Shadowplay
2026 Issue 4



Contents

EDITORIAL 1

POEMS

Siham Karami	5	Resurrection Comes Around
Deborah Doolittle	6	Alan Dugan Replants Astilbe
Evelyn Griffith	7	*Agnus Dei,* Say the Clouds to My Soul
Michelle McMillan-Holifield	9	Metallica in the Background
Alison Ruth	11	collision specialist
Jade Kleiner	12	Being Grendel
Julie Ebin	13	Red Maple
Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg	14	The Blessing is the Bird
Yarrow Knittel	15	A Thing with Feathers
Sarah Watkins	16	Preserve Hunt
Liz Nakazawa	18	The Stone Diary
Alexis G. Garcia	22	Being Angry Makes Me Feel like a God
Abigail-Tydale Bassey	23	Uncommon ways to do nothing
Kathleen Hellen	24	october
Leatrice	25	The Lines Are Open
Madeline Boles	26	I know this much:
Bruce McRae	27	Made Curious
	29	The Saint
Warren Woessner	30	Grasshoppers
Max Gutmann	31	Other Rooms
William Doreski	32	The Final Recap
George Freek	33	After the Chinese Poet Li Shangyin
Jim Tilley	34	Not About Nothing in Particular
Lauro Palomba	35	Throwback
k.d.zwierz	36	Night Crossing
Alan Catlin	37	Once in a Blue Moon: An Anxiety Dream Love Poem
Mark Allinson	38	Old Man Banksia

T.A.R. Wallace	39	Wrong
Garrett Bruner	40	Likenesses
Ross Bolding	41	End of Day
FICTION		
Felicity Marsh	45	Time Was, Time Is
Kalina Smith	48	Double Red Flags
Susan Policoff	51	Shattered
Peggy Culp	57	Bait Shop Love
Eliza Souers Valle	61	serotinous
Arjun Razdan	64	Le *zok* de Marie
Matthew Wherttam	68	Into the Business District
NONFICTION		
R. Nemo Hill	73	Questions Of Sorrow
David Hughes	74	Listening After Goretti
David Milley	80	Penn's Landing
Taylor Harrison	87	Should I Be Concerned If I Have a Possum in My Yard?
Kate LaDew	91	Outside Electric Green
CONTRIBUTORS	95	

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jenn Beachler

FACULTY ADVISOR
Mary Meriam

Copyright © 2026 by University of Arkansas Monticello Literary Publications. All rights reserved.

ISBN 979-8253119136

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers. NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's and publisher's exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

Cover art: Public Domain. U.S. Geological Survey, Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center. Collection: Earth As Art 2. Source: Landsat 7. The eastern side of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula juts into the Pacific Ocean west of Alaska. In this winter image, a volcanic terrain is hidden under snow-covered peaks and valley glaciers feed blue ice into coastal waters.
https://eros.usgs.gov/media-gallery/earth-as-art/2/kamchatka-peninsula

Contact Information:
Dr Kay Walter, MFA Director
phone: 870-460-1578
email: mfagradprog@uamont.edu
University of Arkansas at Monticello
Arts and Humanities
562 University Drive
Monticello, AR 71656

https://shadowplaylit.blogspot.com
shadowplaylit@gmail.com

Editorial

—a cento using the works from Shadowplay *Issue 4*

The brown thrush signals end of day,
after a whole life building, to be called a ruin.
Your visions droop and wallow, sticky weeping
wounds all black and tarred, the remains
of what they assumed to be impending doom.

A globe in the branches turning and burning
brightly into the deep heat of that day
…faint cries coming over the water, along
the unpaved country road, kicking up dust.

Your curse cut me, and through the scabs,
clamped inside the jaws of life, I wrest
my sleeves, their dead and dried up leaves
curly at the base. Jagged slivers spew out
and tinkle. They would be uprooted.

I was mute with the muteness of grasshoppers,
hopping and snapping one on top of another
on the pavement like heavy rain. Silence changes
shape to begin anew where we went all wrong.

And then at her feet of ivory and ice, my shadow
crosses snow, a flamboyance of trees
with a distance as vast as that which isolates
the stars, a new brittleness in my chest
translating tales to blank-faced stares.

Let's not talk of ghosts, though.
I hear them moaning a deep,
continuous roar, a thing of beauty
in an unbeautiful environment.

I've felt myself morphing into another being,
pointing toward a small silhouette.
Stems push through broken stones
of the mirror surface, having trudged through
the downpour framed in the doorway.

We're gliding through a passageway,
the souls off to mourning songs
and hunger, litter strewn, litter cleared,
the leaves shaggy like billy goats.

And I, off to perch into something else.
My rusted ribs cave, cracking like the rattling
of small stones, the skywards swoop
of my movement on cobalt-sheened
wings. *Hope,* the birds are still calling.

Jenn Beachler
Editor-in-Chief of *Shadowplay*

Poems

Siham Karami

Resurrection Comes Around

Earth has a name and something of a voice.
Her messages are broadcast all the time
by albatross and whale, by scum and slime,
on beetles' backs, on bees and butterflies,

whole empires of the ants and flocks of birds,
the scent of every predator and prey,
the smoke of every burning banyan tree,
the running wildebeests and zebras, herds

of cattle, bony, starved on sacred ground
where roots and stems push through broken stones
and deserts bury tentacles and bones
and ancient conches give the wind its sound.

An oceanful of fish and plankton move
between angelic jellyfish, whose light
mirrors our old Milky Way at night,
reminding us of all the worlds in love

with scavengers, and ruminators, torn
and tearing all the universe to shreds
of bladderwrack and tardigrades, of Heads
of State and mountains crushed to whiffs of yarn,

and all things were but messengers to warn
as Earth expels her legacy—reborn.

Deborah Doolittle

Alan Dugan Replants Astilbe

Nothing is plump, pretty, or plain-
  ly elegant. The stems scraggly,
the leaves shaggy like billy goats'
  beards on the chins of young men.
When the sun comes, these flowers fade
  from view, stems wither, leaves curl up
and droop. I am no gardener,
  but I plant a garden for myself.
The red blooms for myself, the pink
  blooms for myself, and the white, all
for myself. My thumb is more brown
  than green. Let the neighbors snicker
all they want. My conscience is clean,
  although my knees are caked with mud.
I planned and planted them with thumbs
  to guide the seeds. My garden recedes,
dwindles each day in the brilliance
  of the sun. Come afternoons, when
shadows creep the other way
  into my yard, my spirit—and
my flowers—bloom and bloom and bloom.

Evelyn Griffith

Agnus Dei, Say the Clouds to My Soul

The ground became a viper
wrapped around the world,
its teeth longer than the place I was founded.
Its eyes the blazing sun,
sulfur—
cracking like the rattling of small stones
in an earthquake.

