been published in *The Cape Rock*, *Existere Journal*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Perceptions Magazine*, *Sandpiper*, *Sanskrit Literary-Arts Magazine*, *Visitant*, and *Vox Poetica*. David attended William Paterson University's Writer's Conference in 2018 and Rutgers Writers' Conferences in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

DAVID SUMMERFIELD

David Summerfield is a graduate of David N. Myers University, Cleveland, Ohio, with an A.S. in Business Administration where he was editor of the student publication, "Millennium." He is also a graduate of Frostburg State University, Maryland, from which he holds a B.S. degree in Business Administration. He is a military veteran with service in the US Marine Corp and US Army where he served in the Iraq war. He has been an outdoor columnist for the

News-Tribune, Keyser, WV and as a Certified West Virginia Master Naturalist co-editor of “Friends of the 500th,” the official publication of the National Wildlife Refuge located in Canaan Valley, WV.

KIM VENKATARAMAN

Kim grew up in Maine where she now spends the summer. Her short stories have appeared in several publications. “Reclaiming” is part of a book in progress made up of linked short stories set on a fictional island in Maine.

CELIA MEADE

Celia Meade is an MFA writing student at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, studying under Marie Howe, Dennis Nurkse and Jo Ann Beard. She won second place in the Raven Poetry contest for her chapbook “The Ones You Love”. She holds an MFA in painting, has shown internationally and lives in Salt Spring Island, Canada and New York. Her writing has appeared in Lake Effect, Lunar, The Louisville Review, and dozens of other magazines.

KEN MEISEL

Ken Meisel is a poet and psychotherapist from the Detroit area. He is a 2012 Kresge Arts Literary Fellow, Pushcart Prize nominee, winner of the Liakoura Prize and the author of eight poetry collections. Recent collections include: *Our Common Souls: New & Selected Poems of Detroit* (Blue Horse Press: 2020) *Mortal Lullabies* (FutureCycle Press: 2018), *The Drunken Sweetheart at My Door* (FutureCycle Press: 2015), He has work in *Rattle*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Concho River Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *The McGuffin*. His new book, *Studies Inside the Consent of a Distance*, will be published by Kelsay Press in January 2022.

KATHLEEN GLASSBURN

Kathleen Glassburn lives and writes in Edmonds, WA. She is the happy owner of four dogs, two cats, and a horse. Kathleen has an MFA from Antioch University, Los Angeles and has had many short stories published in literary journals. She has a novel, *Making It Work*, and a short story collection, *Where Do Stories Come From?* She is also managing editor of *The Writer’s Workshop Review*, www.thewritersworkshopreview.net For more information please see her website: www.kathleenglassburn.com

MICHAEL SHEN

Micheal Shen was born in China, but has lived in this country for over 70 years. After work as a psychologist, carpenter, and, for

over 30 years, a civil rights lawyer, he retired several years ago. He began writing poetry 5 years ago. His poems appear in Anacua Literary Arts Journal, Poets Choice, Euphony Journal, Valiant Scribes, Hotpoet, Inc., and The Closed Eye Open.

WILL WALKER

Will Walker received his bachelor's degree in English history and literature from Harvard College. He has attended numerous writing workshops with Marie Howe, Thea Sullivan, Gail Mazur, Robert Pinsky, Alan Shapiro, and Mark Doty. He was also an editor of the Haight Ashbury Literary Journal.

CYNDY MUSCATEL

Cyndy Muscatel has written for several publications including The Seattle Times and The Desert Sun. She currently writes a column for STROLL Lake Sherwood. Her fiction, non-fiction, and poetry have been published in many journals including The MacGuffin, Main Street Rag, North Atlantic Review, and Quercus Review. Her collection of published short stories "Radio Days" is available on Amazon. She is working on a memoir of her time teaching in the inner city of Seattle during the Sixties, and teaching memoir writing in Kona, Hawaii.

BRAY MCDONALD

Bray McDonald is a poet and Environmental Educator. Mr. McDonald has been published in numerous journals in the U. S. and Europe including Blue Collar Review, California Quarterly, The Cape Rock, Dash, I-70 Review, Rockhurst Review, Third Wednesday, Chiron Review, Adelaide Literary Magazine, Nod (Can.); and Between These Shores Anthology, Gold Dust in the UK and The Transnational (Ger.). He also has poetry forthcoming in Evening Street Review, Plainsongs, Cholla Needles and New Reader Magazine.

