

DASH

Literary Journal

13th Edition

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acrimonious humor *Paxton Knox*

you think you know how this ends

my body a tableau for consumption
taste the tripe and offal of my gut

recognize the flavors you fed me
pluck out the brain from my skull

be the authority on its mechanisms
extract finespun bones so you can

fashion my phalanx into a souvenir
penetrate your incisors into my heart
detect, belatedly, that it beat for you
you think you know how this ends
all my parts won't make you whole

culture *Paxton Knox*

research says college students are more stressed than ever
it's time to prove it- who's the most overworked one here?
oh, two hours? i got one. sick, right?
it's sleep deprivation, unmedicated brain folds
four iced coffees, nevergotthedoctor chic
it's sick, in a good way, in a two-thousand and four way
until it's not- until you're sick
a maddening migraine, 'might as well be dead' pain
except in your kidneys now, not your skull
can't vomit your way out of this one
no one answers your snaps now
driving yourself on icy black to a clinic
where are your friends now that you're hydroplaning?
you make it but you're shaking when you hand over your id
granola bars mock you from the vending machine
saint john gives you doxycycline for the infection
but nothing too strong for the pain
there's an opioid epidemic, you selfish asshole
culture mailed off in a little piss cup
evidence of your lifestyle- our culture
have it test-tubed by someone who couldn't understand
you're having the time of your life
the world could die tomorrow
finish your antibiotics
drink more water
pee after sex
you'll be fine
and you'll pay six hundred dollars for the pleasure

Afternoon Bar *Carla McGill*

Looking at a few photos:
my father is there, at the
outside tables, his afternoon
bar. Lit by tequila
and beer, as I can see
from his expression,
his defiant smile. His friends
laugh, beer glasses held up
for the photo. He will stumble
home, as if on broken glass,
as if carrying heavy things,
beneath the clearest night sky.

And Then, the Bees *Brad Garber*

Today, the seedless apple blossoms fell to ground
brittle leaves were under foot in a heated wind
and pollen flew where it wished to fly, neither
on wings of purpose, nor to waiting destination.

Wilting flowers bend to earth as if in prayer
root stalks crackling beneath a stagnant sun
banks of dust clouds building over distant fields
bereft of bird song or the symphony of life.

Waves of pesticides, herbicides, broken carapaces
blow through thinning oxygen like thick smoke
diseases looking for absent hosts and settling
on piles of whitening bones stripped of flesh.

We watched them go, the bees, those that stung
danced, sensed the magnets of the universe
and created environmental paintings of life
the demise of the tiny, demise of a world.

Angels and Altoids *Doris L. Ferleger*

When she tells people she's a widow
they say, *I'm sorry for your loss.*
She says, *Thank you.* Doesn't say

it's been two years, doesn't say
she's taken a lover, selects only
the red M&M's, dissolves one,

then another, onto his tongue,
serial communions
with this man who makes shadow

puppets on her wall,
who was once a minister
who whispers, *Let us procreate.*

God and angels
are suckers for Altoids,
so she buys four tins

at a time, drops the hot
cinnamon discs into the crystal
bowl in her center hall

where he grabs
a handful and mounts
the stairs two at a time.

Is it a lie or is it a secret—
her lover tells her
he wants to be the one

to die first (too many
losses already borne),
then enters her pulsing

places where angels
are not needed or perhaps are
present all the time?

Aspen, Autumn *Marty Carlock*

Contemplate a poem like a leaf
 yellow, heart-shaped, slick
I picked it up in disbelief
 of autumn and finality

Leaf and summer fade. And so does love.
I kept in in a book somehow, somewhere
I sometimes find it, wonder at the then, the now

Today my son picks up its twin
 holds it out to me
 not knowing it's a talisman
it twists and dances in the air
 displays its real identity

It is the ace of spades. I let it fall
It never was a valentine at all.

Battle *Marty Carlock*

The bird wakes me up
 slashing at the slider door glass
Fighting with himself
a metaphor for us all

Every time he attacks he shits
 another metaphor
 about the nastiness of war.

Attica Prison Rebellion, September 13th, 1971: Murdered Hostage Richard Lewis Provides Play-by-Play Film Breakdown to CBS Evening News, Doing His Best Herbert Morrison Impersonation. *Paul David Adkins*

It's practically still.

Now, the chopper, over the field, and a number of men.

It's starting to rain again. Jesus, in between the slack drops.

And now, the fire. The fire, rising and falling and crashing.

Get out of the way, and get this flaming ruin.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's smoke
and a smoking frame. Choking.

I can hardly, hardly.

Breathe, just lay there. I'm going

to step inside. Screaming.

Stop for a minute.

Five hundred feet into the sky,
and, honest, the worst I've ever.

**Attica Prison Rebellion, September
13th, 1971: Murdered Inmate Barry J. Schwartz
Sat Us Down for Storytime** *Paul David Adkins*

but the autopsy told the tale
of a windpipe and a lung
punctured perfectly, expertly.

Thoracic trauma and an icepick shank.

There was a story,
but it ended between the third and fourth rib,
sternal angle and jugular notch.

O, clavicle, manubrium.

Never mind.

It's a terrible story,
a terrible ending.

Look away
with your two good eyes.

**Attica Prison Rebellion, September
13th, 1971: Ronald Werner, Murdered Hos-
tage, was Unable to Determine Who Shot
Him** *Paul David Adkins*

though he tried. The shots, from everywhere:
catwalk, roof. Everywhere

but the yard where the Muslims who locked arms around
him, cried,

Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim, and fell.

He learned a lot about God that day, a lot
about the sound of rounds spattering the mud at his feet.

He screamed to Holy Mary
Mother of God, the Lord is with Thee.
Blessed art Thou.

He forgot where he was:
censors of powder,
red stained windows shattering.

Peace, be still. There is no God but Allah, blessed be, be blessed.

Bartók *Alison Hicks*

In the afternoon dark, harvest time,
the road covered with leaves,
the stranger with the wax cylinders
has persuaded the oldest woman in the village to sing.
Melody winds from her throat
out through the fields.
An oompah band is setting up on the green
for the evening's dance.
Chords spill
out church doors.
In the fields,
men and women look up,
wipe faces with their kerchiefs.
Across an ocean
strange intervals carry
shadows of late afternoon.

Bartók in America *Alison Hicks*

Every country has a music
running underneath like blood in veins.
To hear you must descend.
In a country now lost,
I traveled beyond edifices and artifices
to dirt-road villages, and then here,
where I am an exile, a wrapper on a bit of cheese,
discarded among so many others, collecting in the gutter.
The wind blows, and blows us with it.
I miss the strange old songs.
I should have wished to be a peasant in the Magyar countryside
when I was a boy, instead of some performer pounding on keys.
The music here, of my adopted country,
I can make no sense of it. Like some old married man
my ear has become indifferent,
so finely tuned to one it must forsake all others.
Koussevitzky out of pity offers me a commission.
I accept because it lets me dream
in the tones my ear remembers.

Beauty Marks *Cara Losier Chanoín*

I shave with cheap, pink razors:
six for a dollar.
I prop my legs
across the bathtub's parted lips,
like the awkward angles
of utilitarian bridges
yawning over rivers.

The choreography of my hands
is automatic,
as though I am playing my own body
like a violin.
The blades sound rough
against my dry skin,
like someone scraping frost
from a winter windshield.

I am never as kind
to my body
as I should be.
I kid myself
that things like this
keep me tough.
The cheap razors
dot my legs with blood,
but I wear these wounds uncovered,
like badges.
Like dares.

Before you, *Frances Koziar*

I thought I knew what love meant.
I thought it meant happiness
and comfort. I thought it meant
how the world can change into a beautiful place
when you see the right smile. I thought
it meant discovering a missing piece, someone
who could bring out the best in you. I thought
it meant finding yourself in someone else
and the joy in that discovery.

After you,
I wondered if love was a sign that you're sick inside.
I wondered if everyone changes
when you move in with them. I worried
that everyone lies through their teeth, speaking sweet nothings
while they hurt you again and again. I questioned
if I knew what love even was and if hate always
gets mixed in. After you,
I looked at myself in the mirror and feared
that I'd found myself in you.

Moments *Frances Koziar*

They come and go like a scratch
in a record, clip and stutter
every round, in every
measure of my life: I didn't know
how many moments I thought of you
until the thoughts brought pain, didn't know
how you had infused yourself
into the patchwork quilt of my day
like an essential oil stain,
bleeding lavender into every
shaky inhale, slipping into the cracks
in my heart even as I welcomed you
through the door, devoted myself
to giving you more than the world
until one morning I had no one left
to give to.

Blind Man Blues *Rees Nielsen*



The Bomb and Me *Denise Thompson-Slaughter*

They say the Cuban Missile Crisis only lasted thirteen days, but it seemed to last a lot longer as a psychological force in the lives of some of us Baby Boomers. It was merely the hottest spike in the long Cold War with the Soviet Union. It felt as if half of my elementary school years were punctuated by the siren and the dive under the desk. In junior high school, it was acknowledged that some kids could no longer fit under the little desks—which never would have protected us from anything more than flying window glass anyway—so we assumed “the position” in the windowless hallway instead. Sometimes the siren went off once or twice a week; then, that fearful October, it peaked at once a day, before settling back into a weekly or twice weekly pattern.

My parents were never much on talking about politics or current events, even though we lived in the Washington, D.C., suburbs. But things changed that fall. I noticed how tense they were. Only my four-year-old brother was unaffected, and we tried to keep him in the dark. But even he couldn't help but notice when my mother started storing canned food in the basement. She and my father had an argument about it then.

He said it was useless—the basement would be a joke in a nuclear war. One of the local newspapers had a target painted on the front page. The bull's-eye was D.C., where my father worked as an accountant for

the U.S. Post Office Department. Our suburb was in the second ring outside of the bull's eye. We wouldn't be melted to a blotch of grease immediately, but without a fallout shelter we would certainly die from a firestorm or radiation poisoning. We probably wouldn't die immediately, but we would die, soon and ugly. You had to have a fallout shelter or you didn't have a fighting chance. So-and-so down the street was building a fallout shelter for his family, Dad said, and so was what's-his-name on the next block. But they were expensive to have built—how could we afford it?

Dad, whom I'd never seen read anything but the newspaper, bought magazines with fallout-shelter blueprints in them. But they were far beyond his skills as well as his budget, and the number of things you had to think of—like air purification, disposal, a gun for self-defense, and medical supplies for every contingency—were overwhelming to him. As was the new information that a family in our ring of the bull's-eye would probably have to stay in a fallout shelter for decades until the radiation broke down enough for the ground and the water to be safe. Some newspapers said the new bombs were so powerful that people would have to stay underground for 100 years.

Dad turned sour on the idea; he started making fun of the people who had shelters or who were paying thousands of dollars to have them built.

"If a bomb is dropped," he said, on his fourth beer of the night, "the people with shelters will have to fight off all their panicked neighbors who will be trying to get in! They'll be attacked, and they'll have to shoot their

friends to save themselves.” The idea was pretty disgusting to us. I tried to imagine what it would be like if we had one and our immediate neighbors didn’t. Who would panic and try to force their way in? Could we shoot Mrs. O’Brien with her new baby? I didn’t think so. If Dad was drinking, would he accidentally shoot his own foot—or worse yet, one of us by accident? Probably.

One day in seventh grade, in “New Math” class, we were saved the onerous task of struggling with bizarre base-systems when the teacher assigned us an essay. An essay in math class? Yes: “Suppose you have a fallout shelter, a big one that holds ten people. It’s possible that you’ll be the only ones on earth to survive a nuclear war. Here is a list of twenty people, along with their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, there’s a medical doctor, but he has diabetes and only a six-month supply of insulin. And there’s a wealthy banker with bad breath and no skills at all, but he promises to stock the shelter with two years’ worth of supplies if he’s let in. It’s your shelter and you have to decide which other nine people to let in, and which eleven to condemn to almost certain death. Write an essay about which nine people you’d let in and why. Include a sentence on each of the others explaining why they were left out. How do you decide? No lottery or chance system is allowed.” There were no right or wrong answers, of course. The teacher, along with the rest of us, was infected with the current anxieties—and no doubt sick of trying to get us to comprehend New Math. Or maybe he wanted to assure himself that we were capable of some form of thought; that we weren’t all the logic-deficient idiots we appeared to be when confronted with Base 6.

Years later, around Christmas 1970, when I was twenty, my

grandfather started railing about the sins of my generation. We were all lazy, dirty, drug- and sex-fiends. Well, in part it was true. We weren't dirty, but we were hedonistic, had few individual goals, no long-range plans, and didn't work any harder than we had to in order to get by. I was usually quiet and well behaved around my grandparents, but I lost my temper that afternoon and told him why we were the way we were—not calmly, but with rage, tears, at the top of my lungs. How dare he hand us a world so screwed-up, so clearly doomed, and expect us to work hard and be achievement-oriented; to turn our backs on any chance to have fun, when we were always either scared or depressed, knowing we might die at any minute?! I had nightmares almost once a week about nuclear war; such nightmares were part of the inheritance of my generation.

To him, though, we were just spoiled because we hadn't had to suffer through the Great Depression. That was the formative experience of his generation, just as the First World War had been for his parents and World War II had been for his children. Just as 9/11 is for many people in the United States today.

For my grandfather's generation, the Cuban Missile Crisis really did only last thirteen days. The Soviets blinked. Then life went back to normal, end of story. Besides, they knew God would never let the Commies blow up America. My grandfather was shocked at my reaction and sorry to hear that I had such bad dreams. I was shocked too. It was the first time I had expressed that rage so directly; the first time I ever even thought cohesively about it. I knew that racism made me furious, that the Vietnam War made me furious; but it was bigger than that—it was all of a piece, this

insane, terror-filled world that I was about to inherit. But almost as quickly as I formulated it, I turned my back on it. It was like staring into the sun, and one couldn't face it directly for long because the pain was too overwhelming—and too dangerous. I guess my generation kept its eyes on its shadow, knowing that the sun was still there, a big continuously exploding fireball in the sky.

Of course, we weren't the first generation to be afraid of war—wars have been fought for thousands of years for land, religion, ideas, money, and oil; for greed, stupidity, or power. But we were the first to be faced with a kind of war that would end only when we were all dead: every man, woman, child, dog, cat, bird, horse, whale, tree, and shrub of us.

So I never made plans more than a few weeks in advance; I never had goals, and, like Peter Pan, I never expected to grow up. I honestly and truly never believed I would even make it to twenty-five. When my parents discouraged me from going to college, I agreed with them for once. I just wanted to get out and start living as soon as possible. I wanted to get my own apartment and live fast, and I succeeded. I got a secretarial job and managed to move away from home two months after I turned eighteen. I was twenty-three before it occurred to me that I may have made a mistake. I was alive and I had never expected to be. I had made no plans for adulthood, and I was poorly equipped. I'd had lots of adventures, but I hadn't died, and the future began to look longer somehow. I set my very first goal, ever: I decided to get a college degree. (It took eleven years, mostly at night.)

Sometimes I feel frustrated to have “wasted” so many years; for a while I felt old and disadvantaged, compared to young-

er peers, for having missed the typical college experience. Many in the Baby Boom went through their life changes a decade later than the following generation, so that we were often working, partying, competing with, and starting our families with people who were ten years younger than us. Now, compared to the ever-increasing lower economic brackets and the job situation for Millennials, I realize that Baby Boomers were, in some ways, very lucky indeed. The late 1960s, when we came of age, was an economic boom time. Few of us were psychologically ready to take full advantage of that in the same way that today's college-age kids probably would; however, we were able to easily find and support ourselves on low-wage jobs: a thing that is certainly not possible today. I vacillate between feeling sorry for today's youth and—like every previous generation does of the ones that follow—thinking they are spoiled, materialistic, and self-centered. I think they could not possibly have had the same nightmares I had.

The nightmares are gone now—except for a couple shortly after that awful day when the Twin Towers fell. Still, every time we've bought a house, I would not even consider one without a basement. In every place I've ever lived—in five different states—and in every office where I've worked, I've identified for myself the direction in which the nearest military target lay; the direction from which the nearest nuclear power plant accident would blow. I have to know to which corner to run, on which highway to flee. I have an old suitcase packed with two changes of clothes for everyone in the house. I've never told that to anyone before, not even my husband. But I'm willing to bet that I'm not the only one in my generation (or of the 9/11 generation) who thinks of these things.

Bones *Meredith Davies Hadaway*

Body of mine, I
abandon all to
you. Carry these
bones through
shorter days
and endless nights
as you will.

I thank you
for the sway of
sleep, the soft
music of sunrise.
For all the promises
you never made,
so always keep.

The Calendar *Iris Litt*

My mother asked me for a calendar
that didn't cost anything.
She made me return
the one I'd bought.
She would only have the kind
stores gave out free.
"Well, they don't anymore, mother."
"Well, they must, they always did
when I was a child."

Now a calendar has arrived
not from a store, I was right about that,
but from a wildlife group;
they'd like a donation.
I could have told her it was free
and sent the donation secretly.
The calendar even has baby animals on it
multiple births for some.
She would have loved looking at it
on her institutional wall
but it came after she had gone.

Well Organized *Iris Litt*

I'm planning on moving out of this world.
I'd like to leave my house clean and neat for the kids.
But how can I make it come out even—
the food, the unfiled folders, the clippings,
the unpaid bills, the wash, for instance.
I mean, something you wore at the last minute
will be dropped into the washing machine.
Try as you may to stay ahead of it,
they will find pieces of you
which you considered private
or just didn't want to burden them with.
It's a noble intention, but don't try too hard.
Envy those who complacently
let others clean up the mess.

The Carpenter *Kristi Nimmo*

What else is there after dappled shade encroaches upon memories and the tree grows tighter? As his memories left, he became even more talented with wood. The gumball tree his wife had hired three men to exorcise from the front lawn one springtime--when the geese still flew in random patterns to the neighborhood pond that later would become a public works runoff for rainwater--birthed the first of many totems. Hunks of wood lathed and polished into sturdy tops for TV stands with deep veins of ebony running through them shored up the feeling of life sprouting while the air outside shouted it's winter! but he still forgot his coat to go to the mailbox to collect the bills and catalogs and flyers. If he could get into a boat and find his way to the deep, blue sea where his daughter now lived, he might find out how the earth turned into the sun to bring back the completeness of thinking. What was one to do with the gaps that erased the nomenclature of people he knew? He sat forward on his armchair, his hands folded, expecting the details of his history to fold in like a tongue laid upon a block of salt. Meanwhile the clocks his wife wound and unwound, and from which she pulled out old batteries and put in new, ticked and gonged away. She gave him white, sport socks to wear. She sang "A Sentimental Journey." She handpicked lint from knickknacks. She ran the vacuum. He sat in a chair. He couldn't follow a story to read. Nothing filled up his mind.

He knocked along the log with the bark on it. Was this from that tree? If he could ask a question someone might answer. He wouldn't be alone. There had been a mulberry knocked down by a storm. Was this from that tree? A pine felled after it was diseased. Was this from that tree? One ought not to throw out wood of any kind if it could salvage a life with a single chisel mark. His wife piled up the mulberry logs in the fireplace that for thirty years sat cold. She asked him if he remembered them.

In that basement corner, he began carving upon the remainder of the tree as if he were a rabbit horning in on the furniture. There was no future in making these live edge pieces that he did not know had a name and did not know was a trend until one daughter suggested he sell them. (You don't get to be the boss of your memories. Someone else will take them if you're lucky and plant them in the ground.)

Was it possible to die from an insatiable thirst while forgetting there was water from which to drink? A house, a wife, two daughters, a bank account, good health, a military record--he remembered these. The tree had rings to record each year, but they weren't his years. He had lived through them. He had lived in them. He had put his ear to the surface as if laying it upon the ironing board his wife wore out. He never could get out.

Catch and Release *Ryan Havelly*

Under the right dusk,
when sun and moon flank
the dying lead sky, rainbow trout float
like balloons to the curling river top,
chasing those mayflies and gnats
who can't tell river from sky.
They leave their world, the rainbows,
unworried, unfearful, dive up
into a place that might not be there,
some old truth prodding them
into the comfort of knowing
they'll crash through the sky
and fall home again, fed. So, we pull them
into the boat, watch them gulp
at dry nothing, and see in their eyes
that old truth: everything bites back,
even the sky.

Changing Places *Elizabeth Templeman*

It was an evening in June, and we were camping at the Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, my husband and I, our three kids, their uncle, and his dog. It had been a long drive from the interior of BC to southernmost Alberta: twelve hours magnified to close to eternity by those three kids and that dog. But it took no time to spill out from vehicles and make ourselves at home in our two campsites, punctuated by tents, truck and car, clotheslines and bicycles. For whatever convergence of landscape and circumstance, this would turn out to be one of our best family camping trips, although we wouldn't have known that then.

The warm and chalky Milk River runs through the park, carving its way through the sandstone and scrub brush. For us, it was all so exotic: hoodoos and middens, wind-rippled grasses, and skies vibrating with birdsong. Rooting around in the high grass, we startled—and were startled by—a porcupine the size of a small tank.

Just after breakfast the next morning, my daughter and I went exploring. I've always loved a walk, and the river beckoned. She was likely seeking a respite from the company of four males, two being loud and rambunctious younger brothers.

The morning sky was stunningly blue, the park humming with life. A faster walker, I led the way and we chatted as we walked. Blessed with a sharp eye and sure compass,

Nicole navigated from behind, our rudder. The path threaded over fallen logs and through grasses, alongside the imposing formations of rock and sand that typify the badlands. It could hardly have been more perfect when—amid our synchronized footfalls, the drone of insect and bird, the steady flow of river current, our quiet chatter—a muted staccato buzzing caught my ear. I froze. My feet stopped. My mind, however, raced, summoning rattle snake notices we'd seen posted through the park.

Never mind their advice to carry on, calmly. I was paralyzed. I might have grown old there, had Nicole not, calmly and without a word, stepped out ahead of me and made her way past the ledge. As naturally as though it were choreographed, the daughter, fourteen, led her mother out of danger. I could claim that I followed to keep her in view, drawn by the impulse to protect. But in truth, I suffered a systems crash, and she rose to the occasion. Reflecting back—well removed from the tangle of emotions competing for release in the moment—I recognize the incident as one of those glimpses parents will have, of the person your child is becoming: small moments of grace to which we are probably, more often than not, oblivious. What I'd glimpsed was the understated fortitude that characterizes our daughter as we know her today. There on the Milk River, though, I couldn't see much past the cowardice of her shaken mother.

Years later, there was this morning in March when a fresh snowfall interrupted a week of mild weather. My husband was away visiting family, leaving our youngest and I sharing house and chores. James, then seventeen, was getting ready to catch the school bus. I was on my way to an early meeting at work. Backing out the door, I turned to wish him a good day. In reply, James told me to drive carefully. I said not to worry: I always did. “It’s not you I worry about, Mom,” he said solemnly. “It’s the other drivers.” Shutting the door behind me, I had topped up the dog dish and was down the driveway before fully appreciating the irony of the moment.

Roles change, sometimes just for an instant. Like a flash forward, it will happen when you least expect it—on a glorious walk along the Milk River, or tumbling out of the house for work on a frosty March morning. But despite these previews that life affords us (or confounds us with), I don’t think we ever come close to anticipating the challenge of assuming a new role. Never mind the awkwardness of shedding that more familiar role from which we’ll emerge. Despite rituals and rites of passage that surely evolved to prepare us for such transitions, I remember feeling exactly like an impostor as an incoming university student. And again as a new teacher, as a new wife, as a mother.

There might be no better example of how we endeavour to ready ourselves for a new role than how we prepare to have a child. Becoming parents for the first time, we so intentionally work at change—one as ordinary as

life itself. Yet, despite the abounding intentions and ardent preparations, becoming a parent will blindside us.

Change can feel so odd, sometimes exactly like failure. The morning comes when, after years of being nurtured and guided, the child assumes the role of protector. The kids assert themselves, advancing even as we retreat, moving into competence in ways and realms we'd never have imagined. They overtake us in intellectual acuity, in taste for indie music, in social connectedness, in thirst for adventure. They take charge of car, kitchen, computer—even of one another.

Our kids used to tease me for my incessant nagging about my boring insistence on taking vitamins and getting enough sleep. Resisting obsolescence, maybe, I washed their socks, baked batches of cookies and worried about them, persisting beyond all reason to mother them. All the while, I inhabited the role my mother played. My mother: who, at 90 would have *loved* to do my laundry, to cook for me. Who worried about me with barely an inkling of what my life was like. Ours was mostly a telephone connection by then: my role, as daughter, was to hear about the multitude of annoyances of senior housing, about her ill-fitting dentures, and her twisting spine. My role, in this phase, was to listen and commiserate; to share innocuous details of my children's lives, while keeping to myself my own nagging fears and preoccupations. My mother and I had changed places. And yes, the same change or role that will surely come to pass between my children and me. It will take us all by surprise, I expect, though we've been rehearsing for years.

Chop Suey *Tony Howarth*
after Edward Hopper, 1929

the way she talks at me
rhapsodizes Chinese food
skims the menu cataloging every dish
like I've never been here before
like I've never eaten Chinese before
when I tell her
I was hit by a bike in the city
she comes up with her own accident
bigger than mine more people involved
and her job as a secretary
young man in the office
with a moustache she's got a crush on
wrote her a mash note
her mother's going through menopause
chrysanthemums are the best flowers
to plant in a window box
nothing I have to say worth listening to
so why am I here when anyone
could service her anyone in this restaurant
except they laugh interrupt each other
and that would make her chew on her chopsticks
even when I ask her for the soy sauce
she passes it without a break in the stream
whatever she's babbling
I'm here but not really
more alone than sitting at home
next to my window.

Same Same Same *Tony Howarth*

I am a cat
a cat that *is*
also a cat that *was*
the cat that was
a duplicat
same fur
same tail
same whiskers
my owner loves me
same way
he loved
the cat that was
same tinkle toys to chase
same bed to sleep
same bowl for food
don't remember
being me
but he says
he missed me
so much
that when I died
he froze me
made me new
from genes
of who I was
and when I die again
he'll do it again

the cat that was
and is
and will be
will be
will be

Chinese Proverb *Gerard Sarnat*

The best time to plant
a tree's twenty years ago
--- second best time's NOW.