Its scales were malice.
My feet were stone—
attached—
and the movement across its back
felt like crashing waves.

Perhaps it was the Devil,
perhaps it was Hell incarnate.
It was a creature
as we're all creatures—
though not ones with dripping maw—
we are the failing doves of God.

We are the poisoned honey
of a desolate place.
I grasped down, pulled my
unshod feet from the ground,
and jumped on the head of the snake.

It will be brought to rest
as I will. Though not
as I will.
Its rest not so pleasurable;
with tender belly,
flaking like ashes of the lost.

Agnus Dei say the clouds to my soul.
Rain pours from them,
soaking the tangled earth.
Tears of God sinking below the heavens
for us.

Michelle McMillan Holifield

Metallica in the Background

Electric burst
of panic cuts
inside the chest
nicks the heart.
Slant hysteria seeping
from the islands
of my pores.
Should I pull over?
Sobering fact: I've got scissors
in the glove box
screaming for new posture.
My rusted ribs cave.
My mind flecks
with letdown:
my blooming fades.
This mental ooze.
It's new. I can't tell if
this bluesy interchange
is a quirk
is a tic
is a crock
is my unlucky brain
in my less-lucked truck.
Or is real.
God: this is my brain.
This is my brain ajar
to You. The stark panic
bites as on exposed nerve.
But on the inside.
Where I cannot see.
Forgive the decay
in my plea.
It's the song fading out

and somewhere I hear applause
that turns out to be
my core's near-beating.
This terror is my bleating. This
is not my exit. Light, I pray:
make some cosmic fuss
over me. I give you back
these scissors. God, I beg,
give me back
tranquility.

Alison Ruth

collision specialist

I cannot light a cigarette
but this wish must be
my last yet, tourniquet.

Sludge through your gloves.
My lipstick out of luck, struck.

Crushed beneath a constellation
of shatterproof glass, crashed.

Radar-clocked, road-blocked,
Called in a long-distance dedication
for Bloodrock.

Clamped inside the jaws of life, I wrest my sleeves
and my dreams. But my waist holstered in place,
Black Queen Anne's lace, bereaved.

Razor, rearview, barber's comb, roach
clip, badge PBA, quarter tray, DOA.

Upholstery peeling, your boots hang from the ceiling.

Alight, crows in flight
on broken chrome.

I cannot stake the shoulder
for you
with your plywood cross
and my rosary beads.
No plastic wreath, bequeathed.

But I can almost see where your face used to be,
Before set aflame my arms, burning me.

Jade Kleiner

Being Grendel

Grendel was driven
Under the fen banks, fatally hurt,
to his desolate lair. His days were numbered
—Beowulf, translated by Seamus Heaney

If you gave my arm back I'd embrace you,
kiss your tongue through that wolf-bite.
Your curse cut me and through the scabs
in my ears I listen only to the quiet things:
the singing bug-friends and that distant exultation.
Slowing thump-thump of ill-will leaving my veins,
craving a sky-candle I'll never see rise,
I look through my hand and find I am translucent.

You came to make me hear nothing
and if you could you'd abase my crickets:
my heart could never be ready for your grip,
that terror became ecstatic as I groped away:
my two feet fell into the night, unguided,
my mind for the first time loving my father.

Julie Ebin

Red Maple

My shadow crosses snow
so slowly; creep of hour.
I await each day's new minute
bask in daylight extending.

Sun rouses me, stirs dirt
and mineral, I drink each
remembering: my sways bring energy.
Call my reserves.

My blood bubbles, awakening
limbs wriggle with its return.
Palms itch to begin
push tiny nubs from skin

Still grounded
I feel sound in my heart
a small creature scrabbling
toward Spring.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

The Blessing is the Bird

Now a blue grosbeak
Now a downy woodpecker
Now a fearless chickadee

landing on the feeder
landing on the arc of the trellis
landing on the cedar's interior branch

until the wind turns the page
until the crow marches down the railing
unless the rain pelts the irises

falling down in the hungry grass
falling down to the soaking rock
falling down in down and leaf until

I wake, 4:20 a.m. again,
the bird of the dream alighted
on my pillow, then flown

off to the other side of a life
off to mourning songs and hunger
off to perch into something else.

Yarrow Knittel

A Thing with Feathers

On cobalt-sheened wings, Hope
breezes into
fall's last leafy tree.

Lemon-bright tail tips
down, up, down,
seeking balance.

Are you Emily's bird?
Or did you flee Gerard
in his coal-deep nights?

I wish you wouldn't steal
stray crumbs from
my sweatered shoulders,

my misaligned hair.
You shut your eyes
against wind.

You've mastered
time and distance.
Master me.

Sarah Watkins

Preserve Hunt

I have learned how the white chukar feels
on Hunting Day: for a moment liberated and bare
ivory dress and sunless ankles
the vast yellow field like an expanse
so much greater than your required two square feet
like your thinned legs could run you through the brush
scrape a knee and get an ugly scar
toss the silver-toned ring from your unwed claw
and trill with delight—
then the recollection of your purpose overcomes you again.
you submit with the mask sliding over your beak.

in a space full of bloody maws
you regurgitate the call: come after me, sires,
with muskets, with hunting knives. come after me, sires,
preserved for this moment
in purest white. come after me, sires,
lay me bare with your sharp blades—
disembowel me
watch
my face
contort with delight.
like a yard dog, leave my drained body open in the field
when you have fulfilled for me all I ever was to be.

I will slide off my ring, my purity mark,
and say to my keepers: is this what it was all for?
after a whole life building, to be called a ruin
while the yard dog with fresh blood in his gums
hunts for another Prize Partridge
while I lay in the hot sun believing
it was me—too loud, too needy?
I suppose

a good bird
would never
want, want, want—anything.

Liz Nakazawa

The Stone Diary

Sometimes I sink into the bleak memory
of my departed lover.
His name is James and the love has been long distance.

I get out the *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson.*
Emily says we dream and it is good for us
when we are dreaming.
We would be hurt were we awake.

She didn't title her poems and
some she wrote while cooking:
on the backs of recipes, shopping lists and
one scribbled on the wrapper of a bar of Parisian baking chocolate.

I never cook for James when he visits because I never cook period.
My only offerings being puns and whimsy.

But Emily wrote often about food.
What she had for breakfast
or what her maid, Maggie, was cooking up.

There's an article in the paper today about hearing wind on Mars.
I look in the mirror and the shades under my eyes have grown darker.
More shades each day he is gone.

Nineteen visits in ten years
coming in on the plane and once on a train.