FRANK JAMISON

Frank Jamison's work has appeared in numerous literary journals, including Anthology of Appalachian Writers, Arkana, Avalon Literary Review, Big Muddy, DASH Literary Journal, Glint Literary Journal. His book of poems, Marginal Notes, was published in 2001, and his book of poems, Songs of Unsung People, was published in 2021.

MARCELLE THIÉBAUX

Marcelle Thiébaux has published stories in The MacGuffin, decomP, Delmarva Review, Dogzplot, Avalon, Visitant, Grand

Central Noir, Cream City Review, Home Planet News, Literal Latté, Penmen Review, Starward Tales, Ignatian, Forge, Louisiana Literature, Mount Hope Magazine, and elsewhere. Her books on medieval themes include *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*, *The Writings of Medieval Women and Unruly Princess*, a novel of 13th century Hungary. For her fiction, she received a Pen & Brush Club Award and a Writer's Digest Writing Competition Award. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

ALITA PIRKOPF

Alita's family moved to Salt Lake City where she attended third grade, and then to Seattle, where she attended school from fourth grade through high school. Her father was offered a job opportunity in New York at the same time that she was about to move east to attend Middlebury College in Vermont. The family moved east. Years after graduating from Middlebury, with a degree in sociology, Alita moved to Colorado. She earned a master's degree in English Literature from the University of Denver and became increasingly interested in women's writing, women's voices. Alita sought her own voice. She enrolled in a poetry seminar taught by the poet Bin Ramke. Poetry continues as a long-term focus and obsession.

NICOLETTE REIM

Nicolette Reim is a poet, visual artist and translator who has been published in *Brushfire*, *Maudlin House*, *Mojave River Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Poetic Sun*, *The Rail*, *Glint Literary Journal*, *Voices de la Luna*, and other publications. She studied art at The New York Studio School and creates abstractions from writing and topography. She holds a Master Degree in Life Science from Columbia University and a Master Degree of Fine Arts in Poetry with a Concentration in Translation from Drew University. She is a member of NohoM55 Gallery in NYC.

GLENN ENTIS

Glenn Entis lives in San Francisco, California with his wife. He writes poetry about almost everything except his long career in computer animation and videogames.

IVANOV REYEZ

Ivanov Reyez was an English professor at Odessa College. His poetry is included in *The Cafe Review*, *Eclipse*, *Pinyon*, *The Blue Mountain Review*, *The Mochila Review*, *Chili Verde Review*, *BorderSenses*, *New Texas 2012*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Cooweescoowee*, *Paris Lit Up*, and other journals. He won the riverSedge Poetry Prize 2015. He

is the author of *Poems, Not Poetry* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). His short fiction has appeared in *Sephardic-American Voices: Two Hundred Years of a Literary Legacy*, *34th Parallel Magazine*, *The Mayo Review*, *Texas Short Stories*, *Terra Incognita*, and elsewhere. He has received a Pushcart Prize nomination in fiction.

CAT THOMPSON WYATT

Intuitive, colorful, prolific storyteller and an eccentric free spirit, Cay Wyatt has drawn from experiences placing her in the right place, right time and wrong place at the wrong time. Mother, grandmother, friend, her stories show “slice of life” adventures with a sly sense of humor, She has never turned down a new adventure including sailing, racing, living on sailboats on the Columbia River, San Francisco Bay, Mexico and Florida Cays. Published in several periodicals including *Dunes Review*, *Penmen Review*, *MARY*, *Evening Street Review* and *Good Works Review*. Cat has studied under Julie Cantrell and Story Summit. Pan Houston, Richard Bausch, Steve Almond, Luis Alberto Urrea at renown Tomales Bay and Chautauqua Writers Workshops. She has also attended Master classes and workshops at Kauai Writers. She’s worked with nonprofits, the American Red Cross, law enforcement and as a trauma intervention specialist with ski patrols, police and fire bureaus. Living in Anchorage, Alaska, with her husband and adopted cats – she can still see the water.

ROB COOK

Rob Cook was a founding employee of Pixar and recipient of the first Oscar given for software. A childhood in rural east Tennessee was followed by a period of physical and spiritual wandering that eventually landed him in San Francisco. Along the way, he studied physics, played piano, climbed rocks, and flew planes. His poems appear in *Cider House Press*, *Steam Ticket*, *Whistling Shade*, and others (see robcookpoetry.com). He likes living at the intersection of art, science, inner exploration, and worldly practicality, sprinkled liberally with adventure and fun.