Chinese Takeout *Vincent J. Tomeo*

Mama's last wish was to eat Chinese food,
Beef Chow Fung.

Fed mama,
against a doctor's recommendation,
"She cannot eat this food," he said.
"What difference does it make!
She is dying."

Mama ate the whole portion.
"Mama! How was it?"
"Delicious, thank you,
I love you."
Mama fell asleep.

Morning, she was dead.

Over the Fence *Vincent J. Tomeo*

Mama!
Every day for five years,
I visited your grave.

One Christmas day,
I was late.

The cemetery gates were locked.
Climbed a bronze fence,
left my tracks in the snow.

Confessional *Eileen Van Hook*

In the deep dark
my much younger knees
rested on padded leather
damp palms pressed
together as if in prayer
the small door slid open
with its distinctive rasp

 bless me father
 for I have sinned

 lying lips whispered
 a litany of venial sins
 my black heart held fast
 to the mortal ones
 rendering every confession
 that followed invalid

Conversations in the Land of Nod

Gregg Shapiro

You pay too much attention to what I say
in my sleep. Press an ear to my sleepwalking
lips. Take copious notes with a flashlight pen.

At breakfast, I am cautious. Certain I will find
an acceptable interpretation of my dreams in a box
of sugar-coated bran flakes. I am afraid to meet

your eyes, filled to the lids with accusation, doubt.
What could I say awake, vertical, to convince you
otherwise? You talk as if you invented language,

but it is your silence that says the most. I have
become an expert at breaking the code with
the aid of a seventh sense, radar, a yardstick.

Cool to the Touch *John Tustin*

I was lying in bed alone tonight and I ran my fingers through my hair.
My hair was, as always, cool to the touch
And I thought about how when she was here
She would run her fingers through my hair and marvel about
How my hair was always cool to the touch.
I thought about that and then I thought about her for a while
And then I thought about something else
And now I'm thinking about
How wonderful it would be if a woman was here right now,
Taking off her clothes for me and getting into this bed,
Her breasts bare – one in my palm, my mouth on the other.
I'd look at her naked body beside me and
She would run her fingers through my hair and remark in my ear,
"Is your hair always this cool to the touch?"

Dance, Katrin at a Used Paper Warehouse,
Katrin Dohse 2018 *Christopher Paul Brown*



Daybreak at Bay *Ruth Ticktin*

– It	– I	– Go
is	am	on
to	so	up,
see	joy	add
the	ful	lit
sun	now	rays
rise,	look,	upon
step	days	blue
free –	open –	bath –

– as the world ascends into order, as worlds forms seasons ascend descend into tides
developing our practiced lives –

– salty water flows up our nose, into eyes forming tears healing sores down to the toes –

– continuous moving light reflects on the bay darkened with clouds,
catch the brief brightness –

– hallelujah amen selah
pause to listen as waves swoosh over boulders, birds sing –

– praises to sun ra, chirping overhead swooping
ducks lost wander drakes locate water –

Waves of salt and rain, spraying rocks, saturating sands, channeling fish upstream,
a seabed for plant life.

Overhead clouds fight for space from sun's power and rain's wrath,
humidity against heat and hate.

Hit us again blacken the bay electrify up above,
sun rays healing seawater steady clouds skyward.

ja ra ya ah la
 nurture us
 sea sun sky
 selah

Footsteps, a pantoum *Ruth Ticktin*

Children play while Mama cooks, until
She freezes, listening to boots stomping up the stairs
Uniforms come for the men living at home
“No,” we silently scream to the footsteps. “Don’t take them”

They freeze, hearing the feet stomping to the door
Mama tells us about that night – after, we are never the same
“No,” she urgently pleads to the forces. “Don’t take them”

That was then – Nazis
This is now – ICE

Papa retells stories of that night – afterwards, never the same
Fear, desperation, footsteps – again come crashing up the stairs
Tearing families apart, falling pieces, haunting shakes
Uniforms come for the children seeking safe home

Escaping terror at home, children taken from Papa and Mama
Ripping relatives apart, pieces falling, we shake haunted
Families play, while dreaming of peace

That was then, footsteps – we heard His story
This is now, not merely – our History

Ode to Stories *Ruth T'ickin*

I was lying in bed alone tonight and I ran my fingers through my hair.
Charlotte unravels her web
Alice wanders in awe
Delilah cuts off the orange braids
so Pippi can no longer lift the horse

Toy Story's troubled kid beheads our dear dolls
Books are torn, tapes unraveled
the view gets hazy, the touch turns vague

Nancy is clueless, Ariel is finless
Dorothy is lost, Annie waits for tomorrow
We can't forget the tune
as the prom, the circus, the farms vanish

Witches, elves, phantoms, all hiding.
Ocean waves rise and crash, proving something
as elders whisper fables to children,
tales are retold, passing throughout the lands

Written on yellowing paper, stuck securely in bottles
legends thrown in water
Chronicles typed Detailed docs blogged
sent by net, clouds accessed, recited from air

Last elements destroy destruct – enlighten
We sit around, chant our sagas,
drink the cool water, fly round about the sky.

Forget burning books,
watch the fire dancing on earth
As light soars from the flames
Picture only scenes – sets – stars – shapes – scripts – songs
Endlessly – Stories

Balance and Bounce *Ruth Ticktin*

He is a come-what-may and they're also a holiday
They and he swap roles helping to balance their full handful
He's a glass half full, possibly half empty
They say "Stay positive, press down the awful"

Thus, they trade balancing
armfuls as an exacting daily dance
Talking works so they cope
hopeful while holding pieces together
She says "Be affirming keep pushing back
hold your head up, look ahead don't backtrack"
Please – keep on moving on

Dealing while speaking, they notice
parts of the day held together
roped up with fragments of deep dreams

Says he to they
"You're the best thank you
look forward, pave the way then lean on"
Again, they're off – bouncing to and fro
waiting until decisions can stick

They to she “Say thank you, you’re the greatest”
She is a cup half empty
 although some days the cup’s half full
Back and forth ideas pass
 a weighty process to decision
At the outcome of her day’s glory
she emerges celebratory

They speak while balancing their watchful hopes
heads put together at last deciding –
deal with her, help him out, give them a chance

They are speaking day to day
through bumps and bops on the way
thus, and so the bobbling balance halts
up down the bouncing reels then plummets
for one crucial moment every day

Balance and bounce – they drop they stop
Wobbling at last – they stand they land.

Look & Listen *Ruth Ticktin*

difficult yes for us to see
to look to watch to visualize
or put ourselves front on the scene directly

impossible so for us to listen
to hear to take note to pick up
or soak in sounds that reverberate around

take in the sights, get-a-load-of, keep the eyes peeled
we shall pay attention lend an ear give heed
observe where we'll be led to, add an extra moment

patience demanding a follow through
to use our senses in full, before
jumping to conclusions, retreating to comfort zones

Joyous Jumps – Feel it deep
Soulful Songs – Listen, yeah
Virtuous Vistas – Hear all and
Look out

Defeat, Denial, and *Downton Abbey*

Bethany Bruno

It was supposed to be a good day.

It should have been a nice, relaxing day of touring a museum dedicated to one of my favorite TV shows, *Downton Abbey*. The show had unknowingly been my saving grace that last year while I was grieving the untimely death of my father to cancer. Instead of running that film reel in my mind of my dad gasping for air one last time, I threw myself into the lives of the Crawley family and their luxurious lives of British aristocracy. My mother, who had not only lost her husband but also began her own battle with cancer merely two weeks after his death, also became engulfed in the *Downton Abbey* world. It was our fantastical escape from the cruel reality of what our lives had become. Lady Mary, the English Countryside, and the glamorous early twentieth century beckoned to me. Hours upon hours were spent watching episodes until the early morning. I couldn't allow my mind to focus on anything but this show. My reality was not allowed to interrupt for any other reason than if my Mother needed a back rub and pep talk before falling back asleep in the early morning hours.

After a year of recovery and waiting, our new life was beginning to take shape post-death of my dad and post-cancer treatment. Due to the extensive chemotherapy sessions, my mom's overall health was recovering at a snail's pace. Though she was now in remission,

she would never physically be the same again. This was evident by her slow movements, newfound clumsiness, and inability to physically exert herself in anyway. The mother I once had, who was so energetic and ready for the adventure of the day ahead, now appeared as a totally different person. Whoever she was, she was not my mother, that I knew for sure.

After weaving in and out of the I-95 lunch traffic and arriving within West Palm Beach, FL, I felt a small rush of excitement. As I parked the car and turned off the ignition, my mom took a breath, opened her passenger door and stepped out into the Florida sunshine. I stepped out and began to walk ahead, knowing full well she would be long behind me due to her inability to walk a normal speed. Up ahead, I turned around and like clockwork, my mom dug around in her purse to find and light up a cigarette. She puffed with every other small step she took as I faced forward and refused to let her ruin my happiness at that moment.

But there was someone else with us, or should I say, within me. She is “Bully Bethany,” a term my mother has affectionately created. Bully Bethany or as I call her, BB, is angry, quick to speak out when some kind of bullshit is thrown her way, and she’s someone who wants to lash those around her with hateful words. Seeing my mother barely walking while lighting up the very thing that beckons her cancer to return, awakens BB from her nap, sending anxiety throughout my back. “You’ve got to be kidding me, right? Even after all of the chemo that wrecked her body to the point of kidney failure, she’s having a smoke?”

BB said. BB begins to scream about inside my mind. I could sense the warm tears stream down her face, as I ignored BB's little temper tantrum. Like a whiny little kid, I told her to stop it and to shut it. No one would be ruining this day for me.

In our excitement over the prospect of seeing actual props and costumes that the actors wore from *Downton* on full display, we planned on eating lunch across the street from the museum. We sat down, ordered our lunch, and began to chat. "I'm so glad that we're getting a chance to do this today," she said. "I can't remember the last time we were here in West Palm Beach."

I nodded as we reminisced about the "good days" of leisurely lazy days spent having lunch out amongst the hustle of downtown. As she sat there, hands folded like a good little schoolgirl, I couldn't help but notice how different my mom looked to me. With the loss of my father and through her own cancer battle, my mom has lost her once energetic sparkle. There's no longer a fire behind her eyes, she's just empty emotionally. Physically and spiritually, my mother has changed in so many ways that it's hard to believe this woman is my mother. The same mother who fifteen years' prior, took me to this exact same restaurant after an afternoon spent watching *Romeo and Juliet* at the Kravis Center. I remember the drive up, listening to the radio and hearing Nickelback's "How you Remind Me." My mom really liked that song, as did I. Music, on occasion, was one of the few things we could somewhat agree on, during my teenage angst years. Now, we occasionally agree on television or movies, but even that is rare. This trip to the museum, is in a lot of ways, a chance for us to reconnect.

The waiter, dressed head to toe in white, brought us our meals: Chicken Farfalle Pasta for me and a Cuban Sandwich for my mom. The oval plates were huge, with a hefty amount of food that could easily feed two or three starving people. As I grabbed the fork, I warned my mother to not eat too much food, because it would definitely make her IBS act up. One of the more hindering side effects of chemotherapy is the havoc it wrecks on your digestive system. Too much food or stress can send you running to the bathroom with absolute urgency. You feel as if your insides are on fire and that it can only be put out by exorcising it from your bowels. “You know what happens when you eat too much,” I said, “You don’t want to be stuck in a bathroom in the museum.” She nodded in agreement, but as she bit down on her sandwich, joy began to emulate off of her. “This is so good!” she said.

By the end of lunch, my plate was still covered in pasta. Her plate, however, was mostly free with broken potato chips sprinkled on the side. We paid and began to walk to the museum, bought our tickets, and entered into the fantasy that had become like a mental vacation for me. The world of *Downton Abbey* was so peaceful, with its melodic music and rich history embroidered into the storylines. As we walked through the doors, that striking piano chord filled the air and I felt, after such a long time of repression, that feeling of wonderment. We walked from room to room, examining each piece of silk gloves or the delicate hand painted china. All of the major costumes, jewelry, and props were on full display. Hell, even the kitchen was recreated for this museum, complete with copper pots that stacked upwards towards the cupboards. We were mostly the only people there,

beside a senior women's group there on a field trip. If there were others, I barely noticed them. It felt like the museum was all mine, that this glamorous world belonged to me. As we neared the exit, I didn't want this feeling to fade. We entered the gift shop, where they sold metal teabag tins, teddy bears, and stationary from the show. My high began to slowly dissipate, when reality came crashing back with the simple phrase from my mother, "I think I need to go to the bathroom."

"You're going to have to wait a minute," I said, "I don't know where the closest bathroom even is. Can you make it?"

She looked around the room, desperately, for a bathroom sign, but nothing was visible. I sighed loudly before going over to one of the cashiers and asking for assistance in locating the restroom. The girl pointed her finger up toward the escalator and said "there" before walking away. I looked at my mom, and she looked back at me. In what seemed like something out of a horror movie, we both realized that the odds were against her. She would, most definitely, poop her pants before making it to the bathroom. "Come on," I said, as I guided her to the escalator. We stepped aboard, with her stomach making loud gurgling sounds. She kept her hand flat on her stomach, while beginning to softly cry. "I'm not going to make it, I'm not going to make it," she said over and over again.

As we stepped off the escalator, we looked to the right where the restroom sign was located, but it was at least 100 yards away. BB woke up from her nap and began to yell all kinds of horrible things to me, beckoning me to become

angry with her. As my mother slowly paced herself to the bathroom, the dam broke within her anus as my mother was obviously pooping herself. Between each step she took, I could hear her sobs and farts one by one. For a good thirty seconds, this went on without stopping. When she finally reached the bathroom and closed the door, I placed my back against the hallway wall and sighed, dropping my purse on the floor. For ten minutes, I stood there, diverged with all sorts of complicated emotions. BB was pissed off and screamed “why does she have to do this? She always ruins everything! You’re never going to be happy again because of her!”

I felt so devastated, for her and for myself. I felt, selfishly, that BB was right. That my mother caused me so much sadness and frustration. And because of her lack of self-worth, she smoked cigarettes and welcomed cancer into her life. She didn’t care about me, or even having a future. She caused her own misery and now I get to be a part of this literal shit show and clean up the mess when it’s all over.

So I stood there, angry as hell. The hate that I felt at the moment could heat up an entire pot of *Downton Abbey* Tea. When I heard the door unlock and she appeared, she looked utterly defeated. “What did you do to clean up?” I asked. “I cleaned up as best as I could, but it was bad. I threw out my underwear in the trashcan,” she said. She luckily, had brought her thin black jacket that day. She placed it around her butt and tied the arms around her stomach, concealing the damage that had occurred to her pants. I shook my head in disgust, and began to walk back to the parking garage. I walked at my speed, to hell with

her. She was so far behind me, and I was so glad to be rid of her. Sure enough, she lit up a cigarette as she was walking. I refused to even look at her as I slid into the driver's seat and turned on the engine. I grabbed a hold of the steering wheel as tight as humanly possible, choking the rubber. When she finally arrived at the car, she gently got in and buckled up.

"I know you're mad at me," she said. "No, I'm not mad," I said, clearly lying. I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of being in the right. She needed to be punished, and what better way than to deny proper emotions. That car ride home, which lasted an hour, was completely silent. I didn't want to talk about it, I didn't want to hear her bullshit excuses. No, I wanted to be left alone with BB and high five each other over our shared dismay over my mom's actions. The actions that brought us to this scene, where at barely thirty years old, I have to scold my mother like a child for overeating and therefore shitting herself in public.

When we pulled into the driveway of our home, the same home where I lived with my father for over twenty-five years, I felt like I was kicked out of the nirvana I so desperately craved. And, the real kicker, was that it wasn't even my fault. She did it, just like he did it. Why did he have to die of an aggressive cancer that ate away his bones and killed him within six months? Why didn't he, at sixty-three, take better care of himself? How could he leave us here to live a life without him? "Yeah! That's right!" BB said, pumping her fist in the air.

I realized, at this moment, something that had been brewing inside of me the day my dad was diagnosed with in-

curable cancer. I wasn't angry at him, or even at my mom. I was denied a life with the two people who were supposed to be there with me until they became old and grey, like that group of women seniors. Both of my parents, were dealt blows in which they were cut loose of having a full life. We were not given what we expected to have. Instead, our storyline was rewritten with a major character dying and another close to death's door throughout. My life at that moment, sitting in my car, watching my poor mother hobble back into the house, felt surreal to me. How could any of this of happened?

I felt like such a terrible person and daughter after this trip. So much so that I decided to actively pursue therapy in order to get BB out of my head. After a year of weekly therapy, BB eventually began taking more frequent naps, which led to very long periods of hibernation. But, every now and then, BB comes out swinging full force. When my mom lights up a cigarette after stepping out of my car to this day, BB softly awakens, stretches out her arms wide, and gives me a look before shaking her head and falling back to sleep.

Derby Man *Max Bayer*

Standing in front of my rental house waiting for the plumber, I noticed an older black man washing a small Kia. The man was wearing a white shirt with the cuffs rolled up, tan shoes, black socks, and turquoise pants. Surely an odd combination, but most striking to me was the black derby topping his head.

He stroked the car gently with a red cloth as if he were caressing a baby. Every third stroke he looked at me and smiled. Finally, he stopped and strode over to my side of the street. "What you doing here, young fellow?" he asked.

I explained that I owned this house and was waiting for a plumber to fix my broken boiler and unplug a sewage pipe. "Shoot, let me take a look at it," he said with a smile. His gold-rimmed teeth reflecting the sun startled me.

Once in the basement, he rolled up his sleeves two more notches and started fiddling with the boiler. He opened some valves, let some water out, then let some water in and stopped. After repeating this several times, "No problem, it will run now," he said. "And, young fellow, wait outside. I'll fix the sewer pipe and be out in a minute."

Still somewhat dazzled by his quick fix of my boiler, I stepped outside and felt confident that he had every-

thing under control. I called the plumber to tell him not to come.

Moments later, Derby Man came out. "It's all fixed and you can cancel the plumber."

"I already did that," I told him.

"I'm proud you had faith that I would fix everything."

"Yes, I did and I'd like to pay you."

"You can repay me by going to the Dunkin' Donuts around the corner tomorrow at 1:00. You will see a woman sitting by the window. Tell her you want to buy her a cup of coffee. And please, wear something nice. By the way, she likes her coffee with one sugar and a little cream. Will you do that for me?"

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't, but you had faith that I would fix your sewer and now have faith in what I'm telling you. Promise me you'll do what I asked, no matter what."

"I promise."

I guess he was satisfied, since he took off down the street. I was happy that my boiler and sewer problems were solved and boldly told my tenants. I was alone that evening as I usually am, but I couldn't stop thinking about Derby Man. I assumed the woman would be black, and I'm white.

I was uncomfortable in approaching her the way Derby Man had asked.

I didn't sleep well that night, unsettled by what I was supposed to do the next day. But my daddy always told me to keep my promises. "A man is only as good as his word," he said.

The next day I went down to my car early. But one of my front tires was flat. I was about to forget about my appointment at Dunkin' Donuts, but since I had promised to go, I flipped open the car trunk, got my jack and spare, and went to work. I would be a little late, but I would keep my promise.

Anxiously, I opened the door to Dunkin' Donuts. Yep, I was the only white patron. I nodded to the security guard, looked right and then to left, and I saw a plump black woman with her head buried in her phone. I am a bit plump myself, so that didn't bother me. As she looked up I walked toward her. With my voice cracking, "Can I buy you a cup of coffee?" I asked. Ready to turn around and run out, I was surprised by her answer. "You certainly can."

I walked up to the counter. Being second in line, I couldn't help looking back. And I really liked what I saw. The woman was still smiling, and that smile was for me. "What can I get for you, baby?" the Dunkin' Donuts lady with a blonde wig and tattooed neck asked.

"Um, two coffees, one black and the other with one sugar and a little milk."

“I’m sure your friend over there would like a donut too, don’t you think?” she said.

“Okay, and two glazed chocolate donuts.”

I brought the coffee and donuts over to the woman, who was still looking at me. Hardly had I put the coffee and donuts on the table when I noticed the same Kia parked by the window. “Is that Kia yours by any chance?”

“Why yes! And yesterday the strangest thing happened. Somebody washed my car and left a note which said, ‘I’ve washed your car and in return I want you to go to the Dunkin’ Donuts tomorrow at 1:00. If a man offers to buy you a cup of coffee, it means he’s the right man for you. Even if he’s a bit late.’ I knew it sounded strange, but my momma always told me to trust people, and that’s what I’m doing. I never thought I would ever be sitting in this Dunkin’ Donuts with a man like you.”

After I finished telling her my story, I asked how she liked her coffee. “Just the right amount of sugar and cream,” she said.

We sipped our coffees slowly. We ate our donuts. She looked at me and I looked at her.

“Maybe we can go for coffee,” I said.

“Isn’t that what we’re doing?”

“Right. What about a nice ride through Branch Brook Park? The cherry blooms are out now.”

“Your car or mine?” she asked.

“Since your car is nice and clean, let’s make a fresh start and go in yours.”

We drove off in her car, and I had the feeling I didn’t need any more help from Derby Man, since I would be able to do the rest on my own.

The Directors *Martin Ott*

I should have known something strange was going to happen on the morning I read an article on my Facebook feed about how a Nobel Prize winning scientist believed that we could not truly die. Apparently, our bodies contain a pre-existing form of energy that zips into parallel universes upon our deaths so that we can relive our meaningless existences again and again. The soul exists in science, too? Well, after trying to wrap my mind around that nugget it was almost a relief to be hauled into the conference room by HR. I figured I'd been busted for too much web surfing, my fantasy baseball team taking up nearly an hour a day that summer. I guess I thought I deserved a good "talking to." That's when I noticed the paperwork on the table and an HR team ready to engage with humorless precision.

Fast forward to the parking garage. I hauled my cardboard box of personal effects toward my red Saab 900 convertible. I could have afforded a better ride, probably, if I hadn't been screwed over by the Dodgers. They'd choked in the playoffs, again, and I'd bet six months of my salary on the deciding game. My car was held together by duct tape in several places as was my pride. My boss Franz, the VP of Marketing and Berlin transplant, let me know I was "fired" with a smug accent. He offered me a quick, though firm, handshake for fear I'd crush his fingers and told me "So long, Kevin."

The deutchbag strolled out of the *Spring* conference

room, letting the HR temp Rodney walk me through my severance, while sheepishly demanding that I hand over my key card and company badge. I should never have joined any place that did so much of its manufacturing in overseas shops. Any technology company with red in its logo was the devil.

Security escorted me outside, like a criminal, past the offices of the other directors (who were not there). The cowards. They must have been told to sequester themselves so that I would have a clear path to my departure. I hoped their guilt was overwhelming, and tears and fears would rule their lives past, present, and future. I was in charge of marketing operations and they counted on me to get shit done. The assholes would soon learn the price for Franz canning someone so vital to the team.

I was one of the half dozen marketing directors that our CMO Franz had given overlapping and redundant responsibilities, praising and admonishing each of us in turn, keeping us in shifting alliances. I think I might have had too much wine on a business trip to Seattle with Maxine, the Communications Director. One night, I confided to her that I had proof that Franz was sucking face with our freelance designer Marcela. She must have fired off a personal press release on this nugget even while we were on the road, which was surprising given her general lack of initiative when it came to her job. Franz got the message, though, and had ordered a preemptive strike. Today's firing. The smug bosstard.

I took the ancient elevator to the sub-level of the parking

garage, one of those Los Angeles sunken behemoths with the office staff relegated to the lowest level to park. On the floors about us were shoppers and executives enjoying their convenient spots at the top of the downtown structure. The crunching of tires made the ceiling shake, the tremors of busy bees coming and going. I was the only one with no place to be.

I checked my phone for messages from co-workers, but I did not have any signal. Surely, I would receive some sympathy from the other minions who despised Franz? I'd spent five years of my life toiling away, outsourcing more and more of my team overseas. Perhaps, they would now replace me in another country. I finally found my Saab, and couldn't help but notice the mottled gray of primer poking through the once sexy red hood. Maybe I held onto things for far too long, like this job. Was the problem mine?

I seemed to remember that I held onto relationships, too. My girlfriends all told me that I was work, in love with my ex-wife, a full-time job they weren't adequately compensated for. My home life had grown to resemble office drama, filled with fear and intrigue, and a revolving cast of characters. With the proper planning, I'd managed to create a life with completely replaceable parts. Love, too, was a commodity.

Jesus, why did it take me three minutes to warm up my car in summer? Sure, the damn thing had 200,000 miles, but Saabs were supposed to last forever. Longer than their owners! I stepped on the gas and wheeled my car up the seemingly endless ramp. The bottom floors weren't very

well lighted and often smelled funky. When we worked late we joked about being mugged in the poorly lit lower levels. Sometimes I felt like a festering sore mummified in a gray cocoon, the garage a cement gauze pad of stink and shadows.

I lifted my convertible top, eager to feel the sun and wind on my face when I exited this hellhole. I ascended first one level, then another, my car squealing as I punched the accelerator. The loops felt endless and I checked my messages. There was one from the Creative Director Rich congratulating me, and calling me Franz. Could it have been a strange prank? A misdial? Salt rubbed into a walking wound?

This misstep in corporate politics was something I should have been able to avoid. I thought of other potential pitfalls I may have fallen into before this bloodletting. Franz had told me how he'd convinced his wife to sign a post-nup after reading a self-help book on the plane home, and now he had all of the power in the relationship. When I mentioned my own problems with my then separated wife, he encouraged me to trade her in for a younger model, like I should have done with my eyesore of a car. The other directors listened to his sage wisdom, and half had divorced in the past year. Caroline had been the one to dump me, and there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't regret who I was and what I'd done.