I look out the window: trees in scrawny outlines
their dead and dried up leaves curly at the base of trunks
sometimes slightly blowing.
Winter,
imperceptible light behind midday clouds

The stubborn, recalcitrant season.
Cessation of abundance
Its narrative: a complete absence of color.
Screaming and nightmare only
black and white remains.

Does winter have a brain or blood vessels
Does it journal or dream
Does it have elbow or wrist
Does it plot or scheme

Yes, Emily, it hurts to be awake
and to wake up
to winter.

Two months before he's due to visit
James texts me a sentence from Boswell's journal
whose first name was also James.

Boswell recorded what he knew of lexicographer Samuel Johnson,
a lot of little detail.
I tell James, my James, I am tossing my journals.
In the trash, he says, just like that.
No, recycling, I explain.
Different means, he says, same end.

This past January,
a winter visit,
not summer like the last.

so we missed seeing phlox and serviceberry,
heather, peony
lavender, coreopsis and rose.

And daisies, Emily's favorite flower.
Even her nickname was Daisy.
She wrote, "The daisy follows soft the sun."

But for a month now I've seen no sun
only this winter of hardness, icicle and stone.

Spring and summer sprout constant shifting
asking us questions
But winter asks us nothing through the looking glass of very few changes.

Volcanos erupt, even through stone
and Emily wrote how we are like volcanoes
even though her poem is called I have never seen Volcanoes

critics call it an extended metaphor:
the full poem living in the public domain

Grumbling and rumbling
and ready to explode at any minute
both woman and poem.

Once I asked James about God and he said He is way larger than the devil
and is unlike anything we can understand.
A writer who lives in nearby mountains said opportunities for holiness are
everywhere.

During winter when missing James
I became less flesh, more marble.

When I think of you, James, there in your home in Tennessee
recalling how I sometimes forget the incantatory effect of words
and how you spread yours, like gossamer wings, around to protect me

We had longer phone calls
in the months before he arrived.

On a recent call a memory reborn.
Sitting on the bed in Carmel, me reading him
a poem about the poet that built the first home there
completely made of stone

on a cliff high above the sea.

Before I had waken the next morning he went
looking for the home of my poem
and found it.

We drove up and viewed it only
from a distance
stones following quiet stones: Santa Lucia granite
Local stone. Rolled one at a time by the poet decades ago
up from the beach and bereft of a team of horses.

Part of the passion is the harnessed slowness at which we come to know
one another
within long distance
Only in Year 10 did I hear your father had climbed on top of an airplane
wing
only to fall off
and on the piano your mom played Rachmoninov
and you learned of the two places within a park in Austin that I remember

Are we retardando or allegro?
about to escape or embrace?
becoming text or subtext?
episodic or resolved?
enrolled in a trance
or just a long happenstance?

Like poetry, long distance requires a heightened tension
a special language with stanchion.

Trapped and yet blossoming within each visit's evanescence
and the best of a bagatelle

our ten year story unrolls in throbbing time.

Alexis G. Garcia

Being Angry Makes Me Feel like a God

I've gone through life trying to avoid
Letting my anger get the best of me
While the rest of me sinks deeper
Into fight or flight mode
More like freeze with perfect ease
Recently I've tried to look at anger
From a different perspective
Pride myself on being more reflective
Gods get to unleash their wrath
Cause destruction in peoples' path
All while retaining their role
And attempting to maintain control
I've felt myself morphing into another being
Seeing the destruction that awaits
But that doesn't have to be my fate
Pacifying yourself to rid the anger
From your bones
Doesn't last very long
Eventually, you'll have a strong urge
To purge yourself of the inconvenience
Of the absolute discomfort
When did succumbing to your emotions
Ever hurt?
That of course was a rhetorical question
Need more creative ways to relieve the tension
Suspended in the air
Letting my thoughts wage war
Crashing into the ground
Hoping to minimize the damage
This is the only type of fallout that
I could ever manage

Abigail-Tydale Bassey

Uncommon ways to do nothing

My roommate relaxes on the bed immediately after returning from work. I see only white rays, the colour of her phone screen, and wonder if our mothers were seduced by monochrome televisions in their golden days of womanhood. My roommate's focus is an Instagram reel—on *Instablog;* reading crazy comments of people on posts about give-aways, celebrity weddings, unsuccessful relationships saga. Her thinning tan thighs cluster; one on top of another like weeds competing in a garden. They would be uprooted. My roommate giggles, knowing how to pretend to do something fun. I giggle along when she bursts into laughter, say she's always focused, face-strong on Zoom meetings; seldom picks any fun activities more than a *tug-of-brains* at the close of fine-tech 9-5's daily. I have seen other girls like her, girls walking on the beach with see-through swimsuits on their *ribs-lamenting-sides.* I imagine they would have similar experiences to share; girls who just want to feel alive like every common woman; not shy of forms, not requesting of gorgeous, girls who, if they were to unparcel greatest wishes in the secret-most corners of their rooms, wouldn't mutter fat, the feast of eyes on collar bones, the refilling of hip-deeps, or the fellowship of veins on every first toast at dinner dates.

Kathleen Hellen

october

o, how they carry on. crows at dying
light. and everything on fire. like burnt
yellow at the edges. the hills already rendered
orange. and everywhere the scent
inside the needled wind. the dry cigars of pines
while skeletons sit cross-legged on the lawns, yawning.
as if they'd seen it all before. had said
don't fret the pods. the husk and gauze. the pink
that clings to roses lost. o,
let's not talk of ghosts. though i hear them moaning
through the shutters of the house. hear the rustle
of a gown. it's just the soul. sleepwalking.

Leatrice

The Lines Are Open

This poem is not about you,
but I'm at the microphone
coping with the disparity between
my will and my words,
my words and my voice,
the unaccountable chain of choices
that has placed me on this stage,

and while I'm bleeding out
these memories of everything else I've been
translating tales to blank-faced stares,
I wonder, as I cannot seem to stop,
what words you choose to give the world.

Madeline Boles

I know this much:

I should be eating berries, sucking salty fingers in my mouth
Why not?
The leaves are dry but they're dancing
I can still feel the breeze erotic between my thighs

Can I be my own wet
berry-bursting
Summer?
Can I choose that?
What else:
Burnt grass, already tired
A new brittleness in my chest
essence calcifying
Breasts dwindling to nothing

Is that the choice, Summer or—
Something I can't speak of?
Step over empty seed pods, an egg shell
of one who maybe didn't make it

If there is still some Sun to be taken
Why not take it?

Bruce McRae

Made Curious

I wonder about the bee's dance
and what lives in the mud.
I wonder about good fortune
and nail-bombs hidden among flowers.
How the mind of the wolf works.
What outer space tastes like.
If a soul can be salvaged
from the weather of sin.

I wonder about life struggling
on the cold sea-bottom.
I wonder about the first Christmas.
How horses feel when racing.
The last thoughts of the condemned.
What will become of us, of me
and you and the things called human.