DS MAOLALAI

DS Maolalai has received eleven nominations for Best of the Net and seven for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in three collections; “*Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*” (Encircle Press, 2016), “*Sad Havoc Among the Birds*” (Turas Press, 2019) and “*Noble Rot*” (Turas Press, 2022)

RICK MCKENZIE

Rick McKenzie taught pre-school for many years, then worked as a park ranger. His work has appeared in *The Yale Review*, *Mantis*, *The Round*, *Talking River*, and other literary magazines. His father was also a poet. Rick and Suzanne love dancing, singing, and being outdoors.

STEPHEN SCARANO

Steve Scarano greatly enjoyed his youth and teen years at the now defunct Walker Air Force Base in Roswell. A 1969 graduate of ENMU, his Portales life included work on the El Portal committee and taking several courses with Doctor Jack Williamson. After service as a Marine Corps artillery officer, Steve retired as a police Captain with a three-decade career in a southern California agency. This year was his 14th season as a Trail Angel on the Pacific Crest Trail (call him “Hamburger Helper”) and as a volunteer Dust Devil at a large regional park in San Diego County. He really was a lifeguard.

IRIS LITT

Iris Litt took a break from writing after starting her career, but at the age of 92, returned to authorship. Iris was an award-winning writer. She has had stories, poems, and articles published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Travelers’ Tales*, *Confrontation*, *The Widow’s Handbook*, *The London Magazine*, *The New Renaissance*, *Earth’s Daughters*, and *Rambunctious Review*, as well as many others. El Portal is pleased to be able to publish more of her work.

JOHN DORROH

John Dorroh understands that words are more than some magic potion, that words engage themselves with the soul and never die. He appreciates the work that went into each and every poem that he reads in journals by every author. He thanks them. Three of his poems have been nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 fine journals such as *Feral*, *River Heron*, *Pinyon*, *Burningword*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, & *North Dakota Quarterly*. He had two chapbooks published in 2022.

KATHARINE L. MCKENNA

Katharine L. McKenna holds a BA in American Studies and a minor in Anthropology from Wesleyan University. Her book *Hopis, Tewas, and the American Road*, edited by Willard Walker, was published through the University of New Mexico Press (1986). Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Cobalt Weekly*.

JEFFREY KINGMAN

Jeffrey Kingman's poetry collection, *BEYOND THAT HILL I GATHER*, was published by Finishing Line Press in June 2021. His chapbook, *ON A ROAD*, was published in December of 2019. He is the winner of the 2018 Eyelands Book Award (Greece) for an unpublished poetry book, a finalist in the 2018 Hillary Gravendyk Prize book competition, and a finalist in the 2022 Prime Number Magazine Award for Poetry. He has been published in *PANK*, *Clackamas*, *Visitant*, and many others. Jeff has a Master's degree in Music Composition and has played drums in rock bands most of his life.

JIM KRAUS

Jim Kraus lives in Honolulu. His poetry has appeared in *Hawai'i Review*, *Kinalamten Gi Pasifiku Anthology* (Guam), *Poetry Hawai'i*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *San Marcos Review*, *Cape Rock Poetry Review*, *Neologism*, *Voices de la Luna*, *Another Voice* and elsewhere. He earned a PhD in American Studies with specialization in environmental poetry from the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa. Currently, he is Professor of English at Chaminade University, where he teaches creative writing, environmental literature and surf studies. He also edits *Chaminade Literary Review*. He enjoys swimming, surfing, visiting art galleries and museums, and reading contemporary poetry.

ROBERT ROTHMAN

Robert Rothman lives in Northern California, near extensive trails and open space, with the Pacific Ocean over the hill. His work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, *Willow Review*, and over ninety-five other literary journals in the United States, England, Canada, Ireland, Wales and Australia. Please see his website (www.robertrothmanpoet.com) for more information about him and his work.

ARNOLD YASINSKI

Arnie Yasinski is a retired college administrator, born American but now living in Ireland with his Irish wife. A father and grandfather, he wrote his first poem at fifty. He has published poems in a variety of journals. *Proposition*, his first collection, was published in 2020. His second collection, *God Lives in Norway and Goes by Christie*, appeared in 2021.