I'm not sure why, but I kept an eye out for the perky Mini Cooper barely large enough to hold Franz's ego, let alone his muscular body gilded with a sprayed-on tan and long

hours in the company gym. I often thought that it was my reluctance to join the directors in games of ping pong with Franz (which they always lost) that turned me into a whipping boy and bearer of bad news. For example, during a leadership staff meeting I was tasked with creating the PowerPoints every time we downsized. People feared seeing me in staff meetings. I was the specter of death. I was starting to get dizzy from the laps around the garage.

Was I out of it? I'd managed to loop back down to the lowest level of the garage. My car must have switched tracks somehow. I slowed down and picked up the photograph of Caroline and my son Joey cleared from my desk and found Franz's hot wife Maxine staring up at me instead. Was this some kind of practical joke? The other objects in the box weren't mine, either. When had I gotten a Bayern München coffee mug? The garage stopped smelling like urine and started reeking like fresh-cut flowers. The scent was overpowering. Like cologne splashed on a dead person.

Finally, I made it to the bottom of the garage where Willie, an old man with overalls and scraggly beard, washed cars from some arrangement with the garage owners. Even during the drought he didn't seem to worry about California sinking into the abyss from the water sucked from its bowels. Neither did his customers. He was spraying down a black Mercedes as I pulled a U-turn to once again climb up the ramp. "Hi Franz!" he cried out. Did someone put him up to messing with me?

"Hi Willie," I yelled back. "How in the hell do you know my name?"

“You come here every week. How’s your wife? Better yet, how’s your mistress?”

“Fuck off, Willie!” I yelled, accelerating rapidly up the ramp.

This time there would be no stopping me. It was just like that fücker Franz to mess with me this way. He had been on the hot seat himself with the board of directors, and we could sense his fear of losing his job, of being sent back home. That fear had caused him to take control of everything and everyone. He...I was pissed! That smell. It was roses. Dead flowers. Sweet and pungent. I almost threw up accelerating up the ramp.

Then I saw the Mini Cooper in front of me. It had pulled out of its spot and its ass was completely vulnerable. I launched myself, thinking I’d tap the edge of the bumper or scratch the side of the door. Something else took hold. It was as though the Mini Cooper and I were one. I drove through the back of the car like it never existed and stared at my tanned hand on the wheel, the same hand that had shook mine on the way out the door.

The Mini Cooper was hurtling toward the wall and I was driving it. Very fast. The expensive leather shoes that pumped the brakes were way out of my pay scale. The goddamn seat belt dangled at my side and I screamed at the point of impact. Then...nothing.

The voices settled in around me as I drifted in and out of consciousness. The stink of roses surrounded me along

with balloons with messages of get well soon. Maxine looked down at me with pity in the hospital bed. Behind her were all of my directors, including the one I'd wanted to kill for having an affair with my wife, Kevin, that schemer in charge of Marketing Operations. He'd just pretended to be my whipping boy. He'd tortured me with puns I didn't understand and always had a plan. He must have alerted HR to look into my affairs (both financial and physical). The rest was a blur. I heard the voices discussing why I'd try to end it. The endless drinking and after-office parties that I'd invited them to suggested I was looking for some sort of oblivion. My depression hadn't been as hidden as I'd thought. Kevin actually had the nerve to suggest that the coma had started months before the accident.

I tried to open my mouth but it did not move. I tried to remember crossing the border from East to West Berlin, and the harassment I'd gotten from the other boys my age, the knowledge that I'd some day grind my enemies into dust. How had I missed this small detail, this underling who I'd followed night and day until I believed I'd become one with him and shared the love of a woman I'd once disdained? Isn't this always the way? You lose the very things you take for granted and the walls come tumbling down.

The Distance *Ziaeddin Torabi*

The distance between our homes
was short.

If I wanted to see you
I could walk to your home
in ten or fifteen minutes
as well as you could.

But there was a high Wall
between our homes
that did not allow this.
The wall was tall and high
it surrounded the city
and all the people
who were living there
on either side of the wall.

But when the time had come
the people of the two sides
came together and destroyed it
the wall fell to pieces
as if there never was a wall.

Strange *Ziaeddin Torabi*

It was my fate or
it was what you wanted.
I came out from a cave
and passed through woods
desserts, seas, and cities.

Reached to the strange
but beautiful city
far from my homeland.
A nice and beautiful city
surrounded by green jungles
and watery rivers
with all kinds of trees, flowers
and elegant birds
that when they sing their delicious song

I forget where I came from
my homeland.

Down at the Irish Pub *Hugh Findlay*

*Life is like darts, she said,
The more you miss the bullseye,
the more you learn how not to hit it.*
I had one dollar
half a pack of cigarettes
and two potatoes in the fridge.
It was Monday
I didn't have a girl
and was ordering a pint of beer.
Who said I was aiming?

drawer of hearts: *Angela Copple*

hearts she's found
and saved
along the way.
onyx and tin,
silver and clay,
black and red
earrings and locket,
heart shaped buttons,
some hanging by a thread
or broken where they lay,
she dreams of them.

sometimes in the dark
she pulls them toward her
fingers them and relives moments
then she slides them back
into the darkness of the chest.

she will drift... into sleep.
in her dream,
she shines a light,
watches closely
for signs of hope,
signs of life.

Evening Nursing Supervisor

Amy Haddad

Autumn Michaelmas daisies survive
in a raised bed where the remains
of miscarriages rest in holy ground.
On my way to supper, I hide
in this hospital garden

especially when the moon rounds
to full, or certain holidays that guarantee
gunshot wounds, mangled bodies, psychotic
breaks and a full house of stunned relatives.
No one can reach me here.

I lean back against the Fourth Station,
engraved in the cool stone, *Jesus Meets
His Mother*. Mary stretches out
her hand to her doomed son,
a gesture that will change nothing.

A plump hummingbird moth hangs suspended
nectaring among the scarlet bee balm.
I catch the burr of its dusty wings.
The sunset counts the stones to the top of the wall.
The moth ascends into the twilight.

The Road to Alzheimer's Disease

Amy Haddad

He first noticed misplaced
words, streets changing direction,
then the symptoms hardened
into certain mental decline.
Not the greatest sorrow to bear,
that was yet to come.
Now, whenever the garage door
opens, the creak of the springs
awakens the betrayal anew.
His pale blue eyes
sharpen, pierce through tears,
as rage reds his neck and cheeks.
He rails at his wife.
She shrinks inside her coat,
braces herself as he drives
in the roundabout of his mind.
Nothing will detour the rant.
How could she take his keys?
Forbid him to drive his car?
a thousand times over.
A slight he cannot forget.

Nightly We Float in Ben Gunn's Boat*Amy Haddad*

My husband was most alert in the mornings.
The sedative that held the seizures at bay
was at low tide then. As the sun moved across
the sky, more drugs were loaded on board until
his head drooped to rest on his chest. Bedtime
came early. I read *Treasure Island*
aloud to him, my voice the gentle wind
blowing on the foam. With Jim Hawkins, we sailed
in Ben Gunn's tiny craft, a walnut-shell of a boat.
The goat-skin covered, flat bottomed bark,
a coracle, was safe for one person
in a shallow, slow-flowing river. Not so
carrying a cargo of two in the unruly ocean
with its changeable moods and crushing waves.
We were at sea, did not know the way of our skiff
that turned in every direction but the one
we were bound to go. Trying to steer
our course to calm water induced a violent soaking

leaving us terrified and drenched until we fell back
to hide at the bottom of the boat,

afraid to raise our heads. Each night for weeks,
I re-read the same chapter because my husband

could not remember our story
from the prior night in our light, little boat
that rode well unless we grew bold and made waves.

The Fifteen-K *Robert Watts Lamon*

Every year, the barn swallows returned to nest, not in a barn, but under a bridge near my home. From time to time, the sight of these little birds would rescue me from despair. When they flew, they rejoiced in flying, darting here, there, and performing an occasional stall. Yes, a stall—they would climb straight up and then fall backward and then recover. In doing so, they appeared to be laughing.

Why was I in despair? Well, I recently divorced my roaming wife, endured back surgery for a roaming disc, and had a dispute with my lawyer over his roaming fees, which, had I paid them, would have driven me to the edge of bankruptcy. All I wanted to do was to run my little magazine, a city magazine, published online weekly and in hard copy quarterly, and to complete a marathon. I was doing well with my magazine, better than the local newspaper, which was in extremis. But for me, in my middle age, a marathon was getting more and more out of reach, especially after back surgery and a sedentary period of recovery.

And yet, by the time the call went out for the annual fifteen-kilometer race, I felt close to racing condition, though my doctor wasn't quite convinced.

"Just take it easy," the young surgeon said with a frown.

Of course, I agreed to do so and signed up for the race. I was looking forward to a pleasant workout, jogging along at the back of the pack.

Race morning arrived, and I reached the starter's tent in my sneakers, shorts and tank top. I got my number, pinned it on my chest, and strolled toward the back of the pack of waiting runners, nodding to acquaintances and enjoying the beautiful spring weather. I was happy just being there—until I noticed a familiar figure, also in sneakers, shorts, and a tank top. The figure had a number pinned to it. My ex-wife Ellen had entered the race. She was standing in a group of four, the other members being my twenty-one-year-old son, my nineteen-year-old daughter, and my ex-wife's boyfriend, a country-club Don Juan named Wilford Baines. Ellen ignored me, though she did greet a few others among the runners. My son and daughter acknowledged my existence, but weren't willing to converse, I being the villain in the contest with my wife. Don't ask me why—financially, I had been thoroughly gouged.

Now, if I had had an ounce of common sense, I would have gotten the hell out of there right then. I could feel my competitive hackles beginning to stir. But instead, I continued moving to the rear—though not as far back as I had planned. As the starting time drew close, the elite runners toed the starting line, and at last, the starter moved into position next to that white line. He gazed along the line, checking for offending toes. Then he raised a pistol, it popped like a champagne cork, and the mass of runners began to move.

I was, at this point, still thinking of my doctor's admonition. As I approached that first hill, I reduced my pace as a precaution. But then, I heard a familiar feminine voice.

“Coming through,” my ex-wife said.

She passed me, and her boyfriend passed with her.

“Me, too,” he added.

I had no idea why they spoke at all. There was plenty of room for them to pass. I gathered they were claiming some sort of victory. It was a little early for that sort of thing.

“Taking it easy today, Harry?” an old friend said, as he came running by.

“Just watching my back.”

“What’s wrong with your back?”

“There was a knife in it,” I replied, pleased with my double entendre

“See you later,” he said.

I swear, I thought there was a conspiracy afoot—one meant to undermine my self-restraint. In any event, I reached the top of the hill and started down the reverse slope. The trick in running downhill was to avoid holding back, which put undue stress on the legs—and, in my case, on the back. Accordingly, I kept my natural pace and form and passed that same old friend. It was a minor victory, yet an encouragement I could have done without.

Well ahead was the familiar figure of my onetime wife with

its familiar backside. She and her present boyfriend were close together, carrying on an intermittent conversation as they ran. Ah, the memories of Ellen, my chosen—the bliss, the contention, and that day she told me that I, Harry Melville, was a lousy lover. At first, I was taken aback, humiliated that I had flunked the sex test. But taking stock of myself, I decided that I didn't give a damn what kind of lover I was. That wasn't how I wanted to be judged. As for her boyfriend, that country-club dandy—if I struck him in the mid-section, I think he would not only double up, but also shatter into a million pieces. A mere statue decorating the country-club bar and practice tees would disappear in a cloud of clay.

Putting aside my physical concerns, I increased my pace, enough to close on the two of them. Closer and closer, I came, and then, with a burst, I ran past them without a comment, allowing my passing to serve as insult enough. Well beyond them, I slowed to my previous pace. I cruised along for a few miles, content to enjoy the day with its pure blue sky and the applause from the spectators who lined parts of the route.

But then I noticed my son and daughter—well ahead of me. In our family disputes they had taken their mother's side. And yet, they were matriculating at two distinguished universities, and it was my careful savings and investments that put them there. I considered this a fulfillment of a duty, but still resented their aloofness with its implicit ingratitude. Again I increased my pace. Why did I yield to this temptation? I ran as I did in my pre-surgery days, turning it on in the final mile of the race, indifferent

to hills, the ups, the downs. When it appeared I might not catch them, I panicked and actually began high-stepping. I closed on both son and daughter, passing them six feet short of the finish line.

As I slowed to a walk and got my place in the order of finish, my son stopped to comment.

“Nice race, Dad,” he said, as my smiling daughter stood nearby.

“Thanks Tim,” I replied.

But I had already sensed that something wasn't quite right—in my back. I felt a tingle, something like an electric shock, and my legs felt detached from the rest of me. It was near the refreshment stand that the first real spasm hit, again like an electric shock, but from a much higher voltage. I reacted with a jerk that spilled lemonade all over my knee, which had flexed with the jerk. Then came another jolt, then another, and I sat down on the grassy plot where I had paused to drink. And once I sat down, I couldn't get back on my feet. I started to crawl, which got the attention of the other finishers. I recall being surrounded by legs, some manly and hairy, others feminine and smooth. One set belonged to my ex-wife, who actually looked worried. Perhaps it was she who summoned the standby ambulance. The medics put me into a folding wheelchair, helped me into their truck, and drove me to the emergency room.

I ended up in the x-ray room, and then in a conversation with my doctor—the young surgeon who had operated on my spine.

“Harry,” he began, “you came close to screwing up a decent piece of surgery. Fortunately, you merely irritated the tissue that was still weak. Look—surgery isn’t the same as taking your car to the garage. It’s an injury done to your body for a greater good. The damage is kept to a minimum, but you still have to heal—before you put stress on the area involved.”

“Yes—I know. You were concerned about my racing.”

“I didn’t think you’d run like a man possessed. What was your time?”

“One hour and six minutes.”

“And what did that accomplish—beyond ruining my day?”

“I won a few victories.”

“Oh?—and what were they?”

“I whipped the whole family.”

That, I realize, was a crude boast, but I still delight in those particular victories. And there was one more satisfaction in that race. As I high-stepped across the finish line, I felt a joyful sense of flying—as though I were at one with those happy little barn swallows.

First Lesson *John Struloeff*

My father had me follow him outside
to a tree at the edge of our hazelnut orchard.
A dead pig lay on the ground, its eyes open.
It was long and fat, much bigger than I was.
A chain was already tied around its hindquarters
and went up to a black branch.
My father cranked a lever, its gears clicking.
The bulky hindquarters lifted, then the belly,
then the chest and head, its mouth gaping,
front legs reaching toward the dirt.
He stopped when his chest was level
with the pig's. Its body swayed slowly.
I didn't see him unsheathe the knife,
just saw him reach up high,
then draw his hand down quickly
as if unzipping its belly.
An acrid mass of slimy coils
fell from inside, impacting
the earth. I was four years old.
I didn't know animals had this
inside of them. Soundless, I absorbed
the shock, enough to have me here,
nearly forty-five years later,
disconnected from the world,
living entirely inside this earliest
memory of my father.
My first lesson in life.

Sea Turtle *John Struloeff*

It's the latest Largest Turtle to emerge
like a bulldozer, pushing a berm of sand
toward the ridge of grasses overlooking the sea.
In the photo, there are always people crowded
around in nylon windbreakers, staring in wonder
at the behemoth. It warrants a special story
in the Science section of the local paper's website.
Each time, I hope it will not be the last.

Forbidden Voices *Alice Jay*

Despite the lack of light
 lost lace is discovered
in a dream. Screams
 follow moans. Before
drifting the lovers stick
 to the sheets. Once white,
like the lace. Oval
 as the table it obscures.
In a Tudor house. In 1910
 Virginia Woolf's fingers write:
Human nature changed.
 She takes Leonard's name
and opens her legs, her lips
 to Vita. Forbidden voices.
Orlando must be held, shared.
 Gender may be bent.
Fluid in orange weather.
 Just ask Tilda Swinton.

The Forgotten Works *Scott Brennan*



In Richard Brautigan's 1968 post-apocalyptic novel *In Watermelon Sugar*, there is a place called The Forgotten Works, a vast, ruinous junkyard of things from the past no longer allowed in the utopian world characters in the story try but fail to create for themselves. I imagine The Forgotten Works to look something like this place, that I was permitted to enter briefly by a kindly old man who could gesture to me (while holding in his hand a lit Bernzomatic blow torch), but who had neither a nose, ears, nor a voice. Indeed, the walls were made of forgotten things—wire, old television sets, pieces of automobiles, mattress frames, bicycles, and who knows what else. Why was all of it saved? Why not recycled? Why not in a landfill? There were so many objects, or parts of objects, I wasn't sure anything could be found if it needed to be found or even repurposed, or who would want any of it, and because my guide could neither hear nor speak, he was unable to respond when I asked what the place and the things in it, and of it, were for.

Haulover Beach Sign

Miami, Florida *Scott Brennan*



Miami is a relatively new city, founded in 1896, that began to boom after the invention of the air conditioner made it possible to live in South Florida during the intensely hot and humid summer months. In 1960 the population of Miami was 291,688, equivalent in size to modern day Lincoln, Nebraska; Madison, Wisconsin; and Toledo, Ohio. Miami-Dade now has 2.75 million people, making it the 7th largest metropolitan area in the U.S., a city where despite rising sea levels high rises sprout up like mushrooms and residential developments encroach on the fragile ecosystems of the Everglades. Once pristine Biscayne Bay--in the 1970s, you could snorkel with seahorses and catch redfish--is now often choked by algae blooms, tainted by red tide. The turquoise waters provide residents and tourists with the illusion of environmental health, but the aquatic dead zone expands as pollution and agricultural runoff increase and habitat is lost. Of course, I contribute to the problem, one of the 2.75 million who traded the frigid winters of the Northeast for a subtropical paradise. Though Miami does not have a long history, sometimes I see fragments of its early days, when the population was smaller, there were fewer cars, and people lived more in balance with their natural surroundings.

I found this sign at Haulover Beach, a segment of Miami Beach near Bal Harbor, particularly interesting. It is in the process of being restored. Judging from the faded lettering, this isn't the first time, and the previous layers, two or three, perhaps, are still visible temporarily, until

covered by fresh paint and a contemporary design. I found the sign a suggestion for Miami in general, especially in the way we regard our history, and, by extension, our relationship to the environment (both natural and built) we choose to live in. Maybe there is hope here, as rather than being torn down, like so many aging structures in Miami are, the old sign is getting a facelift. I wish sometimes I could see more of Miami's past in the city around me, like I see it in the sign, and that we more consciously thought about how our choices impact our sense of place, our connection to the past, as well as our vision of the future. Often all we seem capable of caring about is right now.

Game Over *Linda Judge*



Getting Ready to Go Out Again

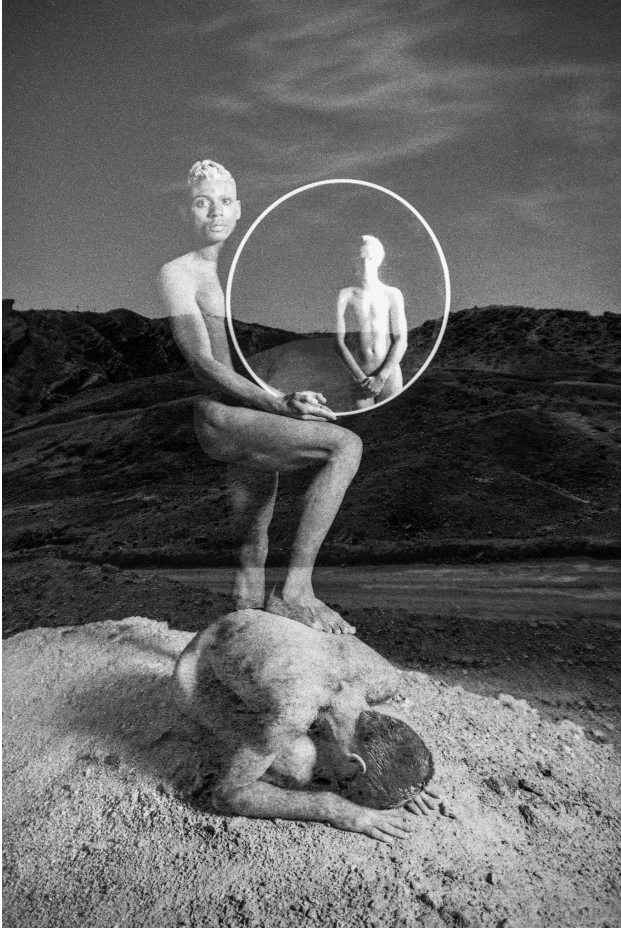
Scott Withiam

In the corner of the tub, her stone, her pumice.
Never saw her use the thing shaped like a bar
of Dove, but much rougher than and never
changing form. We had our arguments. What if just once

I'd stepped in the shower after one; alone,
what if I'd reasoned that stone mimicking
soap, like us, Dove-y, as I did, keeping us
solid though we weren't, but saw chafing

to reduce built-up callous, the feet more
exposable— to put on a finer pair. Nope,
I'm going to run a hot bath instead. I'll bare,
soak and soften, but I'm not going to prepare.

Goldstone *Jeff Leavitt*



Hand to Mouth *Rochelle Shapiro*

What you need is a good *frask in di punim*,
one you won't forget. What a *groyse moyl* on you.
A daughter, the third no less, to tell her father
she won't eat canned peaches with sour cream on top.
When the Cossacks galloped into Berdichev, murdering Jews,
murdering my brothers, I had to hide in the Black Forest,
live on roots and berries, my shit a *farshunken* river,
peaches and sour cream a faraway dream, like America.

Look how the peaches shine in the syrup, how light glows
off the cream like from the *kop* of Moses in those paintings
that make *goyim* think Jews have horns,
like they need another reason to murder us.
Pick up the spoon. Eat or you'll get such a *frask*
in di punim, one you won't forget.

Father, dead these forty-three years, here you are,
sitting at my kitchen table in your sleeveless undershirt
and Bermuda shorts that hang low over your growling belly.
You lean forward, your blue eyes watching to make sure I eat
every bit on my plate. I still flinch at the threat of your big hand.

I flinch when I think of you, at four, shivering
in that forest, hiding in the underbrush,
hearing the panting, the snarling of the Cossacks' dogs
hunting for Jews, your small pug nose and your throat
filled with the smoke of your burning village,
the burnt pine trees hanging from the reeking sky
like fishbones, America as far away as peaches, as sour cream,
as your third daughter, whose cheeks still smart with your *frasks*.

Happily *Michael Casey*

most people didn't see it
but I was in the wedding party
third groomsman
at the back of the church
for the late arrival
of the happy bride
totally in tears
along with her momma
and her grandmother both of whom
divorced ladies
who had brought the bride up
in the same house
without any male interference or help
and so me there
there were three crying ladies
and right away
I knew that for this wedding
it was gonna be
happily never after
and was I incorrect

Her Clip-Ons *Sarah Stern*

Wind through pines. Swwwwoosh. First sounds and sights
that you never forget.
Or Farmer's Cheese. Mom loved it, and I remembered years
later at Stop & Shop. She would spread it
on bread and have with coffee. Still in a rectangular package.
When she told me she didn't want to live anymore
I said, *how about for me?*
She said she'd had enough.
There was nothing left of her except the flat light
that came through the old house windows.
This life, I keep thinking about *enough*,
the deep me somewhere
and how things take on their own lightness.
I wake up with what she left me.
Her deep. Her clip-on earrings I turned to posts.
They go through me now.

History Lessons *David Goldstein*

I was born
My father was a surgeon
We were rich

I went to prep school
My father died
We were poor

I got a scholarship
Ivy League School
First in my class

Martin Luther King marched
I was with him
Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman were murdered

I went to law school
I became famous, radically
Freeing the innocent
And many of the guilty

I married gorgeously
Screwed around outrageously
Divorced expensively

I remarried
Raised drugless kids
They got rich

My wife was bipolar
It was impossible
We got divorced

I was poor again
My novel got published
No money, but I was getting laid

I turned sixty
Economy tanked
As did my 401(k)

A black president
A new precedent
He sounded so good

Nonetheless
Bankers got bailed out
While homelessness grew

There was a black lash
Black brown yellow
There's a new fellow

Stocks rose higher
Unemployment went down
Mass shootings went up

There is a cure
Water heat and fire
Is it yet dire

Why pretend
All things end

Home with Groceries *Ayaz Daryl Nielsen*

home with groceries
the hungry stray
who snuck in
behind us
meows
for her supper

My Poetry Notebook *Ayaz Daryl Nielsen*

my poetry notebook
with the poems
of a long walk
slipped off the
outhouse shelf
and disappeared
through the
round hole—
as I tell her, she
laughs, and says, “now,
they’re holey poems!”

A House of Cards *Richard Weaver*

has many walls,
redundant peaked roofs,
and everywhere windows.
When not a house
it is a collapsed tomb.
When not a tomb
it might become
a fan without need
of wind, or a discarded
gathering of leftover
objects. Sometimes
it morphs into magic,
appearing and disappearing
in places not imagined,
becoming 52 perfect clones,
or suddenly sailing across
space with warped speeds
and painfully accurate edges.
Ancient and amorous,
plastic, pasteboard or papyrus
cards rarely assemble
unless bored. They prefer
a Hindu shuffle if asked.
A scissoring of the deck.
A smooshing or scramble.
An Irish faro. A Hindu pile.
A one-handed spiral shift.
In a pinch, a Schwirsheling.
But would accept a perfect

riffling, dovetail, or leafing
if done by someone other than
a sleight-of-hand magician.
Anything to minimize
a good-enough randomness.
A house of cards is home to some,
a concrete coffin for others.
A house without cards fails to fall.

A Self-Tuning 7-String Guitar Turns

Itself

Richard Weaver

inside out, worrying its frets, nearly cracking its nut while stretching catgut strings to the edge of no return. Humidity-free, sequestered in a temperature controlled studio, it waits, impatient for warm hands and lithe fingers to caress its neck, smooth digits to slide freely with frisson into dropped A bass lines and power chords, favored by metal and jazz players (A1-E2-A2-D3-G3-B3-E4) for those reading at home or listening on podcast. Nothing resounds like sound shadows, echoes of perfection, harmonics that die a lingering, determined death, resonating, reverberating, denying the dying string vibration, the obvious diminishment of purity. It's time to thumb-strum, to reopen chords unknown, to make sound that refuses death's invitation. To lower. To raise. To accentuate. To praise. To fill a sonic void. To open ears and stun the fingerboard bored with probabilities.