Glorious sunshine, raging blizzards;
and I wonder about wondering.
About the stink of the past.
How the cosmos began. Its ending.
Mind on a stick, up on a wheel,
turning and burning brightly,
my thoughts traveling to a field
in Algeria, Bolivia, Amsterdam.
Mind, pure mind, of pure thought.
Mind considering mind.
Mind wondering where evil resides.
Where the old gods have gone.
The nature of love;
that's what I'm wondering.
I wonder what it's like to be dead,
my personal extinction, our annihilation,

the obliteration of everything
I've ever thought or said or wondered.
The long haul under the ground;
I wonder about heaven and hell
and the essence of death, again.
Curious as a cat, I wonder . . .

And then I know.
And then I don't know.
And then I'm certain.

Bruce McRae

The Saint

A Devonian flower in Permian soil.
A song tempered by fire.
A forgetful light, illuminating
the nowhere that is everywhere.
Beneficent windfall.

Like a votive candle, this saint
flickers among the penitents.
A voice at the end of a rainbow,
this saint is a martyr to hooks and arrows.
If you cut her she bleeds springwater.
If you kiss her you're damned.
And yet we kiss her.

In her one hand is an ossuary
containing the ashes of the righteous.
In the other, an angry deity
jealous of m'lady's miracles.
At her feet of ivory and ice
is a garden of cleansing flame.
Is a god without love.
Is a heaven of cats and reptiles.

This saint dwells within a prayer
and makes her bed in the limited earth.
She burns like phosphorous burns.
Her flesh submits to the soul's conscriptions.

Warren Woessner

Grasshoppers

I walk down a grassy path
that's one dusty wheel rut of a wagon track
slowly disappearing after the farming stopped.
I pass blue chicory, milkweed, morning glory
smothering one of the last fence posts.
A Monarch Butterfly, orange and black,
tips and flaps, on its way to Mexico.

Then I am wading through a sea
of grasshoppers, hopping and snapping like popcorn,
then landing five feet in front of me
to jump again when I get too close.
We kids once caught them for bait
despite the spit we called tobacco juice.
Now I marvel at all the protein, free
and here for the taking.

Wasn't it the grasshopper
who fiddled away the summer
while the ant gleaned the fields
and hoarded supplies?
I like to think the ant was merciful
when the hard frosts came
and the grasshopper held a sign
that said, "Homeless musician—
anything would help."

Max Gutmann

Other Rooms

We're gliding through a passageway, the souls
and I, from darkness into light, and then
a corridor. White walls. A gurney. Voices.
Here! Now! Delivery rooms! They thrill, and I
am charged, too, with their hope, though I don't share it.
Too old, now, to be born, I pause and bob,
directionless, alone as they fly off,
uncertain whether there's a place for me,
then drift away along the corridor
toward other rooms.

William Doreski

The Final Recap

A newspaper left on a chair.
Headlines spill like weak black tea.
We try to avoid them but
they puddle on the café floor
and stick to the soles of our shoes.
The downpour framed in the doorway
is news enough for us to process.
Gusts treble and crash through trees
that have never done anyone harm.

The headlines refer to events
beyond our sweep of perception.
Riots at political rallies.
Mass starvation in Gaza.
Masked thugs with badges
trashing those whose color offends.
Our dictator dictates in shades
of rhetoric no one can catch.
Soon the newspapers will pulp

in silence: unsold, unread, unloved.
No record of our era will last
long enough to dent the absence.
Our bodies will freefall into
a space too large for the universe.
Galaxies spinning out of control
will slash the distance and bleed us
of our unwritten memoirs, stories
that crumble at the slightest touch.

George Freek

After the Chinese Poet Li Shangyin

I was mute with the muteness
of a sunless day.
Rain fell to earth like needles,
destroying grass and flowers.
Trees bent over like blind men,
who'd lost a sense of their worth,
but I heard a far-off cuckoo,
echo through the leaves,
as the clouds disappeared,
and night revealed to me
the moving moon,
with a star or two beside.
Their light descended
through eons of time,
and like countless men before me,
I thanked some god
that I was breathing,
and that I was still alive.
How little it takes,
I thought,
to give we feeble men
the simple will to survive.

Jim Tilley

Not About Nothing in Particular

Just driving along the unpaved country road
kicking up dust behind the car, thinking
about nothing in particular for a change,
and there, through the windshield, I spotted

on the electric wires overhead a hawk,
not any old bird, but a large, red-shouldered
hawk with prominent black-and-white
markings on its back, perched there minding

its own business, staring across the road,
perhaps some prey in its sights, motionless
until the time to strike, but probably more
like me in my state, thinking about nothing

in particular, not fretting about free speech
or the imminent downfall of democracy,
certainly not about someone with a gun
taking direct aim, merely a tranquil moment

in the afternoon sun. I stopped the car
in the middle of the road, no traffic either
in front of or behind me, extracted the iPhone
from my pocket and snapped a photo.

Lauro Palomba

Throwback

late day, late redeemer
sparse-haired, sparse speech
rough hands, rough ground
shaky steps, shaky walker
feeble pushing, feeble stooping

park freedom, park fouled
hour needed, hour rendered
litter strewn, litter cleared
unpaid, unasked
old school, old notion

k.d.zwierz

Night Crossing

Path path path
You wind you wind

Draw me through the
Black trees, brown trees, the green,

The yellow flowers
To blue to blue to blue

Beneath an umbra
A globe in the branches

Saddens the leaves
Spill. Spill and close.

Path path path
Leading through night

To the sea
Through night and necessity

To the sea
And nowhere

Alan Catlin

Once in a Blue Moon: An Anxiety Dream Love Poem

We are kissing under a blue moon,
a literal blue moon, in this somehow
black and white in color deep dreaming
state of pine trees overhanging reflective
lake, over a kind of infinity pool, no shadows
are allowed to reside in. The kissing feels
more passionate now, urgent like the black
clouds snuffing out the blueness of moon,
as if the insistence of circling black birds
hovering over the water are looking
for a place to land, to feed on the heads
of fish protruding from cracked surfaces
of the mirror surface where the lake once
was. These fish are like primordial creatures
summoned from within by a conjuring,
a force beyond darkness, where the entrails
have been spread on an altar top for divination
by sibyls and seers hoping to forestall a future
that cannot be denied. A nowhere wind freezes
us in place, locked as we are in a loving embrace,
still standing as the moon waxes and wanes,
silently phase changing like suppressed thunder,
cries of love, in a dream that seems to have no
beginning and no end. And yet, here we stand,
rooted as we are, as if waiting for an Ovidian
poet to release us but the poet has died and
the sibyls have stolen his soul for the next round
of prognostications. We are love's body now
and only a poet can unfreeze us.