ANNE-MARIE DANIZIO

Anne-Marie Delaunay-Danizio is a French-born visual artist and writer living in Waltham, Massachusetts with their long-term partner and two young adult children. The recipient of three master's degrees, in art history, museum studies, and painting, they have exhibited their artworks throughout New England, and recently received a 2022 Emerging artist award at the Cambridge Art Association 2022 Emerging Artists Exhibit, juried by Theo Coulombe. Their writing has been published in Atherton Review, Rue Scribe, Ignatian Literary Review and Alabama Literary Review.

ANNIE WOOD

Annie Wood is an Israeli-American Hollywood native--self-proclaimed creative-compulsive who is easily inspired. Her personal essays, poetry and short fiction have been published in The Huffington Post, Tiny Buddha and P.S. I Love You. Annie has three novels out now: Dandy Day, A Quantum Love Adventure, and her first YA novel, Just a Girl in the Whirl (Speaking Volumes Press) In addition to writing, Wood is also a TV/Film actor and an Internationally exhibited visual artist. anniewood.com

JILL RUSCOLL

Over the past four years, Jill Ruscoll has participated in multiple writing classes with Nancy McMillan and with poet Holly Wren Spaulding. In her work life, she is a creative director in the healthcare field. On her days off, Jill enjoys hiking, biking, climbing, and being outside while spending time with family and friends. Her work appears in the 2022 Connecticut Bards Poetry Review and is forthcoming in The MacGuffin, The Round and the Evening Street Review.

JEFF VOLLMER

Jeff's work has been published in Cider Press Review and Louisiana Literature. He graduated with a degree in English and creative writing from Middlebury College. Jeff lives with his wife, three kids, and dog and cat in New York's Hudson Valley.

NAOMI BINDMAN

Naomi Bindman's articles, essays, and poetry have appeared in anthologies, VTDigger, Mothering, So to Speak, Friends Journal, Consilience, and Import Sky Journal, among others. She has received grants from the Vermont Arts Council, and is on the faculty of the Vermont State Colleges. Naomi has just written her first book, You're the Words I Sing: A Memoir of Song, Sorrow,

and Solace about her journey back to life performing the songs of her daughter, Ellen, who lost her life in a car crash at the age of seventeen.

GAIL NIELSEN

Gail Nielsen holds a Master of Arts Degree in Religious Studies from the University of Windsor (Ontario, Canada) and has a private practice offering psychotherapy and education consulting. Having worked in the mental health field for over two decades, Gail spent a number of years as an online counsellor for a large EAP firm, offering asynchronous text-based counselling. This allowed her to blend her love of writing with her clinical work and to refine her ability to hear the “person behind the words.” She co-authored *The Control Freak’s Guide™ to Living Lightly* which was featured on the national morning show, *Canada A.M.*, and her work has been published (or is forthcoming) in *Kindling Journal*, *Flights*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *Visitant Lit.*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *Evening Street Review*, *Jelly Bucket* and *Wrath-Bearing Tree*. Gail is currently working on her first collection of poetry.

BETH ANSTANDING

Beth Anstandig holds an MFA in poetry from Arizona State University. Her work has appeared in the following publications: *Caesura*, *Hayden’s Ferry Review*, *Sou’wester*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Yale Anglers’ Journal*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Phoenix New Times*, *Hayden’s Ferry Review*, *Reed Magazine*, and *In the Eye* (Thunder Rain Publishing).

KIMBERLY NUNES

Kimberly Nunes’s poems have been published in *The Alembic*, *Blue Light Press Anthology*, *California Quarterly*, *Caveat Lector*, *Evening Street Review*, *Mantis*, *Marin Poetry Center Anthology*, *The Madison Review*, *Sweet: A Literary Confection*, *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*. She sits on the board of *Four Way Books* in New York City and received her MFA in poetry from Sarah Lawrence College. Kimberly’s hobbies include bird-watching, gardening, golf, and tennis.

A.E. SCHULZ

A.E. (Amy) Schulz has been published in *Redaction: Poetry & Poetics*, *Whistling Shade*, *Schuykill Valley Journal of the Arts*, *Poet Lore*, *Glass*, *apt*, *Malpais Review*, *Lullwater Review*, and *Global Graffiti*.



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