Words Rise Together *Richard Weaver*

in the mind, gathering sounds
as they mingle. Ancient ritual.
Sonic handshake. Some are drawn
from the earth. Others pulled
from air. Most are fluid, descendants
of rivers. Ocean born. Cloud birthed.
Freed of tides. Blind to the moon's
melodic singular eye. They seek
no liquid expression, but flow
in formations as mixtures of electrons,
ministers of matter who respect
the magisterial moment of clouds
and precious stone, accept the ancestry
of tectonic plates, and flow river-like
into a body of light, a corpus of shadow,
against a desert tapestry of silent blooms.

Someone Is Fine Tuning *Richard Weaver*

a golf umbrella in the cooler dark center of a sunspot.
A photosphere. Preparing no doubt for a promenade
in the morning mist. A difficult rib

refuses its place again and again turning inward
rather than outward. Perhaps a sign of depression
or at the very least disgust tinged with doubts

about living amongst inanimate life. Such are
the miseries offered by the internet of things.

A Window Opens Up *Richard Weaver*

to a woman standing in a shallow pool of morning light. They share the moment, each faithful to another, unconcerned about appearances, dancing motes of forensic evidence, sunspots staining the pickled ash flooring with their respective shadows. Nothing more than a civilized moment, a gift from each to each and back again. Light that travels does sometimes reflect the parlor tricks of darkness, often refusing to look directly at the mirror that claims it is metaphor. The open window wonders in the quiet there, its inheritance curiously arranged in winter's colorless shroud. Nothing is morning. There is no woman. No pool of light that seeks to expand. The world has inverted itself. Turned away from life and the idea of light. The moment has passed into stale memory and a certainty of solitude beyond language. Meaning without the menace of men.

House of Yarrow and Sunflowers

Rebecca Pyle



I Went to Call My Friend *Marlene Olín*

I went to call my friend but forgot that she was dead.

My fifteen-year-old poodle is losing her sight, her hearing, her everything and who else truly understood? I'm clear out of patience with my daughter and who else assured me that the big picture's important, that the steps along the way can go down as well as up? My knee hurts and my back twinges and who else reminded me that happy doesn't fall in our laps, you gotta work toward happy, you gotta make happy happen--every hour, every day?

Her voice answers on the machine. After all these years, they've left the tape intact. So I do what I always do--close my eyes, hold my breath, and listen.

Then BEEP!

It's over in a heartbeat. Of course, I don't leave a message. It would be crazy to leave a message.

Instead I press redial once more.

Image; Barn *Ellen Peckham*



Imagine So *Joel Savishinsky*

You only know
you have found
the right words when
you think you hear
yourself whispering
“yes, dammit, yes”
to yourself.

You think you have
made her happy when
you imagine you hear
her saying “yes, dammit,
yes” to herself.

Has she, have you,
ever heard what you
imagine? Is this
the communion that
awaits us on the other
side, the fulfillment
that finally lets you go?

Or would you rather not know?

Ritual *Joel Savishinsky*

The trick is to reduce
most things to a ritual.
When they are ritualized
you do them but do not
need to think about them.
And when you don't need
to think that way, you are
free to think, or not, about
other things, which is
a process you should not
try to reduce to a ritual,
though the effort itself
carries the risk of ritualization.
Of course, the trick is
to reduce most things to
a ritual so that you
are free to think about
thinking or not thinking.

The Impaired Pair *Laury Egan*

Nan was playing solitaire at the kitchen table. To the right of the cards, on the red-and-white gingham tablecloth, in an ashtray, a cigarette burned, its smoke rising upward in a twisting plume. A moment later, an old Chrysler station wagon pulled alongside the door. She watched as her husband, Duff, raised himself from the seat of the car. He was a big man, now slightly bent, who once stood tall at six feet, but arthritis and age—he was eighty-three—had whittled his height.

Duff opened the diamond-paned door and tossed his Irish tweed cap on the counter.

“Where have you been so early?” Nan hadn’t realized he’d left the house.

After closing the door, he removed his tan windbreaker and chuckled nervously. “Damndest woman.”

“Who is?”

Duff tucked his mouth to the side and shook his head. “Your friend, Bridget.”

Nan stared at him in surprise. Bridget was one of her best friends, born in Tipperary, and a fellow artist. In contrast to Nan, she was bohemian in dress and looks, with her colorful woolen shawls, paint-smearred hands, and halo of white, wispy hair gathered carelessly in a

bun. For many years—even before Bridget’s husband had died—she called Nan most mornings to share political news and express outrage over the sorry state of the world while both availed themselves of coffee and cigarettes.

“What about Bridget?” Nan asked, alarmed. “Is she okay?”

Duff sat at the table. “Yeah, I guess so.” He scratched his neck. “But something funny is going on with her.”

Nan hadn’t heard from Bridget for a week or two and less often in recent months. She assumed it was because of the natural ebb and flow of relationships, though she wasn’t sure this was the reason. “Funny how?”

“Well, she called this morning—”

“I didn’t hear the phone.”

He contemplated this. “Maybe you were asleep.”

They had separate bedrooms because Duff snored. Even so, Nan didn’t remember the phone ringing and thought she would have been roused awake if it had. She had taken a shower earlier, however, so perhaps the call had come in then.

Duff continued. “Anyway, Bridget said she had a problem with her kitchen sink. A clog or something—and needed help. So, I got dressed and drove to her place.”

Her husband was a retired building contractor. Other than requesting his opinion decades ago about a small

addition, Bridget had never asked Duff to repair anything at her house.

Nan inhaled on her cigarette and narrowed her eyes as she blew out the smoke. “Were you able to fix it?”

“That’s the weird part,” Duff replied. “When I knocked on the door, Bridget answered. She was still in her bathrobe. ‘Hi, Duff,’ she said. ‘Would you like a cup of coffee?’ I said ‘Yes, thanks,’ and we went into the kitchen and sat down.”

Sometimes her husband didn’t get to the point, which had often annoyed Nan over their fifty-nine years of marriage, but lately he seemed more distracted. Trying to hurry his recitation, she asked, “Did you check the sink?”

“I waited for her to mention it, but she never did.” He shrugged. “We talked for a bit and then I left.”

Nan crushed her cigarette in the ashtray and observed her husband. His hazel eyes were fixed on one of the candlesticks in the middle of the table. “So, you have no idea whether there was a plumbing problem or not?”

Duff shrugged again. “I think Bridget is getting a little—”

“Senile?” Nan had wondered the same thing.

“Pretty strange, all in all.” He rose from his chair, using its back for balance, and then lumbered into the living room, where he collapsed in his wingback armchair. Soon, he dozed off.

A few minutes later, the phone rang. Nan stood, picked up the receiver, and said hello. It was Bridget.

“Did Duff get home okay?”

“Yes, he did.”

“Oh, I’m so glad! I was worried.” Bridget blew out a long breath. “Nan, the most peculiar thing just happened. I was reading the newspaper when Duff arrived at the door, carrying his tool box. He didn’t say why he’d come and seemed a bit confused. I didn’t know what to do, so I offered him coffee, and we chatted for a while.”

“I see.” Nan said. “You didn’t call here this morning, did you?”

“What? No.”

“Are you sure?”

Bridget was silent and then said, “No.”

Despite the definitive response, her voice sounded uncertain. “How are you feeling, Bridget? We haven’t spoken for a while.”
“I’m fine. Just a little tired. You know, old age and all.”

Bridget and Nan were both eighty-one and frequently commiserated about their ailments, which they did now for a few minutes. Finally, Nan suggested they should plan a lunch.

“Yes, we should.” Without offering a date, Bridget abruptly said goodbye.

Bewildered, Nan replaced the phone on its hook. Who was losing it—Bridget or Duff? Had her friend called during a bout of dementia, asking him to fix an imaginary problem with the sink, or had Duff imagined she'd telephoned and asked him to go to her house?" Bridget was becoming addled, and Duff sometimes woke and began acting out in reaction to something he'd dreamed.

Nan returned to the table. The situation was sort of comic, except, well, it wasn't. Soon, she and her husband would need to sell their beloved home and move into a care facility. But no, not yet. Maybe Bridget was daft and Duff was okay. Maybe.

"No need to worry," she told herself, though she was very worried.

Nan sighed, lit a cigarette, shuffled the deck of cards, and dealt a new game of solitaire.

In a Different Register *Lynn Hoggard*

He's dying in tablespoons,
she, like the rest of us, in teaspoons.
This disease isn't a death knell,
the doctor says, and he's right.
But everything has changed.

A future celebration for them
no longer includes a climb
up Machu Picchu. Now they
celebrate when the bad right leg lifts
from the car and moves to the pavement.

They remember the countless climbs
up their home's stairway, hand in hand,
to the bedroom where they lie together,
arms around each other,
whispering *I love you*.

Walt *Lynn Hoggard*

Vision so huge,
maybe mad,

oceanic voice crashing,
exploding foam onto the moon,
pulling back, folding in,
distant as God,
intimate as dirt.

Uprooted, seeing it all,
I, a sapling in a cyclone.

In the Garden *Daniel O'Connell*

We shimmied into secluded cabbage leaves
and made love all night long.

Our soft, sugary bodies melded.
I never thought an aphid could be so happy.

In bright sun, we'd find a flower
and bury deep into blossom,

drunk on fragrance, planning our future.
When the pesticide flood came, she was

on a basil twig right above me, I tried
to catch her. I tried to catch her.

Social Services Koan *Daniel O'Connell*

If you spend your life dedicated
to people who contribute nothing to society,
do you contribute anything to society?

Incomplete Ideas *Frank Stefino*

There is something about finishing;
something tangible, fulfilling,
anachronistic;
something insatiable like hunger,
longing, desire for closing circles,
rounding corners, softening
the blow.

There are too many unfinished
sentences, incomplete ideas, short
shifted short winded thought processes
left dangling mid-breath while
cellphones ring and voices ask ask ask
another quick question quick response
insufficient answer.

Doorframes *Frank Stehno*

His voice spoke literature,
a fascination with consonants,
multi-syllabic run on
phrases, and hope.

He spoke of possibilities
and answers to yesterday's
philosophy and news.

He found doorframes
intricate and useful,
while not altogether
aesthetically pleasing.

He longed for security,
a trip to Hawaii
to see his bitter grandmother
who complained door to door
was for deadbeats.

And when I said *No thanks*
he rolled his laminated list
of offered magazines,
smiled, and wondered aloud
if I might think of him
as I had a nice day.

Inertia *Marc Darnell*

I was anchored
as you strewed
your love around
this heart you found,
but you were
a reckless blur,
unpinned, not settling for static.
My love for
you was timeless, yours
was sorely too athletic.

Infinitesimal Tug of an Unfinished List*Stephen Ground*

little tasks neglected
cling like tendrils of
web, tensile enough to
keep me afloat in
deep-space depths,
till they spin, torque
kaleidoscopically,
break off like chunks of host,
ice shelf shards carrying
monstrous, starving bears and
let me slip,
drop, sink like a
stone dropped in
the deepest part of the
deepest lake, spinning to
the bottom with
momentum and weight
from every itemized and
uncrossed chore.

Spring Rain *Stephen Ground*

two
inseparable
things –
soft spring
rain, and
slamming doors.
one can't exist
without the other
anymore.

April has tried.

Brushstrokes *Stephen Ground*

my heart
is shaped by the
prodigious strokes
of a master, unaware
they can paint
and a stranger to
the contours of
my heart

Life is good, she types *Stephen Ground*

gulp another
mouthful of
sour hot
dizzy smoke

then

raise the
stained cracked
mug of
cold black

motor oil
shakily to
numb split
trembling lips

Same – send.

Inglenook of Nincompoops

Dana Stamps, 11

Festooned in a weedy lagoon of collywobbles
was a ramshackle of supine skullduggery,
a pensive tiddlywinks of flagrant sharp snickersnee.
This arduous catatonia, finagled by snide

snollygosters wearing fuddy-duddy winklepickers,
a boisterous, opulent ballyhoo, perpetrated
a baffling boondoggle of wishy-washy shenanigans,
and finally skedaddled like a woolly monolith.

Those hoodwinked, in a squabble over tidbits
of rutabagas, kumquats, and bananas, abrogated
to blubbering over a hodgepodge of scraps,
declined to comment. The vomitorium dolloped

in a teeter-totter of hubbub, a discombobulated
whangdoodle dickering with finifugal catawampus.

Ishmael Mask *Charles Kell*

Men rub red pepper into my shoulders
together & barefoot we shuffle
toward the wall past the slabs
of meat covered in flies past the chaat
stands and sheep sleep-walking
around Gadodia Market look
at this mostly straight white man
bent at the back in supplication
as he approaches Suneri Mosque
Shri Shiv Naugrah temple as words
float in a thick curtain of air
sweat drips down my cheeks
then back on Chandni Chowk
among diesel and dung until
I reach for a piece of paratha and dab
my forehead then sprinkle
a few drops of water on the man
in front of me—

Pierre the Pessimist *Charles Kell*

What is a tale told by an idiot called?
His hands now tickle the harp,

watching with measured alacrity
while the world dissolves.

My little instrument is broken again,
dripping with treatment,

in search of lost time as the tired doctor
ties another bandage.

What do the stairwells on top of stairwells mean?
I feel lean in the jowl.

A beetle, almost, pink foam pearls for eyes.
I rip the pages, douse each with kerosene.

My strings are sharp, they cut glass.
They peel the skin-of-my-teeth down

to the quick. Please, doctor, fix it.

The Janitor's Muse *Danny Barbare*

It's creating a poem that
Keeps me working
Like word for
Word— broom and mop.

The Janitor Dusts *Danny Barbare*

When the dust settles in
 My mind
I take a rag
And wipe it to a shine
As if without a sneeze
 It is clean
Down to the last filament.

The Janitor Poet *Danny Barbare*

I am a janitor who works
 With words.
I take them by the handle
 And wring them
 Out
 With mop
Give them wood and shine
In the grain, create a poem.

John Simon *Seth Richardson*

John Simon is curled up in semi-fetal fashion on his thin gray mattress. His bed is crouched in the middle of his dirt hut, a ten by ten-foot square of loneliness. Above him, a painting of a hilly Haitian landscape rolling with greens and blues sits suspended by two thin wooden rafters, oriented so that it is best viewed while laying down below it. As we walk in, John Simon turns his attention from the painting and smiles. *Bonswa!* Our chaperones told us that “bonswa” means “good evening” in the indigenious Haitian dialect, Creole. John Simon does not stand to greet us. He speaks more Creole, our guide translates. John Simon is a quadriplegic. Before his motorcycle accident, John Simon was a local crime lord and gangster. He preyed on the elderly and beat people to death for money. His neighbors know of his past. They hate him for his past. Occasionally, his neighbors leave hot plates of food in his lap, knowing he cannot eat the meal or remove the hot plate and prevent burns on his thighs. We are here to care for John Simon’s wounds and change his diaper. His five-year-old son helps with this part. He’s been helping his father by himself for two years now. I peel back two bandages on his back. Sticky infection clings to his bed sores, which are about 3 inches in diameter. A yellow smell crowds my nose. His back and ass are pockmarked by a dozen bleeding sores. I realize that I am touching a murderer. At this moment, I do not hate John Simon. I love him more than myself. As we leave, we all wish him goodnight. *Bòn nwi.*

L'Essentiel *Paul Castro*



The Landlady, 1964 *Roger Pfingston*
A life gone by all together like an afternoon.
-Vicente Aleixandre, Trans. Lewis Hyde

When the landlord died, his spine
collapsed from some disease
I can't recall, his wife wept nightly
for weeks thereafter in the room
below, so soft at first I thought it
must be wind, or cats, unlike
the night she screamed his death
at the foot of the stairs. I remember
rising one night in a sweat of nausea
and plunging through darkness to sit
in a distant room, her convulsive
weeping muffled as I rebuked myself
for hating her, what it was she stirred in me.
Not my own demise—hard to imagine
at 24—but the quotidian ticking of each
day's afternoon, its who and when.

The Last Explorer *Richard Hedderman*

My nails turn white in the bitter wind.
Feet thicken in the frost. Standing
just beyond the firelight, I can see
how the moon is an ax

grinding itself against the wind.
By dawn, I will turn into a spruce
standing at the edge of a snowbound forest
torn by the wind

and cradling an armload of blue needles.

Lemon Shortbread Cookies

Felicia Mitchell

After Reading Irving M. Derby, M.D, Manic-Depressive "Exhaustion" Deaths, 1933

While reading about how my mother's mother might have died,
I eat two lemon shortbread cookies—the tang of lemon
complementing the sumptuousness of butter in my mouth.
Prolonged treatment in tepid pack and injudicious use of bath
are presented as contributory causes of death—not her death,
necessarily, but deaths not unlike her death in a similar asylum
almost a hundred years ago, before I was born or learned to cook.
The best way to make shortbread is to use powdered sugar.
Add the grated lemon to the sugar and butter as you cream it.
Then add flour, a cup of flour for each cup of powdered sugar.
Improper nourishment and failure to tube-feed early
can promote a fatal termination of the manic patient.
I bake shortbread in a greased pan and cut it later, as it cools,
taking the brittle squares into my hands as soon as I can
although lemon shortbread tastes better the second day.

Like Thunder *Raffi Boyadjian*

Let monuments rust — turn diamonds to dust
let temporal riches be plundered
let mountains collapse — eternity lapse
...my love for you is like Thunder.

Let the oceans run dry — earth heaven belie
let the citadels of faith all blunder
let our rivals assail — unjustly prevail
...my love for you is like Thunder.

Let all the stars burst — prosperity reverse
let toil replace our wonders
let the foulest protest — virtue arrest
...my love for you is like Thunder.

Let the sun turn black — the bedrocks crack
let our aging bodies pull under
let our beliefs betray — our convictions decay
...my love for you is like Thunder.

Let the fires descend — the dark clouds distend
yet no devil nor angel pull asunder
this vow not forsake — your soul never ache
...my love for you is like Thunder.

Little Art Plot *Stephen Massimilla*

Then I burst out crying. I dreamed
it was not a knife that had come
between us, not the sight of love
scrubbed down in its own blood,

but the oily, sticky feel of recalling
your skin slipping through my fingers.
Naked, antiqued by the mildew-yellow
nimbus of a mosquito-lamp, your marble leg

emerged from a bath of black enamel.
Blue leaves ticked to pewter in the gust.
I knew you'd be back, with a copper Cupid

lightning-soaked in green flames
on your pillow, you two embedded in clouds
over the poet's grave, out of the frame.

The Look *Ronald Pelias*

He left me crying on the couch where we first made love. We had just finished watching a monster movie, the one where a red-eyed monster shot out laser rays, destroyed everything in its path. I should have seen it as a sign. He wasn't always like that. The way he used to look at me I knew he loved me. His eyes would linger, would take me in, like he was giving me kisses everywhere on my body all at once. It wasn't a sex thing, but it was like I was something he always wanted. But that changed. The looks he gave me changed. It's what drove us apart.

The first time he gave one of those looks I knew something between us wasn't right. It was when I bought a lamp for our end table. I just thought we needed a light there, but when he got home and saw it, his eyes went back and forth from the lamp to me. He didn't say a word. He just kept looking back and forth. "Don't you like it?" I asked him. "No, I don't," was all he said. I brought it back to the store, but I couldn't get that look out of my mind. It was as if I'd placed a big dog turd or something next to his dinner. And it wasn't just about the lamp. That look was about me. It was as if I was that dog turd.

Like the time I saw him in the mirror looking at me from behind. It was that same look. I have no idea what he was seeing. I hadn't gained any weight. I was wearing something he'd seen a thousand times before. All

I was doing was just putting on my eye make-up. That's all. But there was that disgust in his eyes, like I had done some hideous crime, or like I was the worst person who ever walked this earth. "What's the matter?" I asked him, and he said, "Nothing," but I knew something was wrong, so I said, "Why are you looking at me like that?" and he said, "I'm not looking at you any particular way," but he was, and I knew it, and I guess he saw that cause he said, "This is my face. This is how it looks," and he walked away.

This look of his became more and more frequent, and I never could guess why he was looking at me like he did. I tried to get him to talk about it, but I couldn't get a word out of him, except that that was his face, that he wasn't looking at me in any particular way. But each time one of his looks came, I felt smaller and smaller, beaten down. It was like he was stepping on me again and again, smashing me. I finally told him that I thought his looks were tearing us apart, that I felt we needed to see a marriage counselor or someone who could help us, but he said that I was crazy, that I was seeing things that weren't there, that he didn't have any of these looks that I was so upset about.

After he said that, he went to the door, opened it, but stopped and gave one more of those looks. "That's the look," I yelled, but he just left. So here I am, crying on this couch, thinking about that old monster movie, thinking about him.

Manhattan Melodrama *Richard Morey*

I needed to find a bathroom fast, so I went into a random building off 9th Avenue. There was a janitor in the atrium, slopping a mop around.

“Which way to the toilet?” I said.

He glared at me. “Does this look like a bus station to you?”

I ran back outside. Stiv was waiting. “Where to?” he said.

“Where to? I thought I’d pop over to Broadway and see how much Phantom of the Opera tickets are going for. I need a bathroom! Now!”

Pretty soon 9th Avenue turned into Columbus Avenue and we found ourselves in front of an enormous theater, all lit up from within.

“Jesus,” I said. “It’s Lincoln Center.”

I was standing in the heart of the city I’d always loved but never visited—a city whose noisy streets and lofty skyscrapers were more romantic to me than all the mysteries of the Nile. This should’ve been a misty-eyed moment. Woody Allen movies and Salinger stories and Gershwin tunes should’ve been dancing in my head. Instead, I looked at the famous fountain, glowing and

gurgling in the night, and nearly crapped my pants. A man in a vest was stationed at the entrance of the theater. Lots of well-dressed people milled insouciantly around the lobby. I swung the door open and said, “Can I please use the bathroom please?”

“Sure,” said the vest. “Just need to see your ticket.”

“It’s an emergency.”

“No tickee, no laundry.”

“Who do you have to be to take a dump in this town? Frank Sinatra?”

I found Stiv lounging beside the fountain. “You better hurry up,” he said.

“There’s nowhere to go. I’m in the middle of the largest metropolis in the United States—supposedly a civilized country—and I’m going to have to shit myself!”

“Squat,” said Stiv.

Why not? This was New York, after all. People did that kind of thing all the time, didn’t they? As I headed for the sanctuary of the theater’s backside, something happened that made all those dopey guardian angel movies seem plausible. My angel wasn’t winged or glittered or crowned with a golden halo—she was a Park Avenue socialite in a sleek evening gown.

“Would you like to see the ballet?” she said.

“The what?” I said.

“I’m leaving early. Take this.”

She placed a ticket stub in my palm. I stared at it for a second, and when I looked up, she was gone. I wanted to run and thank her, but my intestines had other ideas. I burst into the theater, clenching my cheeks in desperation. The vest okayed me, and I staggered across the lobby, splitting clusters of ballet buffs like a tranquilized bull. There were at least ten men lined up outside the bathroom. I bounced them out of my way, cutting short conversations with shocking abruptness.

“Assets without growth potential—oof!”

“I’ve never seen *Tosca* done better—oh!”

“Can you believe the Yankees—sonofabitch!”

I cut around one last man and leaped into a vacant stall. When it was all over, I drifted out of the bathroom and into my newly acquired sixth row seat. This was really unbelievable—I’d arrived in New York without plans and without a penny, and now I was about to watch a ballet at Lincoln Center.

“Excuse me.”

It was the gentleman behind me. “Yes?” I said.

“What happened to the woman who was sitting there?”

“She left. Told me this was the worst ballet she’d ever been subjected to. Said she couldn’t wait to hit the Waldorf and get a few Sidecars in her.”

The dancers took the stage, terminating our chat. I was hoping for a placating orchestral score, one that would lull me into a dream-filled slumber, but the ballet was a frisky one, and I couldn’t sleep a wink.

“Where the hell have you been?” said Stiv, when I finally came out.

“Taking in a little culture.”

We walked on, and the city thrummed around us. I could hear a jazz band blowing in a club, and for a moment it seemed like 1925. I was on my way to the Plaza to meet Daisy Buchanan. We’d make love under a ceiling fan and she’d say, “I don’t care about Tom. Or that old Gatsby sport either. It’s you, I want. You, you, you!”

“Hey!” yelled Stiv.

A cab whipped up to the curb and nearly flattened me.

“Jesus,” I said. “Maybe we better get some sleep.”
“No way. We’re going to 42nd Street.”

I was about to respond, when an ominous shadow descended on us. We froze, and looked up to find a towering man planted in our path. He wore sandals, camouflage shorts, and a mesh tank top. His hair looked like it had been cut with a Bowie knife.

“You little queer,” he said to Stiv. “Give me a dollar.”

“I don’t have any money,” said Stiv.

The man stared lasciviously at him. “You ever suck a big black cock, boy?”

I burst out laughing.

“You *laughing* at me,” said the man. “I’ll cut you to pieces. I’ll cut you up and throw you in the river!”

I continued to laugh.

“What the hell are you doing?” said Stiv. “Are you crazy?”

I laughed and laughed. Restaurants and lounges and sweet concrete were all around me. This was my city now, and I had nothing to fear. A guy came out of a pizza shop and stood beside us. He reeked of liquor and his tie was stuffed in his shirt pocket.

“This asshole messing with you?” he said.

“Who you calling asshole, you spaghetti-eating fuck?” said the man. “You want cut too?”

“Yeah, go on and cut me.”

He walked casually past the aggressor. Stiv and I followed.

“I’ll take the crease out of those fancy pants, you wop fag-got! Come on back!”

The guy from the pizza shop slapped me on the back and said: “Only in New York, boys. Only in New York.”