Mark Allinson

Old Man Banksia

At Burrewarra Point above the waves
On crumbling cliffs an Old Man Banksia stands,
Grinding his groping roots down to the caves
Echoing surf below on hollowed sands—
The powdered remnants of the ancient land's
Antarctic rock, ground from the mother lode.
Listen and you may hear his prising hands
With lumpy knuckled grip make stone implode,
Tightened by the hydraulic sappy goad.
His gnarl-flecked corky bark is split and scarred,
Spotty badged with a mossy lichen load,
And sticky weeping wounds all black and tarred.
In sunlight, moonlight, calm and stormy days,
Steady in frost, reborn when bush-fires blaze.

T.A.R. Wallace

Wrong

It's true that I can say and not say
many variations upon what is right
or wrong. I can be built and bound,
a prancing horse and the eyelash of a frog;
my status is inoperable, there are gestures
to invent and sometimes dignify, none of these
take their pleasures in the background
nor battle for recognition.

You, though, are a church in boots,
a face on the wall in paradise—
your visions droop and wallow,
calm the whips and comb the sand.
Relentless, like gravity, your cups are empty
and full, never too sure to frighten,
and not too bright to be keen.
Your protections are reasonable,
they are ritual and kind,
chambers of the making of a scene and cure—
which most of all remind me:

It's an embrace we are romancing.
When our vagaries quit, we are united.

Garrett Bruner

Likenesses

I'd like to think things through. To think the future can't be
so unbelievable as they're telling us.
I'd like to be told differently. To behold our letting go
the unspeakable, and not embrace it.
I'd like to believe that the truth will out, instead of
power winning out, as it always does.
I'd like to be sure of how uncertain tomorrow is, that
the way we've paved isn't so unearthly.
I'd like so many things. Like it or not, none came to pass.
And like that, it becomes unbearable.
I'd love anything but this. For some other history
than violence be what we're doomed to repeat.
I'd like you to be the start of something better, for us,
to begin anew where we went all wrong.

Ross Bolding

End of Day

The blackbird's song at twilight time,
As clear as church bells' purest chime.
Within the forest far away
The brown thrush signals end of day,
And all about, cold darkness falls.

Across the field, the barn owl calls.
The dying day, the stillness deep,
The lowly robin fast asleep.
We watch and see the night unfurl,
And all is good in God's sweet world.

How very good, in God's sweet world.

Fiction

Felicity Marsh

Time Was, Time Is

Up and further up. Gliding up smooth and unstoppable until suddenly the skywards swoop of my movement is choked and I fall, I go down, unstoppably down, past down and up again into the world behind me as if time will pull me back for every advance I make. I am hauled back up and dropped; dropped and hauled back up, mortal constraints deferred. An innocent Lucifer reclaimed for one more moment of glory I return to the summit of my achievements. Up. And down. Again and again, arc after soaring, plummeting arc. All that I am, soul and body in motion, passing together through the palpable air, unbound from the earth, I am pleasure in my own being.

Without thought or memory or intent I rush towards the blue and the freckling green of trees in leaf on either side, feeling limits passed over and left behind and new ones promised until in the instant of claiming them I'm ripped away again—until, at length, I am where universal laws collide and fight, where the chains that lift and swing are no longer taut, where, urged too far, they flex and shy away from their carved and re-carved path. Slack and distorted, they cease to hold their course. Gravity takes them and, no longer things of air and light, they jolt in hiccoughing twists to their lower limits. The wild fresh air of each exultant rise is replaced for a while by the warm tang of tightly gripped metal, of rust kept at bay, of the ground close by, of fear already gone.

I remember that happiness; the coil and uncoil of excitement revives somewhere deep within me. No amount of swinging in that never-quite-forgotten garden was enough, my shadow passing relentlessly over the lawn, across blank windows of a house that only exists now in a torn and faded photograph. It is gone: cleaved and clawed at and made rubble long ago, only fragments of brick and glass half submerged under the reclaiming earth remain to hint at

what once was; history glides over details of the past as I once glided through the air.

Up I went, time and again, propelled by my own short legs and the stronger push of my brother's arms in that long ago when we were close and every summer's day held the scent of him beside me in the sun. Up and down I went in the lost glamour of those days until, at the summit of a baulking flight, I could not resist the urge to uncurl my fingers, grip less tightly, tempt the universe's unrelenting laws. And so I soared forwards and fell and fell, and fall alone now, dropped clear of the unweighted path of the swing's solitary descent. The forest of nettles that greened the hollow of a fallen tree held up a thousand sharp stings to catch me. I land and I wake.

I wake, heart pounding, in my fifty-years-older body and my dream-wracked bed.

This side of memory there is no blue sky, there are no stirring leaves; night tarries, tracing bruise-blue streaks of cloud across a colourless dawn, and old recollections, shaken loose, unravel time's carefully stitched-over glimpses of white bone encircled by wedding gold beckoning by the edge of a rabbit hole in the hollow's red earth, where I lie shocked and silent, my chain wings clipped.

Deracinated by the arrival of day, I cannot clearly recall who I have been; whether I have been anyone until now evades me. Nothing but that summer seems certain still. Nothing left of then and before then now but night-hints. I cling to the hot and crumpled sheets, clawing onto some kind of stability, sick with a vertigo in which time, not place, swims ungraspably around me; the pendulum of my years is swinging and swinging and swinging. What have I done and what have I been? Who have I been? Where are the pictures in my head that prove I have lived my life?

Sunlight fingers its way into the room, idly touching objects that have no meaning, moving on, sliding into a position of control, wielding full revelation like a threat. A fear of extraordinary loss pours through me. Something I had has gone. Something has been taken.

And then, as if that thought is the hidden catch that turns an inward-facing eye onto my own mind, the careful forgetting of countless years crumbles away under its gaze as the russet soil fell back then under the shock of my landing, and I remember turning my face to the imperturbable, empty gaze of the woman who had lain so long beneath the ground under my body, whose unfleshed finger touched mine and offered no resistance when I reached out to touch and take its sun-warmed gold.

I have memories, but after so long, I'm not sure whose they are.

The early sunshine gliding across my wet cheeks falls onto my hands, glinting on the band that circles my too-white finger. In the clear light of day, it comes to me that I have not been myself for some time now.

Kalina Smith

Double Red Flags

"There are good people here, Isa," Mama always told her. *"Even the tourists…most of the time."*

Isabella was seventeen and had grown up Catholic in Destin, Florida, which wasn't especially common. However, her parents, Mexican immigrants from Juarez, swore that they'd never felt anything but welcome in the tiny beach town.

Isabella had met Charlotte at the beach in Henderson State Park in late May, when red and purple flags flew high. That day, most of the beachgoers had retreated to the sand to read or nap. Others had returned to their rentals to escape what they assumed to be impending doom, like a shark. She only bothered to leave the beach if there were double red flags, but she was in the minority there, which was why she was confused to see a blonde, pale girl peering over the water at the shore, hands on her hips and frowning. She wore a pink bikini with underwire sewn into the top. Isabella only noticed because her own chest did not require such support. She wasn't jealous, though. Not really, anyway.

"Hey!" the blonde girl called, making Isabella jump. They made eye contact, and Isabella immediately felt her face flush.

"Are you talking to me?" Isabella asked, pointing at herself dumbly. She felt frumpy in her one-piece compared to the bombshell in hot pink in front of her. Her suit had a floral skirt and was purchased from the clearance rack at Walmart.

The girl nodded and grinned, showing a mouthful of teeth whiter than the sand under their feet. She had the prettiest face Isabella had ever seen, heart-shaped and blue-eyed. "Yes, you. You're one of the only people out here. What kind of jellyfish is this?"

Isabella inched closer to the girl, moving to stand next to her. She followed the girl's outstretched arm to her pointer finger, which was directed at the shore in front of them. She could see immediately that the creature was clear with a pink four-leaf-clover-

like pattern on top of it. Isabella had seen hundreds of them before.

"It's a moon jellyfish," Isabella declared. "They're pretty common here."

The girl seemed to ponder it. "How bad is their sting?"

"Not too bad," Isabella replied. "Goes away after a few hours. Why? Did you get stung?"

"No," the girl replied. "I just like fish. They're cool. I want to be a marine biologist, but my dad says that's a waste of my 'womanhood.'" Isabella could tell that the girl wanted to say more about her father and his wishes, but she didn't.

Isabella didn't understand. She wanted to study anthropology in college, and her father had always been supportive.

"He's a Baptist preacher," the girl announced, as if she could read Isabella's mind. "He wants me to do the whole trad-wife thing." She was quiet for a moment, twirling one of her curls around an index finger. "I love the Lord, but I also love animals. I don't know if having a husband should change that."

"Oh," Isabella said, her shoulders drooping and face falling a tad.

"Name's Charlotte," the girl said, "I'm from Mississippi, but we're here for the summer because my dad's doing some mission work. What's your name?"

Isabella told her.

"I kind of…just needed a break," Charlotte said with a shrug. "Everyone else is cooking a big dinner tonight, and I snuck away. I said I wasn't feeling well. Obviously, that was a lie," she said with a chuckle.

Nodding, Isabella deduced that Charlotte enjoyed talking about herself. Isabella didn't mind, though.

"You wanna go to the harbor walk with me?" Charlotte asked. "I haven't met anyone
cool yet besides you."

Isabella bit her bottom lip anxiously. She wanted to go to the harbor walk with Charlotte more than she'd really wanted anything, but she shook her head. "I've got to be getting back home.

My mom told me to come home if there were double red flags." The lie made her stomach hurt.

Charlotte's face fell, but she quickly smiled and nodded. "I probably shouldn't be out here, either. If anyone from the church sees me, I'm going to be in big trouble."

Isabella forced a smile back and gave Charlotte a wave goodbye. As much as Charlotte's big blue eyes and perfect smile made her stomach feel like it was filled with boomerangs, as gorgeous as she was, as cool as she seemed to be, it wasn't worth a third red flag.

Her heart was worth protecting.

Susan Policoff

Shattered

Charlotte shrinks from the dead elm, not fast enough. A skeletal twig snags in her frizzy curls. She yanks the strand loose, but a few hairs cling to the limb. Damn tree corpses everywhere. Nothing this dead should be so hard to escape. The mayor swears they will all be removed. If only the city would hurry. Sometimes the dead trees seem to creep closer, as if to devour her.

Dutch elm disease killed all the elms. She scurries past a row of them at the edge of the weed-choked sidewalk on Lark Street. Nowhere in town is free of the remains.

She scuffles into the Times-Dispatch building, solid brick, its many windows staring out at lifeless trees lining Wren Street. The pesticides used on the bark beetles that carried the fungus killed many birds, and the rest have vanished, leaving only their names on the street signs.

Charlotte plods unheralded through the noisy editorial room with its aroma of coffee and sweat to the basement stairs.

On the glass panel in the door to her office, black letters spell OBITS. The narrow room smells musty. Charlotte drops her purse on the floor, hangs her thrift-store muskrat jacket over the back of her chair and slumps on the hard wood seat. She slides a finger down the run in her tights.

A clatter in the hall. The door swings open. The mail room kid tosses envelopes on her desk. They land with a thwack.

"You and me won't ever want for work," he says. "People keep mailing, and people keep dying."

She picks up an envelope. "People keep mailing about dying."

The kid laughs, pushes his cart into the hall and rattles along, whistling.

Charlotte rips open the envelope. "Born in—graduated—Married—survived by…" She writes the obituary to the paper's

specifications, starting with the dates—born 1912, died 1966. The outline of a life, without the essence. She tosses the paper in the out box. The room is cold, like a morgue she once visited.

#

On the way home, Charlotte stops at the giant hole that swallowed Eagle, Hawk and Robin streets. A new county building and courthouse will arise from it, but sabotage and money shortages have put the project behind. The mayor promised it would be done by December, 1965. March,'66 is half over and inside the barbed wire around the hole, scaffolding clings to part of a frame. The rest collapsed in a fire, probably arson, a few nights ago. The air smells of char and dust and diesel, from the machines scattered around the site. Broken concrete and scorched boards litter the ground.

A chill wind. Charlotte flips up the collar of her ratty fur jacket, and inches closer. She grips the cold metal of the chain-link fence around the site. Though floodlights guard the perimeter, beyond them there's only a dark cavity. She stares at it, dizzied. Where had the people gone when the city tore down blocks of houses? She drags a hand through her hair. They must have gone to stay with relatives, found another house to rent, moved to the next town. Or they all tumbled into the hole.

She backs away. Her boots tap the pavement, a hollow sound.

Outside the saggy clapboard house where she rents the first floor apartment, an elm branch scrapes her shoulder. She jumps back, and rushes inside.

Charlotte skids to a stop by the mirror in the hall, a crawly sensation on her skin. The elm could have sneaked a twig down her collar though she was sure she eluded it. Her image in the mirror looks smaller than she is, as if she views herself through the wrong end of a telescope.

"Charlotte?" Billy yells from the main room, and she sidles through the doorway.

"You didn't leave me gas money." Billy sits up on the unmade bed, and swipes lank hair out of his eyes. He sweeps the comics

section of the paper off the rumpled sheet. It flutters to the floor.