The Milk Maid *Stephen Massimilla*

I caught God playing at dice.
Space-time curved 'round him.

Energy spun into matter
and back again, turning up
sevens, turning up threes.

I hid from photons, beams
of particles, the great
hand of gravity. God said

Stop but I wrote

$$T = \frac{I}{I_0} = e^{-x/\ell}$$

on my bedsheet, saw
the dice bounce there,
each iteration opening

lacework. To find
the truth—impossible.

Milk tips from the lip
of a jar; the milkmaid
bends slightly. Scent

of bread. Cool silver
light. I hold my breath,
watch God's steady pouring.

Missing the Beloved *William Rudolph*

You never were
 the person I remember
 no one ever is
yet more than anyone
 you were the person
 I remember having known
 too intimately
 to ever not know

who has always been
 and never existed
 anywhere other than
 wherever
 here & now have been

and now here
 you are so present
one of us is dead.

Morphosis Robert McGill

It was a knee-buckling, four-to-the-floor drunk, and when I woke the next morning, I couldn't remember a single moment of it. Which proved troublesome. Especially when I discovered I'd been stripped naked. It was gone, all of it, everything I owned! My clothes, my wallet, my wristwatch. Even my wedding band.

No, I hadn't been rolled or beaten or left for dead by villains. It was nothing like that. I'd been here at home, alone, all evening, and except for having taken shameless advantage of a fifth of Jack Daniels, virtuous the entire time. There had been no orgiastic reveling, no cavorting. No catting around. I'd been lying on the sofa, and had passed out, quite innocently, while making small talk with the TV.

My wife, Barb, was not here to witness the debauchery, thank God. She was away in San Francisco, visiting her mother. The Barbs (Barb's mom is Barb, too) get together every spring to celebrate their birthdays, which are only a few days apart. When she leaves, I use the free time to catch up on my own interests.

The Barbs like to shop and gab and sightsee when they get together. I like to sit on my ass and watch movies late into the night. I go for man flicks, stuff Barb rolls her eyes at: *Bad Lieutenant... Reservoir Dogs...Apocalypse Now!* It's proved a harmless arrangement over the years, this sanguine bit of mari-

tal give-and-take, and until last night, it had never ended badly.

I rubbed my eyes, and stared at the corpse-colored band of flesh around my finger. Losing my wallet was bad enough, but my wedding ring? Could anything be more unforgivable? Barb and I have been married twelve years, and I've never once taken it off. *Never!* Not even the night I made the admittedly poor decision to bone Sylvia Richards in the janitor's closet after the office Christmas party.

Ugh! I rolled off the sofa onto my knees and wobbled to my feet. When I stood, the headache that greeted me was a lollapalooza. I steadied my legs and took inventory of the room, expecting to see a giant mess, broken furniture and the like. Yet except for the whisky bottle upended on the carpet, and me buck naked with an empty shot glass in my hand, the place looked as tidy as it had when I'd gotten home from work last night. So, what in God's name had happened? How had I allowed myself to fall into such a wretched state?

I lumbered, flat-footed, over to the kitchen sink and splashed water on my face. But it did no good. Or, rather, it did no good beyond improving my immediate appearance, which I'm ashamed to say bore more than just a suggestion of the depraved.

I turned off the tap and shook my dripping hands. I'd been wild with drink any number of times over the years, but this was the first I'd ever blacked out, the first I'd lost all track of my doings while under the influence.

Had someone tampered with the bottle, I wondered? Laced its contents, perhaps, with some controlled or *uncontrolled* substance I had no knowledge of? It seemed unlikely, as did the notion I might have developed a medical condition that no longer allowed my body to process alcohol. Yet, I couldn't be certain of either. I couldn't be certain of anything.

I found my pants in the oven, pressed and folded on a wire rack. My shoes and socks were in the microwave. My shirt? It was in the freezer, along with my shorts, which had been neatly stuffed into a Ziploc bag. What, if anything, these matters were meant to portend, I hadn't a clue. But I assure you, it was no laughing matter.

When I saw the time on the oven clock, my heart took another deflating blow. I was late for work by half an hour. I would have to abandon my morning routine if I hoped to sit in on the boss's interdepartmental audio conference, which meant that, along with the shower I so desperately needed, the detective work I was engaged in would have to wait.

I dressed, hurriedly, and combed my hair. Then I raced down the hall to grab my overcoat. I'd hoped to get to the office before anything else could go wrong, but my plans were dashed straightaway when I discovered the keys to the Volvo were missing.

I closed the front door and slumped against the wall, staring numbly at the latch. I was at a complete loss over what was happening to me, and in this sad state of defeat I shuf-

fled back to the kitchen and stirred up a cup of instant, which I drank, dejectedly, while staring at the linoleum floor.

What happened next was something for which I can offer no logical reckoning. So let me call it what it was—a miracle of divine intervention. I stood up without prompting, without even knowing why I was standing up, and pulled the trashcan out from under the kitchen sink and dumped its contents in the middle of the floor. When I did, out tumbled a stained brown paper bag containing all of my missing goods. Even my wedding ring.

Surprised? Shocked wouldn't have come close to describing my feelings at that moment! My whole life—everything that legally speaking made me me—had been tossed into a garbage can destined for the landfill where it would suffer an ignominious eternity atop a steaming heap of refuse. What this said about me, what it said about my life, my future, my soul, I didn't dare guess. Nor did I want to know.

I did manage to make it to work on time—how, I can't conceive, given the day's early doings—but what should have been an occasion of immense relief, if not outright celebration, turned immediately sour when I discovered that my parking space had been restriped and stenciled over with the name Howard Yu. *Howard Yu?* I knew no Howard Yu, and I had never seen his name on the corporate directory. Miffed, I parked the Volvo in the Visitor Lot and grabbed my shoulder bag and marched briskly up the stairs to Ed Geine's office in HR. I intended to have a word with Ge-

ine. Maybe two. It was no small matter reassigning a man's parking space to a new employee, and I felt I deserved an explanation, if not an apology.

Ed was reading the morning paper when I poked my head in his door. He looked up with panic in his eyes, and reeled, spilling his coffee on his trousers. I started to ask him about the change in my assignment, but barely got past the words 'good morning, Ed' when he reached down for the panic button under his desk.

Two stone-faced security guards appeared out of nowhere, and collared me. They took me roughly by the arms and escorted me out of the building, handing me over to a grim, uniformed policeman who was waiting just outside the double glass doors. The policeman put his hand on my chest as I attempted to step around him. His other hand rested uneasily on his holstered sidearm.

"ID," he demanded, as if convinced I would not be able to comply.

I gave him my driver's license.

He inspected the photo then brought his face close to mine, eyes searching, dismissing me with an acidic grin. "I don't like your type," he snarled, his voice devolving into a dangerous rasp. "And I don't like you." He flicked the license back at me. It struck my chest and fluttered to the pavement. "Make yourself scarce, asshole," he warned with a cold smile, "or I'll do it for you."

I was rattled to the bone. Shaking and sweating at the same time, I picked up my license and got in my car and drove

away, one eye glued to the rearview. I took the back roads home as a precaution, and pulled directly into the garage. There, I shut off the engine and stayed until the heavy door rattled closed.

I called Barb the moment I walked through the door, desperate to hear a reassuring voice. She answered right away, but a couple of words into the conversation began weeping. She told me she was never coming back, that it was all over between us. She said I'd changed. She said she just didn't know me anymore.

My Brand of Loneliness *Milton P. Ehrlich*

is much better than your brand of loneliness.
I'm a Marlboro man, sipping a lemon Coke—
an impenetrable moat prevents anyone
from ever getting close to me.
I suffer alone in ways that haven't yet been invented.
If you knock on my door, I won't let you in.
I'm addicted to the joy of suffering— and cherish all my sorrows.
Please leave me alone.

My Dead Things *Lenore Hirsch*

spiders, flies, wasps
swatted before I
learned to catch and release

thud of seagull
flying too slow for
my speed on bridge

perhaps black dog
in dark road
light reflected on
eyes and wet hip

the other dog
beloved, for whom
I have the vet
do the dirty deed

and one doe
hiding in Montana ditch
jumps into air
not knowing her
graceful leap
will end on
my hood

she lies twitching
then still
a piece of bone
found later on
rear bumper
reminds me
I am not without
blame

My Lizard *Penelope Schott*

Just a bare curved stick with four stubby legs,
a long tail, and an upturned neck with a snout.

With a black marker I draw toe lines on the feet;
with a wide yellow marker I paint two round eyes.

Where the head narrows I mark a mouth line.
Down the length of him I make two yellow stripes.

Did you notice my stick has turned into a him?
He squats on my windowsill and is fine company.

He has dictated this poem. The lizard in my mind
won't mind whatever I say about him. He'll sign it.

Mister Lizard, Esq.

The Night Electric *Yvette A. Schmoeker-Shorb*

The lights of cities
form neural networks;
they buzz and clutter
the sky. As I watch
from a plane, it seems
this branched brain
illuminates a world
deprived of night,
and I wonder how
the mark of humankind
can be so vain and vast.
200 million years forward
from our past, horizons
defy natural lighting;
circadian rhythms
fall into patterns
not grasped
by our synapses,
axons, dendrites,
and other organic
light-generating nature.
I sense this downward
flight may land us
in the inevitable evening
of our brief existence.

Now Is All I Have *Yvette A. Schmoeker-Shorb*

Briefly, briefly, briefly

I am

here

now

living

many futures,

but only one

will be

mine,

and after

I will not

remember

existence

or why

I was.

No Rebirth *Marlene Woods*

Please know I miss you
in the winter's cold,
because your warmth has been withdrawn;
in the summer's breeze,
because your air has been suppressed;
in the promise of spring,
because your growth has been stopped;
and in the midst of autumn
because your fall meant to me,
the end of a season with no rebirth.

Of Listening *Dibakar Pal*

ABSTRACT

In the case of love both the lovers will speak and listen to each other. Both the eloquent lovers are made for each other. But an eloquent and silent partner is mad for each other for being opposite in characteristic nature and behavior. Both of these categories are good lovers. Now, if the partners are both silent then they are great lovers. They say where goodness ends, greatness begins. Silence is more eloquent than speaking anything. Silence beckons. It implies consent. Both enjoy an unfathomable voice of listening through eyes.

KEYWORDS: Listen, hear, attention, obey, follow

INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is based more on manifestation rather than on expression. It does not inform, rather it reveals. So it bears no reference. The best creative writing is critical, and the best critical writing is creative. This article is an outcome of thinking about creative writing meant for a general readership. As such, I have adopted a free-style methodology so that everyone can enjoy the pleasure of reading. As you might know, Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the immortal essayist, wrote many essays, namely, "Of Love," "Of Friendship," "Of Ambition," "Of Studies," and so on. The multiple-minded genius correctly pointed out that all the words of the dictionary can be used as themes for essays. But little

has been done since his death to continue or finish his monumental task. Bacon's unique individual style of presentation ignited my imagination and encouraged me to write creative essays as a method of relieving a wide range of emotions through catharsis.

ARTICLE

To listen is to make an effort to hear somebody/something. For example: We listened carefully but heard nothing. Listen! What's that noise? You are not listening to me/to what I am saying! Listen carefully and you will hear something moving about in the garden.

To listen is to pay close attention for the purpose of hearing. It is to give heed or pay attention to what is said. It is to obey. For example: I have told him repeatedly, but he does not listen. It is to wait attentively for a specific sound e.g. to listen for the telephone.

To listen is to make a conscious effort to hear. It is to attend closely, so as to hear. It is to follow advice. It is to give ear or hearken. It is to attentively hear a person speaking. It is to give attention with the ear to person or sound or story e.g. listened to my story. It is to take notice of. It is to respond to advice or a request or to the person expressing it. It is to yield to a person furnishing temptation or a request.

It is to allow oneself to be persuaded by somebody making a suggestion, giving advice, etc. For example: I never listen to i.e. believe what salesmen tell me. I should never have listened to him. Why won't you listen to reason? I

warned her not to go but she would not listen. I tried to persuade him, but he would not listen.

To listen out for something is to be prepared to hear something. It is to seek to hear sound etc. by waiting alertly for it. For example: Please listen out for the phone while I am in the garden. We listened out for the least noise.

To listen in on/to something is to listen to a wireless/radio broadcast e.g. listen in to the BBC World Service. It is to overhear intentionally a message intended for another. It is to eavesdrop. It is to tap a private conversation, especially, one by telephone. In archaeology, it is to give ear to. It is to hear. For example: She loves listening in on other people's conversations. The criminals did not know the police were listening in e.g. by recording their telephone calls.

To listen is an act of listening. For example: Have a listen and see if you like it.

A listener is a person who listens or hearkens e.g. a good listener i.e. somebody who can be relied on to listen with attention or sympathy. It is a person receiving broadcast radio programme.

A good listener is one who habitually listens with interest or sympathy.

Listenable is that can be listened to, especially with pleasure.

A listening post, in military terms, is an advanced, concealed position near the enemy's lines, for detecting the

enemy's movements by listening. It is a post where men are stationed to hear what the enemy is doing. It is any strategic position or center for securing information or intelligence. It is any source of secret information. It is a station for intercepting electronic communications. It is a place for the gathering of information from reports etc.

When everybody speaks at a time then it is quarrel. If the parties involved are all equally powerful then it is an endless voyage. Everybody tries to overtake the other through shouting or fighting or with both simultaneously. In such a noisy situation if one keeps silent and hears the opponent patiently, then even the stronger rival opponent stops shouting which is not otherwise possible. The stronger rival stops thinking that he has established his superiority. Also he is happy after serving and satisfying his ego.

Someone is afraid thereby eager more to speak rather than listening lest the opponent wins. The mightier speaks and compels the weaker to hear. A wise man does not compel the weaker one to surrender. The learned knows that if the weak person of today becomes stronger in the future then he will take revenge. As such they say look before you leap.

In any court there is no place of shouting. Everybody enjoys opportunity of being heard. It is the place of listening. A good listener can argue logically with better convincing ingredients. He always wins. It is the essence of democracy. Here lies the triumph and importance of listening.

Man prefers to hear favourable words. Sweet song or melody, though tender in nature, compels a person to listen

without applying any force. It is spontaneous and automatic. No enforcement of law is required in this regard.

In any gathering if the speaker is good then the audience hears with patience. If the speaker cannot speak well logically then the audience leaves the place. Further if the topic is beyond knowledge or below than average then the audience also leaves the speaker.

If a noble laureate offers speech and if there is huge gathering then the society is educated. Further, if there is a program of Hollywood heroine and if there is much gathering then the society is uneducated.

Now if the aforesaid two programs occur simultaneously then from the gathering of people one can judge and gauge the culture of the concerned citizens.

As such the speaker must speak as per status of the mob. It is the duty of the society to enrich thereby enlighten its citizens. Only then the educated audience will appreciate the speaker properly.

If the culture is rich then the audience musters strong in the poetry corner beside the street to listen the poems of the new poets. But, if the people are uneducated then they are addicted to enjoy the dance program of the bar coupled with wine of night club casino for violent enjoyment.

There are two types of persons. The first category takes credit through speaking. The second category enriches him through listening. Both are diagonally opposite. The speaker is so blunt that hardly can he realize none laughs for

him, rather everybody laughs at him.

Listening is an attribute. The teacher advises listen carefully. This attribute has to be acquired from childhood. A good listener prospers always than a speaker. A wise can listen the voice of inner soul or conscience. He decides accordingly. A fool cannot hear it.

All cannot listen. One has to acquire it. It is an art. All is not artist. This answers why we observe few listeners around us. In fact, good listener nowadays has become a fossil.

Someone likes to listen. He avoids speaking. To him speaking demands knowledge and intellect as well. It is a laborious job to speak logically. Listening enriches knowledge without any effort. It is cent percent gain. Listening is not to bear all and everything. One must protest but after full listening for full gain. One who speaks more lies more and forgets most. In contrast one who hears more gains more.

Lacking in listening is a chronic problem. If a person does not stop or rectify himself then everybody is speaker. There is no listener. It is a decorum that one has to keep mum for the sake of patience hearing when someone speaks. Someone communities are famous for speaker. They have gift of the gab. Some communities are famous for listener. They are come by nature.

Through study, a person becomes giant of knowledge. Also listening renders a person an inventory of knowledge. Knowledge is power. An intelligent person gathers knowledge and thereby enriches himself from both avenues.

There are many good speakers. But there is a scarcity of good listeners. Everybody tries to highlight his name thereby acquiring fame. Everybody is busy to beat his own drum. None is ready to hear but to speak. In fact listening is a great virtue. All cannot listen. It demands perseverance. Perseverance is akin to physical pain. Very few people can bear it. This answers why we see few good listeners around us.

Good listening helps to take proper and fruitful action. Some persons begin to quarrel without full hearing. This half hearing is dangerous more than no hearing. If a person takes action without hearing then there is cause of no hearing. But a partial hearer cannot claim of non-hearing. Thus he is penalized for incomplete hearing.

CONCLUSION

In the case of love, both of the lovers will speak and listen to each other. Both the eloquent lovers are made for each other. But an eloquent and silent partner is mad for the other for being opposite in characteristic nature and behavior. Both these categories are good lovers. Now, if the partners are both silent then they are great lovers. They say where goodness ends, greatness begins. Silence is more eloquent than speaking anything. Silence beckons. It implies consent. Both enjoy unfathomable voice of listening through eyes.

REFERENCES

No reference, since the present article is an outcome of Creative Writing

Off Season *Lauro Palomba*

Tour boats hunker on the river's edge
alligators forgotten to be fed
the boardwalk creaks from memory
and absent feet tread eerily

She'd bloomed alongside azaleas
by autumn his affection hung gray
like moss she'd been advised flowered
as a plant, not one hiding bats and snakes

She's a fixture by the window
it's just dusk, not a vigil
the waiter knows to leave alone
this heart untouristed, unteemed

Both elbows anchored on the table
unjewelled fingers gentle on her neck
rest pensive near the pulsing vein
her free hand bringing up the cup
to shield the sunken face

The river's flow becomes unseen
pleasure craft waggle with neglect
the boardwalk lamps glowing awake
greet an empty chair pushed in
for the waiter to gather up the day

Omissions *Catherine Parilla*

Tonight the lamb will sit
on my plate and get cold,
its fat congealing. My appetite
will disappear. I know
that she knows that I know—
but I can't believe you want me
to tell her that he's already married,
that he has a home and three kids.
She must know he'll never leave
his wife. The trouble is, she never
sees omission as a lie. Once
she let me believe that I, too,
could bake bread, even though
her recipe left out the part
about a second rise.

**On an Evening with Congestion in
the Chest**

Raymond Berthelot

With the full weight of the flu
sitting on my chest at 2:00 am
clogged nostrils that push a cough
through a bright red throat
I shiver the night
in a cocoon of blankets
and think
if this is what it was like

On the (L)edge John J. Trause

I liked looking at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby pickled in a laboratory jar for me to look at, I'd stop and look so hard I never forgot it.

Sylvia Plath [Victoria Lucas], The Bell Jar (1963, 1967, 1971)

Behold the Eighth Wonder of the World and
 the Most Beautiful Suicide, Fallen Body,
 iconized in death and in Life and Life and
 screen print, whirling around her May Day
 maypole atop the Empire State Building or
 nestled on her funeral bier, a crushed limousine,
 with gloves and pearls intact, in fact, arrayed
 in chic fashion, fashionable and modern,
 legs crossed at ankles, made up and perfect,
 serene in her slumber, a little Eve tempted to the
 edge and ledge, a hedge against survival, a rival
 icon for the icon of iconic architecture

Ben-Day

Day-Glo

Pre-Pop

Pop

a hop, a skip, and a jump, a drop,
 the most beautiful slump of slumber.

And west in the Westbeth
at rest in the tub,
other photographs shot,
never arranged on a contact sheet
CLICK CLICK CLICK

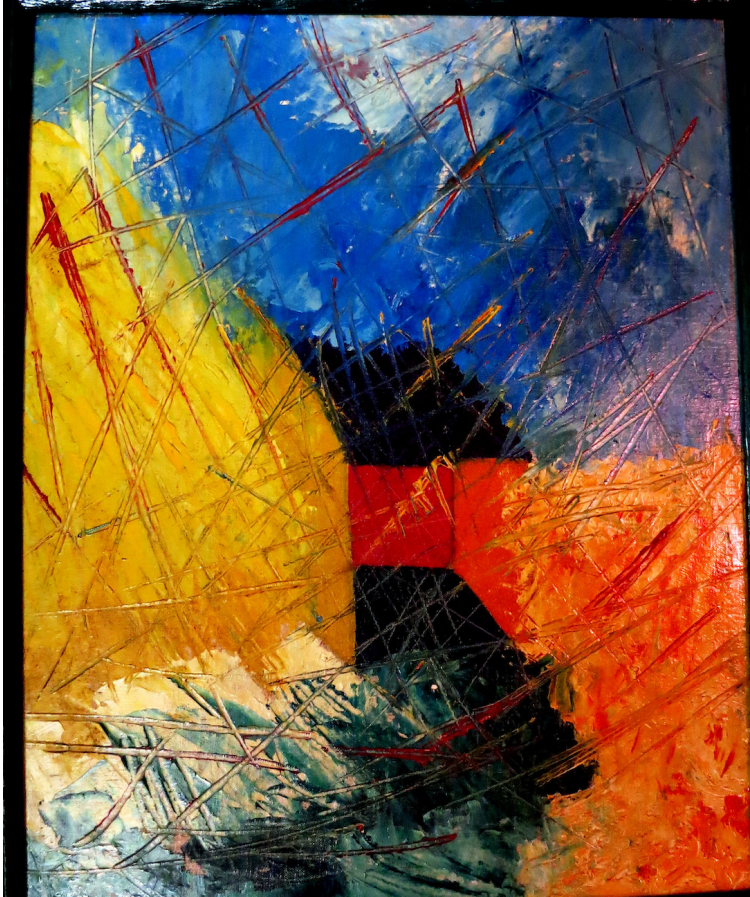
NOTE: Based on the photograph of suicide of Evelyn Hale by photography student Robert Wiles and published in Life magazine May 12, 1947, whereupon Andy Warhol appropriated the image for his painting *Fallen Body: Suicide* (1962), and on the life and death of the photographer Diane Arbus.

Bachata y Más *John J. Trause*

abrazo
alegre
aliento
alma
amor
ardiente
beso
conmigo
contento
contigo
corazón
feliz
fuego
juntos
jurando
jurar
labios
lágrimas
llama
llanto
llorando
obsesión
ojos
pasión
por favor
quemar
sabor
solamente

sola
solo
sonrisa
sueño
tacto
tristeza
una vez más
voz

One Safe Place *St. Leger Joynes*



Pharmacy *Rachel Tramonte*

Zeldox Zyprexa
Latuda, my love.
Not Tegretol,
not Depakote.

Not you, lithium. You made
the cobblestone streets of Boston
shimmer a chemical glaze.
Latuda, my love

my million bucks
you pinched my hips
twisted me at the waist
burnt off a piece of skin.

You pressed my heart
below my leaden head
pushed it above my seed center
pressed it above my solar plexus.

Latuda, it was you.
Sunovion, by ego or accident
you screwed my heart
back up and in place.

A Poem About the End *Abby Caplin*
Beginning with a line by Lynn Emanuel

Broke down in a cul-de-sac, I considered the old shoes and sofas desiccated in driveways under a green lentil sky, pressing on a landscape of beehived lives, and chilled by the sight of air-conditioning rushing through outlet mall doors, I thought of the photos posted on Facebook of Susie's newly remodeled kitchen, how the sun-singed factory sod was meant to last just long enough to sell, everything from China, those factory villages making the thing needed for every American household—subway tiles, socks, eight-hundred-and-fifteen-lumen light bulbs, wedge dowels for IKEA shelves, Swingline staplers, My Little Ponies, AK-47s—pyramids of packaging that fortified stores in the dream where America stumbled: This was the time of antipathy, cunning, the deliberate dismemberment, when airlines hustled their last junkets.

A Poet's a French Pirate *Randy Mazie*

from la tete to Lafitte,
a typo plankster,
and a wordeneer,
a key corsair,
a boarder des ordres,
bordered
by quays:

s'il vous, please!

An apostropher's danglin'
from the yardarm,
with a stern dashing off —
and a gallant bow
bent from the derierre
at the arriere.

Pond Scum *Ed Meek*

Her tongue was slick as pond scum
and when she swallowed, I gulped.
I could almost feel the green slime

sliding down my throat.
Her eyes—yellow, opaque,
shallow as sand.

And I walked
right onto her beach,
though the sand was hot
and burned my feet.

Dreams *Ed Meek*

Sleep closes the door and opens the window.
Dreams ride in on the wind. You're talking
to yourself. But you don't always listen.

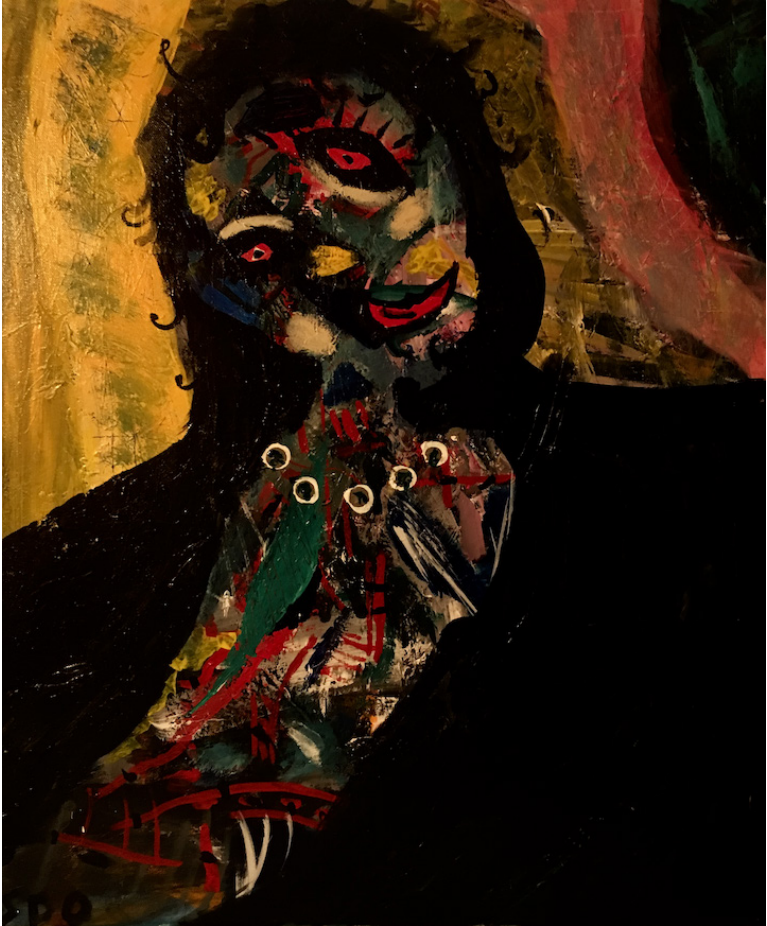
So, you try different angles, story lines, trailers,
clips, visitations with dead family and friends.

In this world elastic time bends, stretches,
loops and snaps back. Your mind a 3D printer,
never jams: casting filaments in a web of images and sounds.

In the morning, all that remains are strands
that lie in fragments all over the floor of your mind.

Portrait of a Melancholy Woman

Steven Ostrowski



Re: Joyce *Tom Stapleton*

The evening my mother went into labor with me, my father dropped her off by taxi at Dublin's Rotunda hospital and then took her older sister, my Aunt Eileen, for a walk, occupying their time in the wee hours until news came of my birth. Her husband slept at their home in nearby Clontarf, Aunt Eileen keeping a vigil in the house at 17 North Richmond Street where my parents lived and where she'd grown up. Afterward, she and my Dad returned to 17 where she made tea, both later falling asleep on armchairs in the front parlor until word came at 6:30 a.m. that I'd been born. The date was August 23, 1949, 70 years ago now. Two years later, I immigrated to the U.S. with my parents and younger sister.

The house at "17," as my relatives have long referred to it, was, from 1894 to 1898, occupied by the James Joyce family, one of a number of houses Joyce lived in as his father regularly moved the family around Dublin, attempting to stay a step ahead of creditors. Some years ago the Republic of Ireland installed a plaque on the front of the house designating it as a national landmark. Legend has it that my grandfather bought the house from Catholic priests who administered the Christian Brothers school directly across the street, which Joyce himself attended as a young boy. It may at one time have been used as a rectory. The street, the school, and the house are referred to by Joyce in his short story "Araby" from his *Dubliners* anthology. The first page presents a description:

North Richmond Street, being blind [meaning cul de sac], was a quiet street except at the hour when The Christian Brothers' School set the boys free . . . The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers . . . The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes, under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump.

I knew nothing of the James Joyce connection until high school, when I casually mentioned to my mother that I was reading stories by the Irish writer and asked did she know that the Joyce family also once lived on the same street where her family had resided. "Of course I knew," she answered. "In fact, the Joyces lived at one time in our very house at 17." I was flabbergasted and asked her why she hadn't told me until now. She just shrugged and said because it never came up. I'd soon find out there was more to it than that. At the time, I'd been considering becoming a writer. When my mother learned I'd been thinking of writing as a vocation, she told me that if I did decide to, I'd be carrying on the tradition of *seanchaí*, Gaelic for storyteller, in her words "the same as James Joyce." She bought a copy of Moss Hart's biography, *Act One*, handing it to me and saying that, after reading it, I'd certainly make up my mind whether I really wanted to be a writer. I read it and understood why my mother suggested it. I've recently reread Hart's book, reaffirming that it was, in fact, one of a number of factors that influenced my decision. During my teen years our whole family watched "What's My

Line?” on television on Sunday nights, one of the regular panelists being Bennett Cerf. Only much later would I learn that Cerf, a one-time executive at Random House publishers, was instrumental in getting Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* published in the U.S., having won a landmark 1933 court ruling deeming that the book, which a U.S. Attorney felt was a “literary masterpiece,” was not obscene. My mother, good Irish-Catholic-churchgoing woman that she was, would have vehemently disagreed. I’m sure the “obscene” adjective was why she had never mentioned Joyce for all those years until I brought him up. Too scandalous.

In 1967, after graduating from high school, I accompanied my family on a trip to Ireland, my parents’ first visit back in 16 years. My mother took me to 17, its brick front having recently been painted a dull red, the commemorative James Joyce plaque at eye level. The house hadn’t been in her family’s possession for several years. As we stood on the sidewalk, she asked me if she’d ever told me the story of her father, Peter Byrne, and “Saint Matt Talbot.” I didn’t remember her ever doing so, and listened eagerly. She related that my grandfather was a drinking companion of Matt Talbot in Dublin a century before, though Talbot hasn’t quite yet made it to the level of saint. Rather, he was declared “Venerable” by Pope Pius VI in 1975, occupying a rung just below sainthood because he didn’t meet the key requirement for canonization: evidence in his life of a physical miracle.

Talbot was born to poor parents in Dublin in 1856 in the North Strand area, the same general region of the city where Joyce was born, one of 12 children. He quit school at

age 13 and within a year had become an alcoholic. Several years later he took “the pledge,” vowing to abstain from alcohol for the rest of his life, and becoming an ascetic. Talbot modeled the remainder of his days on the behavior of 6th Century Irish monks who lived spare lives, devoting themselves to the veneration of God. He began wearing cords and chains as a form of self mortification and as a devotion to Holy Mary. He died in 1925, collapsing on a Dublin street from heart failure on his way to Mass. He has long been considered a “patron saint” of alcoholics.

I don't know how close my grandfather and Talbot were, but my mother related that my grandfather bought him to the house at 17 on at least one occasion. She remembered her father often returning home after an evening of imbibing with friends, one of whom was likely Talbot, singing, “Wrap the Green Flag Around Me,” before taking to his bed. I once asked her whether he was a problem drinker and she answered only that it was known in the family that he was very fond of what she termed in her Irish accent “the dhrink.” I'd read in Richard Ellmann's definitive biography of Joyce that he and his father, John, also weren't ones to spurn alcohol, but nowhere in the book did I find mention made of Peter Byrne.

My grandfather died in 1941, the same year as Joyce, though he was considerably older than the writer, who was born in 1882. My grandfather, born in the 1860s, sired 14 children, two of whom died in infancy. Joyce, like Talbot, was born into a family of 12 children, two of whom also died young, of typhoid. My mother, Una, was the youngest Byrne. Her father used to refer to her

ironically as “the aul one.” His trade was coach upholsterer and hood maker. I still have a business card of his from 1904, the year in which the action of Joyce’s *Ulysses* takes place, given to my mother by her older brother Jack in 1943. Jack, born John Byrne and who also grew up at 17, figured prominently in the Irish army during “the Troubles” which began with the Easter Rebellion of 1916 for independence from Britain. Uncle Jack led a garrison in a fight against the British at Dublin’s General Post Office, reporting to Michael Collins, the historical Rebellion figure. My Aunt Katie, Uncle Jack’s sister, was herself a participant in the uprising, one of 200 women in the *Cumann na mBan*, transporting military orders between Collins and his officers at various sites throughout Dublin. In 2016, during the centennial commemoration of the insurrection attended by thousands of Irish citizens in Dublin, my uncle and aunt were paid posthumous tribute for their roles, as was my grandmother.

As my mother and I walked to a bus stop to meet at her sister Maureen’s house for dinner, she told me about the times her mother smuggled guns and ammunition across the streets of Dublin in 1918, while fighting was still raging. She hid the arms in the bottom of a pram she pushed along with a baby inside, “and wasn’t that baby me,” my mother asked. Soldiers of the Irish Republican Army procured the firearms and brought them to 17. “There were always soldiers and priests coming and going at our house,” she went on.

There is some anecdotal evidence that Joyce was briefly enthused by the Rebellion, but Ellmann suggests that the enthusiasm wore off quite quickly when he writes that,

when asked if he looked forward to the establishment of an Irish republic, Joyce pithily responded, “Why? So that I might declare myself its first enemy?” It’s well-known in literary circles that, after Joyce left Ireland in 1912, never to return, he felt strongly that the Irish culture and the Catholic religion were particularly repressive, leaving him to resort to a life of, in his words, “silence, cunning, and exile” to pursue his art.

Years later my sister and I videotaped my mother relating stories of her upbringing at the house on North Richmond Street as part of an oral history. She told in some detail about the layout of the house, and how as a young girl her weekly duty would be to polish the big brass handle on the front door. I wondered how many dozens of times Joyce’s fingers touched that same handle. She talked about the small yard at the back of the house where her father tended a little garden of vegetables, with a workhouse behind it where he labored at his trade, her older brothers assisting him, her eyes tearing up at mention of my grandfather. As I’d peered over a wooden fence that day in 1967 at the side of the yard, I imagined Joyce and his siblings playing there as children, recalling the “wild garden” with the “straggling bushes.”

In 1951 my parents, younger sister, and I arrived as immigrants to America, disembarking the *Mauretania*, which during World War II had served as a troop transport, in New York. I began leaning heavily as a teenager toward the liberal arts. I even edited my high school yearbook and wrote newspaper columns in college. I wanted to write because of encourage-

ment from my mother, from reading *Act One*, and then a from a high school and later a college instructor. I choose to major in English in college and grad school, Joyce always in the forefront of my mind during those years since I knew he studied English at University College Dublin (UCD). I earned my M.A. in English at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). In lieu of writing a master's thesis I chose independent study under the guidance of a graduate advisor. The paper I wrote argued that Stephen Dedalus is just as much a protagonist in Joyce's *Ulysses* as is the central character, Leopold Bloom. My professor suggested that I consider submitting the paper to a literary journal for publication, but I never did. I would, however, eventually enjoy the modest success of writing magazine and newspaper pieces that got published and for some of which I actually got paid.

The year after I moved to Los Angeles in 1981 the centenary of Joyce's birth occurred on February 2. To commemorate the occasion, I wrote an article discussing why I thought the writer was important and why his works have endured. By that time I'd long before read *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, *Pomes Penyeach*, and had attempted, though never completed, *Finnegans Wake*. I mailed the spec piece to the book review editor at the Los Angeles Times, a former Life Magazine writer named Art Seidenbaum. A few days later I got a call from Art telling me that although he liked my article and my writing style, he regretted that he couldn't use it, but would I like to write book reviews (which he referred to as "chores") for the newspaper. And I'd even get paid. I jumped at the chance and for the next two years periodically wrote book reviews on an array of subject matter that Art assigned me, from

sports to fiction to sociology. Art even named me as a judge for the Los Angeles Times Book Awards. Having that experience on my résumé kickstarted my writing career in California, giving me opportunities I might not otherwise have had. Anytime I'm asked how I got started writing book reviews for a big-city newspaper, I always respond, "By writing a personal essay on James Joyce."

I think it's safe to say I've read just about everything I could get my hands on regarding Joyce, publications by and about him, including *Giacomo Joyce*, a little-known love poem he composed as he was completing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and beginning *Ulysses*. And I'm planning to make an upcoming new year's resolution to forge ahead, once more, with *Finnegans Wake*.

**The REDRUM of Gray Matter and
Oxidized Crows**

Brett Stout

Postmodern dinosaurs
can now read
fluent Times New Roman
and the New York Times,

the idiocy peninsula
is surrounding me
on all three
sides,

information is the enemy
now,

the body,

the devil,

the mother,

the degeneration of it all,

the passion of
past restraining orders
and future serial killers,

I should've had a
back-alley lobotomy

to match your previous
orange winter abortions,

sustainably sourced
a decaying spring
and recyclable rotting teeth,

the dripping white fangs of a perverse
new American dream,

now texting
blocked numbers
and open cerebellums,

West Virginia is now so
fucking
heroin chic,

caravan warnings
choking victims
Mayans and refunds
need not apply.

A Ring of Stones *Rick Rohdenburg*

The ancients knew
Winter brings no promises of spring.
A tattered wind tugs at my sleeves.
The years take back what they granted.
The mirror darkens with regret.
Old bones grow cold. What are memories
But ash? I am left with dreams,
Which I kindle in a ring of stones.
The dream of the cattails, nodding by the pond.
The dream of the willow, turning yellow by the lake.
The dream of the moon, walking on the water.
The dream of my mother young again,
practicing a nocturne in her front room.
The dream of my father, stumbling home,
pockets filled with rain.
The dream of the darkened house,
haunted by candlelight. The dream of my troubled brothers.
The dream of my dreaming, and those dreams dreaming,
their singing flame, blazing in a ring of star-flecked stones.

Robert Frost Trail, Vermont*Janée J. Baugher*

To name is to contrive –
purplish chokeberries
soft ferns wilt on first frost
oily spruce and goldenrod

kingfishers damsel flies
Turkish slippers jewel weed
flat-needled hemlock
blue beech muscle wood

yellow birch wintergreen
unvexed paper birch
chevron-leaved grey birch
goose-foot maple

quaking leaves quaking aspen
pink steeple bush
clusters of daisies asters
sugar maple boiled sweet

bear consuming hazelnuts
vetch flowered legume
sweet meadow hobbled bush –
to name is to honor

Roller Coaster *Gloria Murray*

My lover of four years of screaming battles, angry silences and wild love-making finally packed up and left. He met someone when his best friend sent him a singing telegram for his fortieth birthday. She was the telegram.

I was walking through the apartment, staring at the empty place where some of his things had been when I discovered a small piece of blonde moustache behind the toilet bowl while washing the floor and wept for almost an hour. It became increasingly difficult to concentrate on my job and after numerous mistakes, I got fired last week. It's been my fifth job in five years, so that averages about a job a year. I suppose I deserved it since some of the things I did were really stupid. I was working in an accountant's office and accidentally threw a check into the garbage. Another employee and I spent our whole lunch hour looking for it in the trash before it was finally found with a large tomato stain across it and some mozzarella mixed in. Then I would keep setting off the alarm when I opened in the morning because I kept forgetting to put on my glasses when I punched in the code. The alarm company would have to call to verify my password.

You see—stupid mistakes? I just don't know why. I suppose I was always sort of ditsy. Maybe that goes with being a poet. At least I can say that's why. My grandmother used to call me Calamity Jane, Jane being my middle name.

Well, to get back to the jobs: once when I made coffee I forgot to close the filter cup and it all exploded. Coffee grounds covered the ceiling like a muddy abstract painting. And if that weren't enough, I jammed the photocopy machine with my poems. I changed the screen saver on my computer to a jungle theme and we had to listen to screeching monkeys before I figured out how to fix it.

By now I sort of knew that my life wasn't really going anywhere. I never continued with school and just ended up with a GED (which I describe akin to toilet paper). I drive around in an '98 Mercury Cougar with 130K on the odometer, a persistent oil leak and a passenger seat that only reclines. It has a couple of dents (well, maybe more than a couple).

I've also got this annoying backache from lifting a large watermelon one Fourth of July. I spent six months in P.T. when I strained my shoulder on one of the machines—only it turned out to be more than just a strain. It was called impingement syndrome that eventually required surgery and P.T. for another six months.

And then you probably won't believe this, but it's true—my therapist who I'd been seeing for almost seven years, well, she developed this neurological condition, which fortunately was not deadly, but caused her to have facial tics and sporadic stuttering and because of extreme embarrassment took a temporary leave of absence, taking with her all of my horrible childhood that I couldn't imagine explaining all over to anyone else. I called the other day and left a message saying I was thinking of killing myself, and guess what? She never called back. I couldn't believe it!

So you see, what else is here? I'm sitting here with a bottle of Valiums, not the generic, but the ones with the little heart in the middle and a large cup of filtered water (you have to really be careful about the water these days) and planning my farewell. I thought of writing a poem in lieu of a suicide note, but I just happen to be suffering from writer's block. Heart pounding and shaky hands sloshing the water, I open the pill bottle. It looks like about fifty in there. That should certainly do it. That is, if nobody finds me first. But what if someone does and they get me to the hospital in time to have my stomach pumped and now I'm labeled suicidal and they put me in a psych ward? I mean I just couldn't bear it—walking around in those orange and green slipper socks and sipping juice from those little containers because my mouth is *sooooo* dry from all the meds. And a perky nurse walking in and asking: *Well, how are we doing today?*

Well, I'd better not screw up, make sure I do it right, take the phone off the hook, put on clean underwear and take my computer off stand-by. So now I'm holding the pills, trying to get up the nerve when the phone I forgot to take off the hook rings. I hesitate a moment or two before picking it up. It's my therapist and she apologizes for not getting back to me sooner but she was away at the Mayo clinic, trying to get treatment for her odd condition and she's so relieved I'm still here. They gave her some experimental medication that really seemed to help and she was calling to give me an appointment.

Then I get a call waiting beep and it's an old boyfriend who wants to have dinner tomorrow night. Now my cell phone

starts ringing and it's a response from one of the companies I sent my resume to. So now I'm juggling between three calls when the doorbell rings and it's my neighbor, Gilda, whose calico cat caught its paw in a mousetrap and she *really* needs my help and I'm beginning to think—well maybe now isn't really the time to pack it all in...and promise I'll be right over.

Room Air *Kate Delany*

When the nurse removes
the nasal prongs, we cheer.

We watch my sister sample
the room air as if the nurse
just poured her a fine Bordeaux.

Here I've been tipping room air
all this time, stinging antiseptic
smell by the snootful.

"Room air!" my mother smiles,
rubs my sister's arm. The last time
room air was decanted into these lungs
they were inside somebody else.

Last week, I watched my sister,
aged 36, learn to walk again,
heart in my throat at each halting
footfall on the linoleum.

Maybe we'll come through this,
rejoicing at each beat of our
lashes, the miraculous post-it
note replenishment of skin cells

or maybe we'll move on, become
ordinary ingrates, forget there were
days we sat on the edge of our seats,
watching each other breath
room air.

Imagining the Donor *Kate Delany*

The first time I think of them, really think of them, enough to envision in sepia the soft undulating lines of their sorrow bent necks, the white knuckled latticework of their grief locked fingers, is when we are all sitting around the table, laughing, giddy as castaways who still can't believe their incredible luck at hailing down that passing ocean liner.

It's been three months and the miracle still holds--without the tubes, without the hospital bed, without the complicated interventions. We can now step back, just watch it work, the second hand billow installed in my sister's chest. We sing "happy lungiversary to you" over a cake onto which my kids have piped icing the shape of smiling lungs. Maybe it's the prednisone but my sister's glowing.

Digging in, we make outrageous jokes, the kind you crack when you've cheated death. *Umm, these are some tasty lungs. Hey, next month, let's invite the surgeon, see if he wants to crave up this set too.* We're not trying to be crass. We're just so happy we're seeing stars. There's something in my mother's face, that look of the exquisite terror of pure love as she watches my sister swallow

her cake that makes me imagine her mother,
the mother of the donor, the mother who lost
her daughter three months ago. Are they sitting
around a table tonight too, sharing a meal,
trying to smile, talking about her or trying
not to? She was young is all we know. It was sud-
den.

I think of her family and mine and the image
that comes to mind is the way you think of the globe
as a kid, with half the people walking upside down,
the other half walking right side up. There's an invisible
thread connecting us but no one's checked its tensile strength,
not yet. Maybe someday, maybe not soon, maybe
some other anniversary, they'll join us at the table.

Routine *Steven Ostrowski*

Tiny greywhite moth
dead on the lip
of the porcelain sink.

Making mental art of it,
I brush my teeth
an extra three minutes.

Scent *River Kozhar*

Years had passed, but I remembered that scent the way one remembers to fear a cliff's edge. It hung in the air after a guest's recent shower like a miasma of memory, and the world fell away into void.

Was I awake? I asked myself as the winds picked up around me, an echo of that old tempest. Were you there?

I peered over that precipice. Into it. Was swallowed by fangs of darkness.

A flicker across your smiling features.

Your eyes turned to glass.

Thoughts. Innocence. Confusion in a voice that was once mine.

I had known about alcohol. I had known about date-rape drugs. Both were given pages in that rape-culture pamphlet we women receive ever year as if we are the ones who need to be educated.

I hadn't known about exhaustion.

It distorted that nightmare as if I were peering through a kaleidoscope. You fractured into all of your composite colours, the world freezing and shattering into abstraction. The real image

was impossible to believe, impossible to face. Surely you hadn't forgotten our friendship, hadn't forgotten me, hadn't forgotten you. Surely I was only dreaming, and so it became a dream.

When I smelled the shampoo you wore that night, my gaze sharpened like a soldier's who suddenly senses an ambush. When your hands had roved, my eyes had been closed against the truth, and I made sure they were open now. After a "no" only spoken once, my voice had vanished into pain, and I stood my ground on that tile floor.

I stilled, I breathed, and I saw that I was alone in my own bathroom. The phantoms dispersed like morning mist, leaving only a scent I might always remember.

But when the dust settled and the winds died down like a dragon returning to its lair, the blue tang of sadness was left behind—for the love, the trust, and the hope behind any betrayal, and the woman who had believed in them.

Secret Garden *Stephen G. Weiss II*

a tiny rosebud
crushed, unwanted

entombed in sterile glass
pierced by the cold light
of a dead sun

silent tears streak down
summoned too soon

one for each drop
of fetal blood

frozen, mute
—*I squeeze her hand*

Self-Portrait as Emcee & Sorcerer*Larry Narron*

the contrarian abbot
with nefarious habits
i carry a bag with
various sumerian tablets
spared me by a derelict
the bandit with the canary
that i buried the hatchet
with my chariot lavish
precarious with the black
fairy magic i cherrypicked
from the berry stick in
the labyrinth it gives clarity
to the marionette merrily
playing the clarinet fairly
accurate latched away in
my very elaborate barely
immaculate cherry wood cabinet

Ars Poetica *Larry Naron*

In memory of Sean Price

The poetry
was never
predicated
on a hope
for the cheddar.
I've been
dedicated
to the lonely
endeavor
ever since
I noted the
pleasure
potent when
devoted to
better coding
the letters
in an open
ledger coated
in leather.

Self Portrats in Ely *Jeffrey Alfier*

I.

You remember how it was: too long out of work
and living lean. He didn't lie when he swore
he was down to bone broth and cut-rate liquor.
So this is the game: pipefitting in Nevada:
fuse joints and socket welds. Bevelers, threaders
— you name it. He does so well his foreman, Luke,
lets him slide on extended smoke breaks,
shoot the shit all day. He carries his weight,
welds alloys with savior-faire,
keeps balance on the highest scaffolds,
even as the sun drops in the darkening air.

II.

A bit north, near the rail junction in McGill,
Luke's wife moves with easy grace
through her kitchen, hearing her husband
enter the front door, drop his tools in a corner.
Her smiles away her questions of layoffs
and walkouts. Tonight's their anniversary —
says he's taking her for steak at Marie's,
champagne at the club. Soon dressed
and ready to go, he follows her into the Buick.
She tilts the rearview to check her makeup.
Dashboard light reddens her eyes.

Shredding Lavendar *Katharyn Machan*

over and over again she cries out,
“Baby! Baby! Where’s the baby?”
pulling apart tablecloths, lifting up pillows
in the nursing home dining room. All

others there are laughing or moaning,
angry when she bangs into their feet
in her wildly wheeling chair. “Give her
to me! Oh, let me hold here! Where

is that baby girl?” There to visit
as clear-eyed friend I hand her
a smooth stuffed toy. With her thin arms
she hugs it close, pats its silent rounded head.

This is a woman who bore two sons.
This is a woman whose husband left her.
This is a woman who lived for theatre
and wrote stories, essays, poems.

“Baby, baby, hush now, hush,”
she croons amidst scattered purple.
Maybe she’s trying to talk to herself.
Maybe she’ll die very soon.

Side Effects *David Sheskin*

Interactions with certain types of People
Have been found to be associated with a wide range of
Side Effects.

Sustained and sometimes even Periodic Contact
With those who are
Acerbic, Obnoxious, Narcissistic or Inconsiderate
May result in Symptoms such as
Profuse Sweating and Drowsiness
Headaches and Dizziness
Chills and Fever
Nausea, Vomiting and Diarrhea
Incontinence

Ringling in the Ears and Tingling of the Skin
Impotence
Chest Pain and Difficulty Breathing
Irregular Heartbeat
Hallucinations
Fainting and Seizures
In fact

Studies have shown that Intermittent Interaction with
certain

Personality Types
Can result in such Conditions as
Hypertension, Diabetes and Liver Disease
Asthma, Ulcers and Arthritis
So one should always be wary
And carefully read between the lines
Before entering into Relationships
Of Any Kind

Slivers *R.T. Castleberry*
After Creeley's "The Flower"

I think I layer tensions
like bottles shattered
in ditches the thirsty
refugee hides.

Each faulting gesture
blocks breath,
catches in my chest,
cracks knees in a fall.

Tension is a wasting blade
It slices that one
and that one
and that one.

Smoker's Cough *Éliot Greiner*

It was Tuesday night at The Brown Jug, and Kurt and I were young and drunk. In fact, everyone here was young and drunk, except for the old guy who had just walked into the bar. He must have been sixty years old, in blue jeans and a dirty t-shirt, and didn't say anything besides the order he put in for a BLT. "What the hell," Kurt said, looking to me. "How old is that man."

"Old."

"Too old," Kurt said. "Actually, he is what one calls an old fart."

"Fat fart."

"Wrinkly fart."

"Dumb fart."

Kurt's favorite thing was ribbing people, which I didn't love, but couldn't help but partake in since Kurt was my only friend, and I wasn't his. So I sat there and helped come up with more names until we got tired. Then Kurt got an idea.

"Let's send him a shot," he said.

"Oh," I said. "That would be funny."

“Very funny.”

Kurt flagged down our waitress and explained to her that we would like to anonymously buy the old man a shot of blue raspberry vodka. She made a face and tilted her head. She looked at him and back at us. However, wetting her finger, she flipped open her notebook and scribbled our order. She did not smile like I hoped she would.