"I have to go to the bank." Charlotte tries to twist her wedding ring but it's too tight, it doesn't move. Looking at him, she's lightheaded, his eyes like the old swimming hole when the city drained it, leaving only mud.

She retreats to the kitchen. The warped floor boards creak under foot. The last tenant painted the whole apartment a salmon color, and though it gives her a headache, she hasn't considered repainting.

Billy follows her. "Don't just walk away, I need gas money."

Charlotte pauses by the stove."I'll go to the bank tomorrow."

He plants himself under the bare bulb that hangs from the ceiling barely above his head. "I have an early class."

"Take the bus."

He's a grad student in the English department, to keep from having to fight in Vietnam. He lost his teaching assistant job when he slapped a student during an argument.

"Can't you go to the bank before work?" he asks.

She turns on the oven and a flame springs up under the rack."We can't go on living on just my paycheck."

"You know I have to keep my grades up. You want me to lose the deferment and get drafted? You want me sent off to war?"

"You could work a few hours and still keep your grades up, couldn't you?"

"You could get a better paying job." Billy circles, hovering behind her.

"If you hadn't gotten fired—"

"That wasnt my fault, I told you. The kid—"

"If he'd pressed charges...That wouldn't have helped your deferment."

"Such ugliness here," he mutters.

He isn't looking at her. Maybe he didn't mean her to hear. Her eyes sting. Charlotte turns her head so he won't see. She straightens her shoulders and brushes past him, to the refrigerator.

He bangs a fist on the table. "Can't you do one thing for

me?"

She opens the fridge and takes out a tuna casserole."I'm making you dinner."

"I thought you'd be a comfort but you're hardly here even when you're here."

"I spend all day with death." Stupid thing to say, but who comforts her?

Billy back hands the light bulb. It swings, clunks against the refrigerator and shatters.

"Damn it, Billy!" Shards settle in her hair and on the shoulder of her black turtleneck. She brushes them off and flicks a few off the covered casserole.

She shoves the casserole dish in the oven and faces him. A little light from the main room keeps the kitchen from plunging into darkness but he's only a shadow. "You can sweep that up."

He makes a growling sound and punches the wall. His fist smashes through the plaster board partition. Even in the dim light the ragged hole he's made is visible.

Charlotte spins around and stalks into the living room. She grabs her coat, and dashes out. The moon is up, more light outside the house than inside. She shivers by the elms. This is death, absolute and unquestioned, yet the trees stand, trunks glowing silver in the moonlight.

She lurches down the hill. The newspaper building looms up at the foot of it.

Stumbling down the basement stairs, she gropes for what to say to Billy. She'll think of something before she goes back to the house, surely she will.

Once in her office, she writes up the obituary of a Gordon Holcomb, died age twenty-three. A jolt in her chest. A year younger than she is. Dead in a 1st Cavalry operation in some area of Vietnam she has never heard of.

"This is a life," she says, loudly, reading what she has written. Her hand quivers.

She knows no more of this life than she did before she

wrote it. She shuts her eyes. In the treacherous blackness behind her lids, a faceless girl, her replacement, writes an obituary for her. The paper is blank.

She starts in her chair. The tuna casserole. Has Billy turned off the oven? Charlotte dials the house, but he doesn't answer.

She rushes home. No Billy, and the oven is still on. She kicks aside fragments of the broken light bulb, and turns off the flame. The casserole dish is charred. With a shudder, she clunks the burnt mess in the sink

Billy isn't back when Charlotte crawls into bed.

#

The scrape of Billy's key in the lock, the whoosh of the front door opening wake her ten minutes before the alarm.

She pulls on her clothes, the ones from yesterday and holds on to the bedpost.

Billy strolls into the room. "You're still here."

"Where were you?"

He tosses his keys up and catches them. "Why aren't you at the bank, waiting for it to open?"

"There's still glass on the floor in the kitchen." The salmon-colored walls make a spot above her eyebrow throb.

Billy heads into the kitchen. A crunch of glass a whirr from the fridge. "I'll sweep it up later. After you go to the bank."

Charlotte rubs the spot above her eyebrow. Be honest at least, she wants to say. Tell me who is really going to sweep up the glass. How far should she push?

The air in the apartment isn't reaching her lungs.

She blunders outside.

Walking aimlessly, she approaches a brick building that hulks on the corner of Crow Street. More dead elms crowd around it.

Black letters on its glass door proclaim Italian-American Social Hall.

In the darkness behind the door a shape is visible—tall, with two moving limbs. A tapping sound inside, like a branch

slapping a window. Crash. The door shatters.

Charlotte leaps back. Jagged slivers spew out and tinkle on the pavement like heavy rain.

A man in a suit and tie, clutching a hammer, steps out of the building, brushes off his jacket, and saunters down the block.

Charlotte sways in the broken glass, groping for an explanation. Who was the man? Why was he locked inside the building? Why did people break things and leave without cleaning up their mess? She burns with the need for answers.

Be careful what you wish for, the boy she loved in high school said, before he wrapped his motorcycle around one of the still-living elms. She has wished for answers, but she will never know who the man is, where the displaced people went, what anyone's life means.

Charlotte shuffles a few steps but her feet aren't taking her toward the bank. What is she doing? She presses a hand to her stomach, against an emptiness more than a skipped breakfast.

A sliver of the broken light bulb drifts from her hair to the back of her hand.

As a kid she yearned to know what was next, but like a hammer smashing glass, it hits her.What's next is a void, and she's teetering on the edge.

Knees shaky, she rests against the nearest elm, combing her fingers through her hair, searching for any more glass. Maybe what's next isn't what she needs to know. Maybe what's next doesn't matter if she can't grasp what she's doing now, staying with Billy, writing obituaries, leaning for support on a tree that dead, is still steadier than she is.

Peggy Culp

Bait Shop Love

"I need you to do something, Tom." Jake's back was turned to me. "I need you to write a letter to Rosalee." Rosalee was his wife. A framed photo of her stood on the corner of the oak desk where he was sorting through invoices.

Jake's Bait Shop, small but strategically located next to Lake Anderson and always well-stocked, had been an early Saturday morning stop for me for fourteen years. I went by there when I needed to; I went by there when I didn't need to. Fishing, once my passion, now served as a mere distraction from my career as a teacher in the English Department at the community college "up the road," as they say, in my hometown of Pearl, South Carolina.

My love for the shop was defined by the world it created when I entered the front door. Certainly I found comfort in seeing the variety of items for sale, lures and related fishing accessories and the bags of Cheetos and the cans of Spam. But especially comforting was the smell. While others might have been repelled by the shop's odor, that earthy aroma rekindled for me memories of reeling in my first decent-sized bass; ending a day of swimming by burning my thighs on a vinyl car seat; making out with my girlfriend Susan on the lakeshore, touching the perspiring nape of her neck as I pulled her toward me for a kiss.