We watched as the bartender poured the shot and placed it in front of the old man. We could not hear the man speak, but we knew what he was saying as he leaned in to talk to the bartender over the music. The bartender shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. He walked off. The man held the shot and stared at it, and then he looked around to find who sent it. He couldn't see us though, because we'd slid down in our booth, peeping through a crack in the wood paneling. “Is he taking it?” I said, staring at Kurt as he peered through the small hole.

“No,” Kurt said. “Bastard.”

We both sat back up and looked at the lonely blue shot sit by the man's plate. Kurt grabbed the shot menu and scanned it. “Another,” he said. He flipped it over and picked a different one. The Purple Gator. I nodded. “Very good.”

Kurt waved the waitress over again and told her what to do. Her face was flat as she wrote down our order. Again we watched the bartender make the shot and place it in front of the old man. However, now the old man grimaced, and shook his head. The bartender still only

shrugged his shoulders, brushing him off as he picked up a bottle of vodka. The man watched him walk to the other side of the bar and bowed his head. He placed the shot neatly next to the first.

“Damn it,” Kurt said. “Ungrateful.”

“Seriously.” I took the menu from him and read it over twice. I set it down. “I’m ordering him a smoker’s cough.”

“A smoker’s cough?”

“Jaeger and mayonnaise.”

“Nice.”

The waitress came back and we gave her our order. She took out her notebook but did not write anything down. She shook her head. “Do you know him?” she said.

I looked to Kurt and he looked to me. “A friend,” I said. “Our old professor.”

“Biology.” Kurt straightened in his seat. “Titan of the field.”

“No,” I said. “Titan of a *man*.” The waitress panned her head from me to Kurt, and Kurt to me. Then she took down the order and left.

The bartender made the smoker’s cough with little fuss. He set it in front of the old man as he was paying his bill. The old man peered at the shot, and then sniffed it. He reeled back. We could hear him gag.

“Weak constitution,” Kurt said.

“Must be,” I said.

The man sat there silently and frowned. The waitress took his plate away, but he did not acknowledge her; he did not look up from the shots.

“What’s he doing?” Kurt said.

“Contemplating,” I said. “*Thinking.*”

“Melodramatic.”

We did not know why, but when the old man finally stood up, he went outside and cried by the street. It wasn’t anything monstrous, but there were tears, and his shoulders gently heaved up and down. We could see him through the big plate-glass window. Kurt and I watched him and drank our beers and laughed until Kurt said “Why do you think he is so sad?” I turned to Kurt and frowned, and he frowned back at me. We sipped quietly, thinking about this until Kurt had to go catch the bus home. Then I was alone.

A week later I saw the old man at a proper bar with top shelf liquor and twelve-dollar drinks. My father was in town. He was taking me out. The dinner wasn’t very fun though; Kurt had never responded to my invitation, and I was left to listen to my father ask me about my classes, the progress I wasn’t making in statistics. He was usually disappointed with me, but now especially so. I think it was because I wasn’t as smart or as good looking as my brothers. He liked to remind me of that.

I ended up spending most of dinner ignoring my father, and gave my focus to the old man. I watched his movements at the bar, how delicately he ate his food and drank his water. I even flinched when he made a small spill. My father noticed. It made him more angry with me. He asked me what my problem was, but I didn't want to get into that with him. He never appreciated it when I told him that I was sad. After a time he got frustrated and paid the bill before setting off for the car, but I lingered. Every question one could have about the old man suddenly occurred to me, sticking me to my spot like a rat trapped in glue.

A busser came to clear my table, but I remained next to it. The old man had not finished his meal. He was wearing similar clothes to when I'd seen him last, but they were clean, and I wondered if he only ever wore t-shirts and jeans. In fact, I wondered and wondered and wondered about him until the maitre d' took my arm and asked if I was okay. I smiled. Her question was simple, but I did not know how to begin to answer it. I thanked her and went outside.

It was December. Cold. I was alone and freezing, but happy because of how much sense this made. I could not see where my father was, and I walked down the street and turned left, and then kept walking for some time after that. As I was crossing Third Street a car honked its horn, and I turned to find my father waiting for me in his BMW. He rolled down the window and stared at me. I could see his breath.

"Get in," he said. He was not happy.

I walked up to the side of the car, leaning against the window. I looked at him in his eyes. They were wide and still, and I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. The only thoughts in my head were about the hole in the bottom of my shoe and how my father reeked of cigarettes; where and when I would see that old man next. What I would say to him then.

Snow White's Dissertation on Pleasure

Laurie Lessen Reiche

Real mythologies are invented moment to moment.

Michael McClure

Snow White with her bluebirds and swallows—
I with my hunger for love. Toss us seeds and we'll sing and dance
in the gold meadow surrounded by windows.

We all sleep in our own glass coffins.
We are all ready for a touch, for a kiss.
But I do not want to be woken.

Let me dream for another two decades,
let me dream I can achieve perfection: tongue-tip licking
your cock. Let me watch in wonder as it stiffens
like a tree growing in fast-motion.

Let my mythology be Pleasure and impatience a feather
fluttering through my cunt. Put your finger inside me—
promise you will not wake me.

December's Incandescence

*Laurie Lessen Reiche
For RSH"*

Luminous December, snow's
sparkle, the radiant spangle
of your soul. I saw it yesterday
when we stood outdoors.

Pearl luster of the newborn, ember
of innocence, a halo, something
authentic exposed.
Whoever you are, its pulsar.

I saw you re-beginning. I saw
resplendent tenderness, the star-child
dreaming and the miracle
of being.

December's incandescence,
your skin bright as silver tinsel,
a winter present for yourself:
your Self waiting for my love.

Last Supper *Laurie Lessen Reiche*
Sometimes I sleep, I go back
to the beginning, falling back in mid-air.
Pablo Neruda

I never go back anymore, not in midair,
 not lounging on the floor. Not in bed. Not dreaming.
 Why go back to the slow torture of love's anemia, its original
 illness, pathology of least resistance, philosophy
 of infantile solitude?

Why go back to the beginning of emptiness?

I was she, the baby abandoned to dust-gods—
 and O, how I loved them! How they imbued me with all I'd need to survive!
 How they choked me with infinitesimal tenderness!
 Why go back? Why stake a claim in a personal past when I
 am no one? When will I get it through my thick skull, I am a child
 of untouchable air?

How desperately I've always wanted someone to care.

Why does it matter? This is my last supper.
 There's no milk on my lips. No desire.
 Let me die with the long-lost

crucified child.

Leaving the Good Husband

Laurie Lessen Reiche

June 4, 2018 8:00 p.m.

what kind of woman am I to expect a taste of happiness to fall from the sky—
what kind of human could...

eat,

be gifted with a feast while he who...

what kind of woman am I, what kind of insubstantial awful woman
would...

think there might be more for her, she who breathes and thinks to breathe
is not enough but wants to be a tree with many leaves—

who wants to be a flower at this late hour

what idiotic imbecile so filled with venomous power
dreams of dreaming as if she wasn't cursed with the kiss
of the dream-dead father while he who is so affable kills me

with unspoken sorrow

Leaving the Sexless Marriage

Laurie Lessen Reiche

Breaking the bonds, breaking locked doors and windows, standing
under the lintel looking out at the blue expanse, a woman tastes
freedom,
considers the shelter, enclosure of home and all the daily
time-bomb executions—
or liberation.

And to be stripped naked in the shade and sunlight.

The body matters.

It has many reasons for being: clitoris, nipples, fingers, sternum, skin.
How we forget all that we are when mummy-wrapped in
the holy scrolls
of definitions. And yes, I know the mind is erogenous! But
lip and eyelash, triceps
and cervix! Lust is a liberty, the salacious mouth and
tongue an emancipation.

Let the soul tag along for the ride, uncircumscribed. The
domesticated bride
is now a lie. Her cunt is not under lock and key anymore,
it is redeemed, unlatched
from the knight-ghoul's clutch, his marriage to ennui.

Stepping forward, I am free.

Song for Jasper at Fernandina

Rick Campbell

*I have a bird that whistles,
a bird that sings. Stole that line
from the blues. I don't have a bird.
I have a dog who neither sings nor whistles,
but he would herd cattle if we
had some. He's from Australia
back in his dog days, some ancestral
down under where dingoes howl
at the moon of his dreams. Jasper,
my mate. Today, he said no to the Atlantic
waves breaking on the beach. *Cattle dog,*
he said, and lunged for the steps to the big house
behind the dunes. Not that one, I said,
they say John Grisham lives there.
I whistle show tunes, blues, Shenandoah.
We cross the highway and work
our way to the green grass shoulder,
a place to squat. Grisham
writes about lawyers, I say.*

Sorrow *Robert Rothman*

Sorrow can't be fought. So
otherworldly, like
love, an arrow pierces,
claiming every cell: the
potion spreads its will. I have
wailed and run to outrace
that hold. Never done. Now
it whispers: be glad this angel
has found you, large enough
to inhabit, to be flesh
and blood to celestial
flow that gives a gravitas
and weight to the human show.
When I depart, mortal man,
the silken black plumage
that gave you wings of grief
all gone—plunge back into
that lesser realm, restored.
I am never missed.

Rejection Slips *Robert Rothman*

Take every rejection letter and pin it
to the wall. When the walls are full
glue the onslaught against the ceiling. When an
acceptance comes, place it on your desk
and leave. Close the door. Let them have it out
alone. Never put a match to
a single no. Burn it inside so the
heat singes every last vein. Make
it better. Make it deeper. Make it so
so hot the reader goes up in flame.

Spider Rides the Log *Judith Grey*

Spider rides the log
inside, out of the rainstorm,
to the stove side stack.

Spring Break *Cheryl Walsh*

Throughout the first winter following his wife's death, Carson Reid drank a lot. His daughter Christina never said anything about it, but she never set his bottle out for him, even when he bullied her. She was only thirteen, but he bullied her anyway.

His younger daughter never stopped asking him to put the whiskey away. He did listen to her, little five-year-old Missy. And he would want to do her bidding, but the trouble was she looked so much like her mother—her sparkling blue eyes, just like Jenny's, and he would miss Jenny so much that he just had to reach for the bourbon.

At first, he wouldn't sleep in his bed at all—it was their bed, his and Jenny's—and it held too many memories for him to fit any slumber in. Then one night as the winter cold set in but good, he forgot and tumbled into bed after tying one on and fell immediately to sleep. When he woke up, he wept, but he realized he could survive the experience. So he started to go to bed again, if he hadn't drunk himself into too much of a stupor.

Of course, he still fell asleep on the couch in front of the fire more often than not. Those nights Christina never screwed the top back on the bottle for him, never even spread a blanket over him. He told himself that she was being lazy or cruel, but deep down, he knew that was just where she drew the line. He respected her

for that, though he would never consider telling her so. It wouldn't be right.

One night, he fell asleep with his head near the fire, rather than in its usual position at the opposite end of the couch. So when he woke up, he didn't see the fireplace, but the blank wall at the back of the room. A ray of sun peeked over the top of the mountain and found its way through the big picture window into his living room. It lit up two tulips, a big red one, and a smaller orange one. They seemed to float before his eyes, and he thought he had woken up in a meadow, that meadow where Jenny had planted the tulip bulbs right after they had moved here to the ranch so many years ago. And then he wondered, maybe he had died and was lying in a cemetery, and Jenny had planted tulips on his grave. But he wasn't cold enough to be outside, and he was able to blink and stretch his hand out, so he was neither in the meadow nor dead. He blinked again, and he saw that the tulips were sitting on the end table in what Jenny had called a bud vase. They hadn't been there the night before. He was sure of that.

He heard someone in the kitchen and soon smelled coffee and bacon. He sat up and tasted the inside of his mouth. Disgusting. He looked again at the tulips and he wanted to cry. Picking tulips, setting them in a vase, that was the sort of thing Jenny would do. He couldn't see Christina doing that—maybe little Missy, but not Tina. He almost called out, but it seemed like too much effort. Moving closer and speaking softer seemed an easier option this time.

He stood up. He didn't feel good, but he didn't feel as bad as he could have. He walked, steadily—he noticed that, made a note of it—to the kitchen. He rested his arm on the doorway, and Christina looked at him.

“Morning, Papa. Coffee's nearly ready.”

“Morning, Tina. Bacon smells good.”

She gave him a quick and insincere smile. He appreciated the effort.

“I haven't been easy to live with.” True enough, but what made him say it was beyond him. They were both surprised.

Christina stopped and looked at him intently. Only momentarily. Then she turned back to the stove and turned the bacon. “Far be it from me to disagree, Papa.”

“That sounds older than your years.”

She looked at him sidelong, curiously. “I guess I've aged a bit since Mama's gone.”

“I guess so. I'm sorry for that.”

Her eyebrows shot up and her lips parted, but she made no reply for a few seconds. “It's a sorry situation.”

“Sure is.” He sat down at the kitchen table, propped an elbow on it and rested his forehead on his hand. “Did you put the tulips on the table in there?”

“Mm hm. That OK?”

“Yeah. I just didn’t know what they were at first.” He laughed a little at himself. “They’re nice, though. Remind me of your mama.”

“She liked tulips.” She took the bacon out of the pan and poured some of the grease out. Then she spooned some batter into the pan. It sizzled, but not as much as the bacon. Then she turned to him, and he saw she had been crying. “It’s her birthday today. Remember?”

It was his turn to drop his jaw. He shook his head, involuntarily. “No. I forgot.”

“I thought maybe we could go out to the cemetery today. Put some flowers on her grave. So I picked some tulips and daffodils. They’re in a couple of jars on the porch.”

“Yeah. That’s a good idea. Sure. We’ll all go out after breakfast. You have school today?”

“No. It’s Easter week. Spring break.”

“Oh. Yeah, that’s right. Let’s go, then. We should plant some tulips on her grave, don’t you think?”

“You plant tulips in the fall—”

“I know that, girl!”

Christina turned abruptly and busied herself with the pancakes.

He regretted the testy sound of his voice. "I didn't mean today," he said more mildly.

She took a deep breath and softened the line of her eyebrows. Deliberately, he thought, not naturally. She said, "That's a good idea. I can dig up some bulbs come September."

"Good, then." He got up and walked back toward the doorway.

"Don't you want breakfast?"

"I'll be back. Think I'll shower first. Keep it warm for me."

"Sure." She continued after he had walked through the door, "Thanks, Papa. I'll get Missy up, and we'll all have breakfast and go to the cemetery."

He cried in the shower, but it felt good for once.

Stairs *Pama Lee Bennett**Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, U.K.*

Inside the front door, I see the staircase opposite,
with its smooth dark wooden railing,
wide Yorkshire stone stairs,
stairs worn concave in the center,
stairs leading to the landing with
the grandfather clock in its niche,
stairs you climbed as children to play
with toy soldiers and scribble wild stories together,
stairs you ascended each night
and descended each morning,
stairs leading you away to teach,
to governess, to study in Brussels,
stairs to come home to, and finally
to write what you needed to tell,
stairs you dragged your drunken brother up,
stairs that led to beds, sick-beds, death-beds,
and, too briefly, a marriage bed,
stairs they carried you down for the last time.
Once, you walked on these wide stone stairs,
each one now worn concave in the center,
stairs worn smooth by your feet and mine.

Stomata #1 *Jonah Jacobs*



Survival Lexicon *Hunter McLaren*

Drunk/short of breath/flopped over the mattress/bottle tipping/drowning

Speeding/on purpose/seat belt loose/lines whizzing/headlights singing

Jumping/fences/dodging firecrackers/knees torn up/having hickies

Sailboating/wavesplitting/impersonating captains/backstroking/bigger lungs

Picking/strawberries/gloveless/soiled shirt/wine-guzzled/sunburning

Hungry/eating cotton balls/shrinking/digging graves for moths/heaving dirt

Counting/lily pads/cupping minnows/bathing in the lake/sleepless moons

Stitching/snipping sweaters/making quilts/dusting window sills/hollowed out gowns

Afraid/colored nude/making snow angels/freezing/winter walking/sky grasping

Awake/carving wood/tossing knife/charting stars/ghost wailing/painting saucers

Building/tents/skinning hares/setting traps/easy crying/camouflaging

Pouring/liquors/dinking glasses/wincing & sour/laying cards/dragging feet

Praying/out of spaces/begging highway/breathing smoke/swerving

Making/lanterns/painting the house/burying things/locking windows

Tales of Hungary *SEIGAR*



Temporary Protected Status *Claudia Rojas*

is another way of saying I have had a temporary home. I have borrowed someone's life. One decade, two decades of a permanent address in the U.S. add up to a contradiction. My living costs a paycheck, necessary fees paid to Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Internal Revenue Service. I'm always due a visit to the Department of Motor Vehicles, where my documents talk terms or talk nonsense. I frequent the Human Resources Department, where my documents talk terms or talk nonsense. I hardly ever find the Office of Student Financial Aid, where my documents talk terms or talk nonsense or talk me into another student office.

What is the difference between temporary and permanent?

The distance to dying:

El Salvador's land.

At sixteen, I was college-bound. I could not wait. For a field of wildflowers in a small town, for a roommate wide-eyed in the snow, for a tuition bill unaccounted for in my imagination, I only had to find new words. Not citizen, not permanent resident, not undocumented. An error in the system, a perennial crisis in the United States. I would germinate beneath a rock.

What is the difference between detention and deportation?

A temporary home:

a cell, a spell to shake.

Every year, another year passes. I am the exceptional, a performance of life. Du Bois lives in my unsleeping present: *How does it feel to be a problem?* I don't sleep enough. My face is a foreign word. Untranslated, I am a brown skin, a large continent.

I, Not Home *Claudia Rojas*

Worn
and torn,
our photograph falls from my reach.
We could've erected a glass palace, such was the reach
of our restless hands. The wallpaper now left
peels off. The house, old, upheld by my memory
alone. Next door, they ask about you: You are well.
 You kept a spare key and rusty quarters
 under the welcome mat. Do you remember
 ? Nobody knocks. Nobody jeers. Not one.
How can these starved poems and subdued rooms
not want to rescue color and sound? A past. Those
echoes of my wholeness. The basement keeps
our zeal stuffed between boxes. You
are gone, and you are not a sweet
 absence,
 love.

Test Anxiety *Ellen Roberts Young*

The moment you ceased
paying attention
will be pinpointed here,
in a closed room, at the doctor,
at college, answers awaited
in body or blue book. Did you
eat properly? Did you study?
Greenery sways at the window.
Inside judgements will be rendered:
in tests of the muscles' balance,
the mind's capacities,
every appointment
an exam I fear I'll fail.

Conundrum *Ellen Roberts Young*

Full moon in Aries,
the sign of self I've read
somewhere—the newspaper
astrologist? News to me.
Aries a fire sign, what self
is constantly burning? Selves
are fluid, shifting, but not to ash.
Fire is action—we know
other selves by their actions,
a smile, a frown, a fist. Am I
what I do? I refuse to believe it,
an action that describes,
does not define me. I
sputter and fume, searching
for a core of self. Molten like
the earth's? Or a lake
shaped by its borders?
The sun in Libra urges
a more reasoned approach.

Thank You for Your Service *Craig Etchison*

I'm a veteran of the Vietnam War. Like many soldiers who headed into that war, I knew little about the country beyond the name of the capital, nothing about the people, and less than nothing about the history leading up to the war. I suspect that every man—no women in combat at that time—on that World Airways 707 flight remembers chasing the full moon from McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey to Alaska. After a brief refueling stop, we raced southwest to Japan, where the moon outpaced us, and we saw Mt Fuji bathed in the early morning sun as we came in for another refueling stop. The plane was eerily quiet on the final leg into Bien Hoa. We all knew that some on the plane would not return to the United States seated as we were now. And so began tour 365.

I learned much during that year. About people. About war. About myself. The experience changed me, as I'm sure it does most anyone who goes into combat. I learned that I should never judge a person on looks, which I certainly had a propensity to do—often unconsciously—prior to my year in Vietnam. Not long after getting to my unit, a heavy-set, swarthy dude joined my platoon. He was a badass motorcycle gang member who, given the choice by a judge, joined the military rather than go to prison. Had I seen him walking down a city sidewalk toward me, especially at night, I might well have found a reason to cross the street. Yet it didn't take long for me to discover that he'd do anything for

the guys in the platoon. I can't imagine anyone I'd rather have at my side—or at my back—in a tight situation. Book covers can give false impressions, a lesson I learned in other situations during my year.

I discovered that war was nothing like the versions I had seen on television while growing up. Being mostly fanciful lies to make a heroic actor look good, when, in fact, death stalked both the good and the bad without making any distinction. Nor was war much like what I had read in my school history books. Books that sanitized war, ignoring the destruction, the pain, the death that was ever imminent—for both the soldier and, even more so, for the civilians caught in war.

I saw a B-52 strike not too far from my position, and I tried to imagine what it must have been like for the enemy soldiers—young men my age—who were being blown up as I watched the horizon disappear in smoke and dust while the ground quaked. I watched a young soldier who had been badly burned while on patrol as he was lifted off a chopper and wondered what life would hold for him going forward. I looked into the large, luminous eyes of a beautiful seven-year-old girl whose foot had been blown off by a rocket that had hit one of our hootches where the girl's mother had been cleaning—and wondered what her life would be. If she survived. So much blood.

I saw desperation, Vietnamese—people just like me, with families, friends, hopes, fears—reduced to slavery and all sorts of injustice. Girls forced into prostitution in order to keep themselves and their families alive was but one

miserable form of slavery out of many. I shall never forget the elderly woman digging into a fifty-five-gallon barrel that was being used as a garbage can outside our mess hall. That in the final years of her life she should be reduced to little more than a rat scabbling among the garbage for enough to keep herself alive is but one symbol of the obscenity of war.

I learned fear. I was in a helicopter unit, and we were subject to numerous rocket and mortar attacks trying to knock out our helicopters. On some evenings, when the breeze was right and all was quiet, I could actually hear the first rounds exiting the mortar tube—a sound I shall never forget. And there's nothing one can do but wait, hoping the next round doesn't land on you. That's the hard part—waiting, unable to take any action to avoid the incoming round. As those rounds rained down, I knew a fear I've never known before or since. I also knew those rounds were completely amoral, that they would kill both the good person and the evil person without making any distinction.

Death in war never makes any distinction between the deserving or the undeserving person, however those terms might be defined.

I remember one particular evening as if it were yesterday. I was reading a fragment of the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, something I seldom did because it was seldom available where I was stationed. For some reason, I glanced at the list of KIAs (killed in action), again, something I normally didn't do. A name jumped out and smacked me in the

gut. My first childhood playmate. He had been killed—a friendly fire incident in an ambush gone wrong. A good person. Shouldn't have been there. Artillery officer. But with the shortage of infantry officers, he had volunteered to lead an infantry unit. Dead. Never to live to old age, along with so many others. On both sides.

What I didn't learn during that year was why we were fighting. I began that process after returning home, slowly over the years learning the history that led up to our active involvement, as well as those moments where we might have—should have—could have avoided or exited the war, saving so many lives. What became eminently clear to me—though I'm sure some would disagree—is that we had no business being in Vietnam.

After WWII we supported the French, a colonial power, in their attempt to keep their colony, even when the Vietnamese leader had pleaded with us for the right of self-determination for his country. How ironic that we would deny Vietnam its freedom after having just fought in WWII for that very right for European countries.

We then got caught up in the communist scare and the domino theory, failing to realize the basic truth that communism wasn't a monolith—that in fact, the Vietnamese loathed the Chinese dating back hundreds of years. Vietnam was also torn by a struggle between the minority Catholics who were ruling—left over after the French abandoned the country—and the majority Buddhists. The conflict in Vietnam had little to do with some

organized march of communism but, rather, which totalitarian regime, the one in Saigon or the one in Hanoi would rule. But we didn't see the obvious. Maybe couldn't see it because of our hubris.

Only after the U.S. exited the war did I learn how catastrophic the conflict was. Over 58,000 U.S. soldiers dead. Many more injured, both physically and mentally. Upwards of five million mostly civilians dead in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The residue of that war continues to this day. We spread 13 million gallons of Agent Orange, a toxic defoliant, over much of the country. Agent Orange causes cancer and birth defects, among other nasty things. Because Agent Orange remains in the environment for a long period of time, it has caused two million cancers among the Vietnamese population so far. Over one half million children have been born with debilitating—and ghastly—birth defects to date. So the war continues to ravage the country long after the end of hostilities.

The cancers that Agent Orange spawned have ravaged and killed many of our soldiers after they returned home, including a guy I grew up with. His final years were an ugly battle against the inevitable. And how many were affected by all the DDT we soldiers were exposed to?

Now we come to the crux. I'm embarrassed when someone finds out I'm a veteran and says, "Thank you for your

service.” What was my service? Was it to help a land and its people who wanted a right that most of us take for granted—the right to self-determination? No. I was involved in the destruction of that land and the killing of its innocent civilians who simply wanted what every person wants—a chance to live peacefully and safely.

Did my service in any way defend or protect the United States? Of course not. Had I been doing something—anything—that actually helped protect my country from a real threat, I could accept thanks. But I wasn’t doing that, so when I’m thanked, I feel like a charlatan. That somehow, I’ve conned the person thanking me, and that makes me extremely uncomfortable. Or maybe, when I try to absolve myself, I see myself as the victim of an over-powerful militaristic element in our society that has somehow persuaded us that the military is the *sine qua non* of the population—no matter the amount of death and destruction that military rains down on the innocent. Even then, how can I accept thanks?

I risked my life, true, just as all who went to Vietnam did, but that risk was for a blatant lie. The valor displayed in Vietnam—and many displayed unselfish valor of the highest order—had nothing to do with national interests. Those unselfish demonstrations of valor involved risking life and limb for buddies in the unit. Nothing more. Because there was nothing more in Vietnam. The war was a debacle of the first order. As most war is. As our current “forever wars” are.

So instead of thanking me, I wish people would make sure old white men in Washington—often men who avoided war and military service—don't send young men into wars that do nothing to defend or protect or advance the ideals of our country. Often demeaning our ideals, if truth be known. As has been going on for the past twenty years.

Hold politicians accountable. And if politicians make egregious mistakes, force them to admit those mistakes and bring the lads home. Soldiers shouldn't suffer and die because of some warped sense of national honor or exceptionalism, as so blatantly happened with the Vietnam War and continues to happen today.

I cringe at the logos pasted on cars calling for us to *support the troops*. Let's support our soldiers by refusing to use them to further the political ends of egotistic, self-absorbed politicians. Let's make sure our military is, in fact, a defense force for the country, not some global cop nobody wants and which many people around the world hate. Then, when soldiers are used only for real defensive purposes, you can thank soldiers like me for our service, and that thanks will be most acceptable.

Thinking Small *Will Walker*

Sometimes I wish I lived in one of the world's tiniest principalities—say Andorra, where the military spends most of its funds on blanks, or Liechtenstein, whose primary product is snazzy postage stamps, or San Marino, which may have a foreign policy, but has committed no known atrocities, except perhaps on wayward goats.

I take it as a matter of faith that citizens of the little nations are no finer than those of the rich and powerful, yet perhaps their opportunities to plunder, ravage, and despoil are constrained by lack of real estate.

Perhaps the ones who think big leave home hoping to strip-mine derivatives on a world stock exchange or corner the market in napalm, while the souls who love peace and a daily dose of quiet, who can find satisfaction in gossip with neighbors and sufficient profit in simple work selling cheese or growing grapes, stay put.

The countries the size of postage stamps do not dominate the history books or send their citizens to collect Nobel Prizes. They may even speak a dying tongue, one that celebrates silence and the spring breeze that blows down from the eastern mountains. You wonder: Don't they relish obscurity? And thank their little gods for peace?

This Is River *Brin Williams*

She was alone until she found him, hiding in the pages of a book called *Illness and Affliction: A Physician's Guide* from 1967.

He was in the corner of page 58, in curly, slanted handwriting. River Stanley.

And she didn't know what it was about the little curl on the "r" at the end of River or the slant of the "t" in Stanley, but she couldn't stop thinking about the little name in the corner of page 58.

It was as if River were with her, keeping her company in the quiet library, because perhaps he had sat there almost 50 years ago, reading that very book, but it wasn't until she found him again, this time in a first edition copy of *Viruses and Bacteria* from 1962 that she realized he really was there, the folded corner of page 148 was like a blanket wrapped around her, keeping her warm and all she could think about was River.

She began to search for him in medical textbooks from the sixties in the front left corner of the library. And she found him.

And sometimes there were notes.

"Penicillin?"

“probably asphyxiation.”

“more research.”

All written in black, slanted ink.

She traced the notes in his handwriting into a blue notebook. Called it River. Wrote it like he did in black ink on a silver piece of duct tape she stuck on the front.

Scanned the pages when she found out where the scanner was. “What are you doing?” the librarian on duty asked politely one day.

“Just talking to River.”

“Ah, I see?” It sounded like a question, but it was fine; people probably wouldn’t understand River the way she did. They didn’t know his “r’s” or his “t’s” like she did.

She took a glue stick to the printed pages, pasted River together neatly.

She spoke to him each night before bed when she was alone, and he kept the loneliness at bay, because River was there.

She held him to her breast as she slept. She woke up and kissed his face.

She brought him to class each day.

“What class is that for?” her classmate asked her one morning. “This is River,” she replied reasonably.

He looked at her strangely, but she just smiled at him; people didn’t understand River, but that was fine. He was hers, and she didn’t want to share anyway.

She placed him on the stool next to her when she got coffee one rainy day, and someone sat on him by mistake.

She’d screamed at the woman, appalled.

The woman was confused and apologized before moving away, to the opposite end of the shop, sparing backwards glances at her every so often.

River seemed fine, but she decided it best to leave, go to the library and have more conversations with him.

She found some passages he had circled in the second edition of *Basics of Diagnostics* from 1965.

She copied them down meticulously, looking back at each word two or three times to make sure she’d copied it correctly. She couldn’t make mistakes.

Her mother called her out of the blue, something she never does, and asked how she was.

She said she was fine, she’d met someone. Someone better than dad, like her mom always hoped.

An aspiring doctor she said.

“How wonderful! And what’s his name?” “River,” she said. “River Stanley.”

“Well, I’d love to meet him. I’m so happy you’ve finally found someone, sweetie. I was really worried about you, after your father.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Well, anyway, you should come home. I’ll make dinner for you two.”

She took a train home that weekend, with River in her lap, excited.

She knocked on the door to her childhood home, and her mother answered happily, hugged her and kissed her and asked, “Where’s River?”

“This is River.” She held him up for her mother to see.

Her mother looked confused, like everyone always did, and she sighed, not knowing why she thought her mother would understand.

Maybe because of dad.

Dad was so awful, and nobody understood why her mother married him. Why did she stay when all he did was

drink and smoke and beat her over the head with his empty bottles? When they found out he'd given himself cancer from all the drugs and alcohol and tar, they didn't rejoice, at least not loudly. But then he got meaner and meaner until he put a gun in his mouth.

If anyone could understand River, it was her mother, but she didn't understand. She was all wide-eyed, asking things timidly, like words would shatter.

And her mother kept her at home, talked to people, talked to different people, brought her to people and had her explain herself.

"This is River," she always said. "I met him in the library. We fell in love," but they didn't understand and she didn't try to force them. It was alright, after all, love is complicated, but then they tried to take him from her and that wasn't alright.

She screamed and screamed when they took him, begged her mother, couldn't figure out what she'd done wrong. He was better than dad, surely. Studious, an aspiring doctor. And all her mother ever really asked of her, was to "find a man better than your father." She said that when he had the cancer, when he was meanest and nastiest.

So what had she done wrong?

River, who kept her company, calmed her, listened to her, treated her well. He would cure her. Why would they take him

They held him up to her, after many months apart. Hundreds of hours of therapy.

If she pretended she was better, maybe they'd give him back. "What is this?" they asked.

She didn't know what to say. What was the right answer? If she said he was a notebook, they might throw him away, consider him dead. And he wasn't; he was living, breathing, speaking to her.

Not her dad. She paused.

"This is River," she said.

Through the Keyhole *Ron Torrence*

a rose
will hurt you
if
you hold it
the wrong way

a song
will beguile you
if
you ignore
its meaning

pathways
clear
at noon
disappear
at midnight

smiles mislead

perception
resides
beneath
time

observe

Framing Time *Ron Torrence*

still

completely

still

ripple breeze

splash fish

distant rumbles

war cannons

iconizing

legacies

leaving graves

unseen

forgotten

lining history

like

fields

of

cabbage

yellow
flutter

b
u
t
t
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r
f
l
y

Trump Signs Bibles in Alabama *Lorna Wood*

How much death does it take to move us?

Polar bears, penguins, marine mammals,
insects, coral—not the right species.
Superdome crowds—not the right color.
Puerto Ricans, too—send paper towels.
Got wildfires? Sweep up that forest floor.

The old consult Foxy oracles
who wind them in fear like mummies.
The young (if they survive the shootings)
roar down the road like drunks, ignoring
signs for Less Normal, then Even Less.

The middling in age and class struggle
to hold on, voting down new taxes,
marveling at invisible hands
snatching even the little they have.

Now, in an “outbreak” of tornadoes,
an EF4 strikes out of nowhere,
killing twenty-three. Is that enough?
Two children ripped from their father’s arms,
a family of seven—why go on?

Only heads in the sand give answer,
relentless, joyful and Trumphiant:
“O come bearing books, all ye faithful,
and receive talismans doubly blessed.
Depart one by one and be grateful.
Clutch his signature tight to your breast.”

Golden Age *Lorna Wood*

There were Titans. There always are. My grandmother ate her own children, and my mother was doomed to carry the mother she had killed inside until it devoured her, and I had to bury Mom's remains, still living, under a mountain.

There was hubris. Dad, competing with Apollo, thought he could heal the world with music, even though they dragged him from his piano and tried to make him a warrior, and afterward Kronos mocked him, and he couldn't even fix my mother, or himself.

But I was born in that brief interval when Mom, enduring, and Dad, trying for rebirth in autumn, still had hope. I was their magic fruit that could heal miraculously and reverse time, and so we lived until the Titans' curse, inevitably, turned the wheel.

Tunnel *Marjorie Power*

Can X and I stay friends? Chances are slim.
We're caught in a tunnel, propelled by fright.
I still cannot believe she'd vote for *him*.

We've had our differences for many years
but also followed an underground stream.
How could she vote against water, earth, air?

To label her as "X" is not a whim.
I've no wish to cause hurt, exposing the name
of someone long loved. Chances are slim.

Ugly *Allen Strous*

unavoidably

faces hardened and dulled with age
or not-old faces, hardened with hardness,
the look of hard at work on a hot summer morning,
of children playing, grubby absorbed, blank grubs quickly,
my own child-face in the mirror then, hardly human
 fitting no pattern that I knew
in a time when all the patterns were hard,
trim, trimmed, constricted.

The colors of flowers, of cotton print scraps,
fell from the sky, somewhere else.

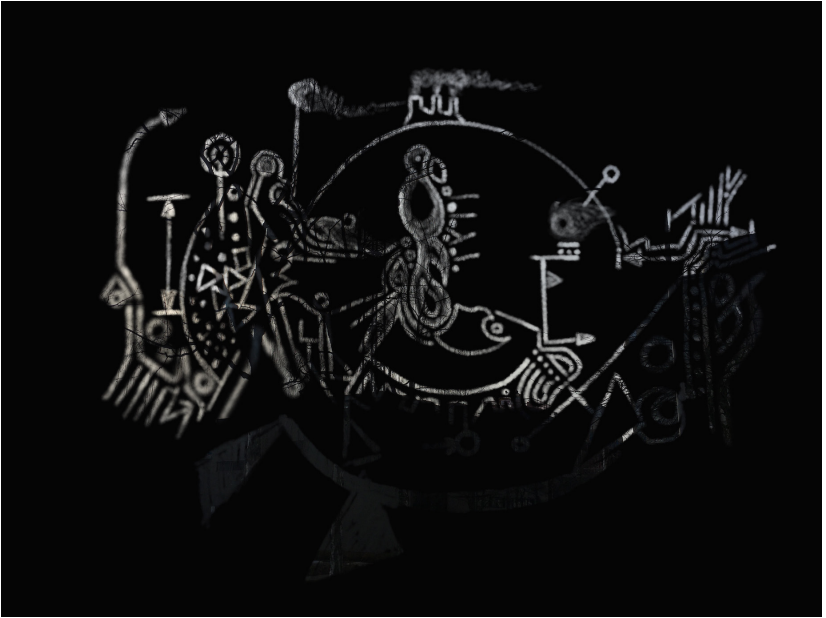
I felt exiled from that more real world,
and that gap has lasted—

where I was, instead,
alien,
and so much mine.

Unlike Reality *James Croal Jackson*

television
the mechanism
wherein brains
dwindle
upon a string
tethered
to satellite
voices
in my ears
and yours
a stranger
intimately
confined
to believe
one of us
is real

The View from Here *Nelson Lowhim*



What Oliver Sachs Said *Jim Ross*

On the night Billy Crystal became the tenth recipient of the Mark Twain Award for Humor, Robin Williams (who persistently evaded being the recipient) told the audience, “Some of you are under indictment. You know who you are. So please shut off your cell phones and ankle bracelets and enjoy the evening.”

The after-party felt more like an orgy at Times Square because they all came out to toast Billy. Once paying guests were allowed to mingle with celebs, my wife, my 20-something son Alex, and I became deer in the headlights. “What now?”

Jimmy Fallon, not yet famous, who screwed up his routine so badly he had to repeat it four times, stomped his right foot like a Riverdancer, looked Alex in the eyes, and said, “You and I could be brothers.” They got side by side and I snapped a few photos. They *did* look like brothers. After a chat, Jimmy said, “I better go practice my routine in case they want me to do it again.”

Off to the right I saw Robert De Niro and surprise toaster, Joe Torre. All I could think about when I saw Torre was an old headline in the *New York Daily News*, when the Mets beat the Braves because Torre, then a catcher, flinched as a runner slid home: “Chicken, Catcher Torre?” Sports-caster Bob Costas was two steps to my right. I hardly follow football. Would he find that headline funny? I filched for something sporty to say and welcomed a fan’s

squeezing me aside. To our left, Barbara Walters, alone, struck a Statue of Liberty pose. A thought flashed through my head: I should run over and say, “Miss Walters, I’m ready for my interview now.” But then I heard the fingernails-on-glass voice of Danny DeVito. He sounded really close. I looked all around. “I can hear him but I can’t see him anywhere.”

“That’s because he’s two feet tall,” said Alex, “but who cares about him. Turn around. You’re right next to Robin Williams.”

I pivoted. An arm’s length away, Robin was submitting to a “Let’s get this over with” photo with a fan and turned to face the inevitable, us.

“Robin Williams,” I said, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“I’m sure I’ll soon learn that the pleasure is all mine,” he bowed.

“May I ask you a question?” I asked.

“Should I be afraid because you asked for permission first?”

“Have you ever had an MRI of your brain?” I asked.

“When we were making *Awakenings*, Oliver Sachs really wanted me to get one.”

“But you didn’t?” I asked.

“Naw,” he shook his head. “I’m sure my brain is *perfectly* normal.”

“If you were an extraterrestrial looking at your brain, would you think your brain was normal?” I shook my head. “It’d look like *Fantasia*.”

Robin turned his hands into two talking heads. “Oooweee,” he said. “Oooweee,” raising his pitch. “Oooweee oooweee ooooweee,” he repeated, going lower, then shooting higher. The talking heads at first appeared to be chatting. Then they attacked each other for survival of the fittest. With his wrists crossed, it then looked like the talking heads were making love. As the talking heads gained momentum and carried him along, Robin spun around 360 degrees, twice.

“That was invigorating,” I said.

“Like I said, I’m sure my MRI would look *perfectly* normal.”

“Speaking of Oliver Sachs and *Awakenings*, have you had your own awakening yet?”

“Most days I do, though now and then I prefer to spend the day under the covers.”

“Have you discovered your personal el dopa?” I asked.

“I’ve tried nearly everything, and I’ve had plenty of wake-up calls, but most of my awakenings vanish by morning. Cycling wakes me up.”

“What about the Buddha?” I asked.

“The Buddha laughed. I try to give him something to keep laughing at. But, whatever I come up with, it’s always so *impermanent*. I keep striving. I know the answer is to cease striving. But how can one reconcile speed and the cessation of striving?”

“It would be really good if you got that MRI,” I said.

Robin laughed. “You and Oliver would like each other. You two should get together.”

“I’ll gladly meet Oliver in the shadows of the parking garage of his choice,” I said.

My son snapped a serious-looking photo of me and Robin, who scribbled his name on an index card, and we tried shaking hands. “Odds takes it. Once, twice, three shoot.”

“Stay away from crowds,” I said as we began stepping away.

Robin folded his arms, raised his head, closed his eyes, and repeated, “*Om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum,*” until we could no longer hear him.

Over the next seven years, Robin had surgery to replace an aortic valve, married for the third time, checked himself into alcoholism treatment, and was diagnosed with early-stage Parkinson’s.

After Robin's August 11, 2014, suicide, his wife, Susan Schneider, wrote in the medical journal *Neurology* that a year earlier Robin began to experience sudden and prolonged spikes in fear and anxiety, constipation, urinary difficulty, heartburn, sleeplessness, a poor sense of smell, stress, a slight tremor in his left hand and, eventually, paranoia, delusions, severe insomnia, memory loss, and high cortisol levels. She said, "Robin was losing his mind and he was aware of it ... He kept saying, 'I just want to reboot my brain.'" The autopsy indicated that Robin suffered from diffuse Lewy body disease, which Schneider called, "The terrorist inside his brain."

After I heard of Robin's suicide, I wished he'd gotten the MRI that Oliver Sachs recommended while they were making *Awakenings*. I've often wished it since. I've been told it might not have mattered because Lewy body disease has no cure. They couldn't evict the terrorist in his brain. I think at some level Robin knew all along and he didn't want to know.

The Widening Gyre *Claire Scott Rubin*
After W.B.Yeats and the myth of Theseus

The same crime over and over
a boy limps through the desert, wearing one sandal
a woman pulls up her pants, notices red stains
and a tipped over water bottle
a child with a backpack of stories
and a half eaten sandwich
returns to an empty house
every ten seconds
the minotaur snorts
Theseus loses the thread
and so it goes and goes
like a malignant echo
down blood stained corridors
King Minos smiles
a blank and pitiless smile
his hour come round at last

Willie *Terry Sanville*

He never gave me back my wagon. I found it years later, half-buried in the ravine in back of our house on Calle Poniente, its body rusted through, wheels gone. You know, you act a little like him, I mean like Willie used to before the fire, before he went from being a first class tough guy to worm food.

No, I'm not trying to piss you off. But seeing you after all these years gets me thinking...about that afternoon in '58, raining like holy hell and the four of us standing on the cliff top, staring down Thousand Steps at the Pacific. What idiots. Willie gives Allen a shove...then there's just three: you, him, and me.

We never really let Willie become one of us, ya know. You remember that, don't you? Was it all *my* fault since I met him first? Marquard Terrace seemed like another world, even though it was just around the corner and uphill from Mrs. Story's house. But it had no kids and I guess...I guess Willie had to come over to *our street* and push us around, to keep in practice for sixth grade. Dammit, we had the numbers, we could have taken him. But he had...had that hardness, that dangerous way that kept us off balance, cautious, watching our own little horror show. I still won't go near cliffs.

Order us another round, will ya? What? I don' care, just keep 'em comin'.

It's strange being back in Santa Barbara drinking at Tullie's. As kids, we could only stare past the padded door into this dark hole and wonder what went on, about the old alkies hunched over the bar, or how anybody could breathe in that smoke. Now we know. Big whoop.

But thinking about Willie makes me drink. He really wasn't that big, ya know. But he seemed huge that day. My mother told me to stay away from him. She even called his mom and they had it out over the phone. Mother yelled the "N" word and slammed the receiver down. I never thought about Willie being black, just one badass kid. But somehow, being close to him gave you, me and Allen extra...muscle. Other kids at school wouldn't mess with us. But it's the secret you and I kept that really amazes me. Eleven-year-olds aren't supposed to keep secrets. I don't know how we did it. You did keep your mouth shut, didn't you?

My mother always said words could never hurt me. I learned that day she was full of it. You can't call somebody a...a nigger and expect nothing to happen. Well, Allen tried. He paid for it. But then...your brother always was a klutz, falling off his bike, tripping over curbs. Still, Willie shouldn't have shoved him. At least Allen went quickly, I hope so, bloody rocks, high tide, surf taking him away...to float in the kelp beds off Ledbetter Point.

Why you looking at me like that?

I'm sorry. You already know all this. But it comes out of me in dreams or when I drink, can't stop it – that high scream, sea sounds, Willie's grayish face as we charged down Thousand Steps and watched the surf take Allen.

I'm...I'm sorry. You don't need to relive any of that. I never told anybody about the shove. Figured it was bad enough when Willie and his mom got burned up. What good would it have done? And it's been sixty years and everybody's gone.

We're supposed to get over this crap, right? It's supposed to fade after so many years, decades. But I still remember... Willie's mama, that glorified chicken coop they rented in back of the Lopez house. These days, the City'd be all over them for code violations, especially the electrical. Never could figure out why the cops thought somebody torched the place. Who would do that? Right?

There aren't any affordable chicken coops left in Santa Barbara. They've all been moved to Lompoc. Come on, it's not *that* funny. Quit laughing, will ya. You are laughing aren't you?

Willie's mom was nice, inviting us in for cookies and sweet tea. Remember that God-awful tea? They came from Georgia, or maybe the Carolinas. He never talked about it... never talked much about anything. I think he was ashamed of his accent. Remember the kids in Mrs. Adam's class laughing whenever he was called on?

Come on, order another. Ya can't get drunk on beer.

Ya know, Allen's buried in the same cemetery as my folks. They're a couple rows over from your brother, right next to Hope Avenue. He was the first person I knew who died. Sometimes when I'm drinking like this, I imagine him

growing up just like the rest of us, only better. He'd go to a good university 'cause he was smart, maybe Stanford or an Ivy League school. I see him livin' the good life with a wife that looks beautiful, even with gray hair, kids, grand-kids, *with two cats in the yard* as that song goes. It's almost like I want to force him to live in my mind, that somehow he never...and neither did Willie...but I struggle to think past that fire. Crazy, huh?

What? You gotta go already? At least let me pick up the tab. I'm gonna hang 'round here for awhile, like this place, these guys seem like my...my people. Call next time you come through Santa Barbara. We'll do it again. I promise not to go on and on about...you know. Sorry 'bout that, Rod. Take care.

A Woman Blows a Conch

*Edythe Haendel Schwartz
Manini Beach, Kealakekua Bay, HI*

A woman blows a conch at the edge of the bay,
long unbroken tone, a call—a hover
over water, echo not an echo.
We stroll closer.

Notes rise and fall like *oli* / chants
of ancestors. At the border of sea
and shore, we ring the woman—
spirits seeking shape.

A woman blows a conch, faces east, west,
north, south— intones *I summon the sacred
rhythms of the ancients, warn of oceans
rearranging maps, shrinking habitats.*

*I am kapuna wahine / grandmother,
blow the conch to heal my land,
to soothe my bones, my soul.
Now I am without*

*my love, I blow, unweave the weave,
watch Pandanus twist in trade winds, nurse
our garden at Manini beach,
where fronds of fennel flare like stars—*

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Michael Casey—Casey grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts.

R.T. Castleberry suggests irony will suffice.

Paul Castro—Always spoils good walks with photography. <https://themovingpavement.tumblr.com/>

Cara Losier Chanoine: I am a constellation of scars.

Angela Copple

Barbara Daniels—Traveler now at home under quarantine.

Marc Darnell—Last of the pasture poets, unpasteurized.

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- Ed Meek**—High Tide is coming out this summer.
- Felicia Mitchell**—Now blooming where I was planted. www.feliciamitchell.net
- Dan Morey**
- Gloria Murray**—Confession: Stopped trying for the New Yorker. glorggm@optonline.net
- Larry Narron**—The handle of every syllable held.
- Ayaz Daryl Nielsen**—Gosh, all these alien poetry readings.
- Rees Nielsen**
- Kristi Nimmo**—I was met at the airport.
- Daniel O'Connell**—Reincarnation of small, prehistoric flying insect. www.danieloconnellpoetry.com
- Marlene Olin**—For Billie. Always remembered. Forever loved.

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Laurie Reiche—Flitting poetry minnows in the air.

Seth Richardson

Rick Rohdenburg—Contemplation. It's still worth thinking about.

Claudia Rojas—Writing because her heart is ocean.

Jim Ross—Repentant researcher resurrecting long-neglected right brain. Jamesross355@gmail.com

Robert Rothman

William Rudolph—Living in the grays of all-or-nothing.

Terry Sanville—Musician loves to write short stories. tsanville@sbcglobal.net

Gerard Sarnat—Married half-century, eight grand/kids, homelessness physician-professor-CEO.

Joel Savishinsky—Recovering academic, unrepentant activist, love's fool. savishin@hotmail.com

Yvette Schnoeker-Shorb—Life building words; sturdy shelter now.

Penelope Schott

Edythe Haendel Schwartz

Claire Scott Rubin

SEIGAR

Gregg Shapiro—Clearly, you don't know me well.

Rochelle Shapiro

David Sheskin—A writer and artist published widely.

Dana Stamps, II. likes to play with funny words.

Tom Stapleton—Still hanging on by my fingernails.

Frank Stehno—Live fully, read broadly, write on.

Sarah Stern—My mom made me a poet. <https://sarahstern.me>

Brett Stout—I came, I saw, I died. Instagram: [brett_cooterific](#).

Allen Strous

John Struloeff—Yes, still searching for my purpose.

Elizabeth Templeman

Denise Thompson-Slaughter—Called forth to witness interesting times. Facebook: Denise Thompson-Slaughter's author page

Ruth Ticktin—Seize stories place together we succeed

Vincent Tomeo—Poised; innovator; motivator; dreamer; passionate; poet. Skinnyfeller136@yahoo.com

Ziaeddin Torabi—The world without poetry is empty. Torabi_tz@yahoo.com

Ron Torrence

Rachel Tramonte

John J. Trause—Callimachus of now: librarian, poet, scholar.

John Tustin—A poem written for romantic losers. Fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry

Eileen Van Hook—Poet who married in haste—twice! Hookefoley28@yahoo.com

Will Walker—Past expiration date. How'd that happen?

Cheryl Walsh—Watching the sunflowers. Hold my calls. cherylwalsh@q.com

Richard Weaver—Person >six syllables.

Stephen Weiss

Brin Williams—Life is a beautiful cosmic coincidence. Twitter: [@Espace_Noire](#)

Scott Withiam—Given time, his mistakes grew shorter. [scwith-](#)

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iam@gmail.com

Lorna Wood—Creates while social distancing with cats. Amazon.com/author/lornawood

Marlene Woods—Psychotherapy was NOT the right profession. www.marlenewoods.com

Ellen Roberts Young

EDITOR BIOS

Gemma Alvarez Esquivel—Justice in my bones. Sembrando Huellas.

Teren Bangi—A reader living thousands of lives.

Jennifer Barraclough—I have no idea, but sure.

Sara Brune likes Eliot, Collins, and Earl Grey.

Joel Bush learned how to read this semester!

Jackie Duran—Tired from the naps I took.

Patrick England

Jesse Fhami—Boy with New Jack Swing tattoo.

Esteban Lara—Vitamin Water is my entire life.

Rachel Mendiola

Jessica Padilla—Puzzling Puzzle Pieces Piece Perfect Poetry.

Christopher Perez—Always growing and improving; always human.

Eulices Ponce

Sequoia Ruth—I thought I didn't belong here.

Megan Taylor --Thinking about being a botanist instead.

Hamilton Tran