With that letter-writing request of me, out of the blue, Jake definitely had my attention. He revealed in a flat voice that after many years of marriage, Rosalee had "just up and left." Shaking his head slightly, Jake almost whispered, "I don't know what happened."

I was stunned.

For one thing, I had always thought of them as a team: Jake managing the inventory, Rosalee at the cash register.

And then there was that other thing—the fact that, in the fourteen years I had known them, I had never had any exchange with Jake or Rosalee that would even border on personal conversation.

Not even a "how's it going?" or a "looks like good weather today" from either of them. I'm not counting that one time when I initiated a detailed discussion with Jake about the best bait to use for a particular fishing excursion I was planning. Red wrigglers? Night crawlers? Leeches? Jake could teach a master class on the topic. He talked for fifteen minutes.

Otherwise, nothing.

With Rosalee, I had never discussed anything. She would always just state what my change was from my purchase—"that's one dime and two pennies"—then gently place the dime and two cents in my palm.

The two of them lived in one room over the shop. One room. Jake and Rosalee must love each other a lot, I had mused. As a single guy, I was constantly running into myself in my four hundred-square-foot studio apartment. I would have found it intolerable if someone, even someone I cared about, were there with me all the time.

"Jake, have you considered writing to her yourself?" I asked, truly puzzled. Jake wasn't illiterate. He proudly displayed his community college diploma on the wall next to a line of rods and reels for sale.

Jake looked as if he might cry. "I've written to her every day since she's been gone," he said quietly, adding that she was staying at the home of her sister Camille in Charlotte. "She never writes back. I tried calling her but Camille can't get her to come to the phone.

"Rosalee likes you. And besides, you're an English teacher. I know you won't misspell anything or use bad grammar." He handed me a slip of paper. "This is her sister's address. Be sure to put 'care of Camille Simpson' after Rosalee's name on the envelope."

"I wouldn't know what to say…" I stammered. Was Jake serious?

Yes, he was. His eyes met mine. "Tell her I miss her. Tell her I love her. Tell her I want her to come home. My words don't seem to be good enough. Maybe you have some different ones that will work."

"I'll see what I can do." My voice trailed off. "I'll compose something while I'm out fishing today, then show it to you to see what you think."

"I don't want to see it. I'm desperate for her to come back. I'm at the end of my rope here." He wiped his eyes to stop the tears from escaping, a gesture I hated to see from such a private man. How embarrassed he must be, I thought. "Just mail it off whenever you're ready to. Let me know when you've put it in the mailbox at the post office."

I made my way down to the lake ramp. Before I got out of my truck to launch my boat, I took from my glove compartment a little spiral notepad and found a Number Two lead pencil on the passenger side floor. A pencil would be better for this epistle than a pen, I said to myself, anticipating a lot of erasing and re-writing.

I was prepared for my assignment.

###

Dear Rosalee:

In this letter, you are hearing from me—Tom Carroll, your long-time bait shop customer. Jake asked me to write to you.

I don't know why exactly he chose me. He said it was because I am an English teacher but there are plenty of people in Pearl that you know better and probably could write a letter to you that would sound more eloquent than mine.

Jake says he loves you and misses you and wants you to come home. I think he wanted me to find other ways to say these things, words that would have more impact. But there are none more direct and meaningful.

Now here are some observations on my part. Jake is not aware I'm writing these.

I can't imagine living with Jake, or anybody, in one room over the bait shop for years. You must be a saint. Or maybe you are, as is Jake, simply a good person with a good heart. You are so lucky

to have found each other. I knew Jake before he married you and he was so somber and his expression so grim. He sort of plodded around the store like he was a hundred years old—and he wasn't. When you came along, he actually started to smile sometimes. There was a new lightness in his step. Not easy to detect, but I noticed it.

Rosalee, you brought a sweetness to the shop. I think it was your presence that transformed the store's smell of dirt and fish into many of my favorite memories of being at the lake. Plus, you were a thing of beauty in an unbeautiful environment. You always wore that clean, freshly ironed yellow apron and you styled your hair in a neat, ladylike way so that you would look pretty behind the cash register.

I don't know you well enough to say I love you, but like Jake, I miss you and wish you would come home. Jake's Bait Shop is different, sad, without you.

Sincerely,
Tom Carroll

###

It was several weeks before I was able to go fishing again, stopping by the bait shop on a trek to the lake. Rosalee was standing at the register. Same yellow apron, same carefully styled hairdo. Same tenderness about her when she gave me my change. One difference: a faint hint of pink lipstick.

"Thank you," she said softly.

Jake was counting Ziplock bags on the table behind her. "Thank you," he said in the same soft manner, without turning around.

Eliza Souers Valle

serotinous

It's midnight on a Friday, and the birds are still calling. I should be sleeping. Instead, I sit on a rock, unchained except by a quilt, and stare at Prometheus' gift. I wonder of the guilt, grief, or regret he might've felt from his sacrifice. The bonfire offers blessings of sparks and ash to the sky, and the stars tinker with the tribute before sending it along to whatever lies beyond: beyond me, beyond anything, to raspberry or rum, to Orion or Andromeda, to worlds no man could possibly envisage.

My wrinkling hands, a new phenomenon, this aging body, absentmindedly fiddle with my grandfather's watch as I am entranced by the dancing flickers before me. How I ended up with the timepiece, I don't know, despite several attempts to trace it back, to remember. There is no one to ask. Its arms push on with their eternal cycle, the tick still audibly clicks and tocks, literal clockwork, ignorant and apathetic to earthly grief. So many blame a clock for their own folly and fate, when really the wheel of time is impartial to everything but its dedication to progression, linear or otherwise. It reminds me of my grandfather: always working. Always dedicating himself to his art. Pushing himself to some undefinable higher purpose, a sublimation I never really understood. Perhaps he made amends with time and death, a necessity for artists, I have come to understand.

It's been decades since his death. And I'm still not half the man he was, and I'm not sure how much longer I have left. An unwelcome prognosis riddles my bones every moment I remember it, an instant ache in my gut caused by stinging words spoken by a medical professional as if they were reciting what they had for breakfast. This foreign presence in my body, unwelcomed yet engaging in its ceaseless conquest, nonetheless. Somebody once told me it's like a timebomb. But it's nothing like that. There's no waiting. It's only now.

But I'm not even sure what that means, to be half of

somebody. Too little too late. I try to remember what I said to him last:

Thank you for teaching me how to tie my shoes when my parents wouldn't.

Or:

How does one learn to tolerate how lonely life is?

Maybe I said both.

Maybe I said neither. Maybe I just stared at him on his death bed, disgusted by all the fluids going in and out of him, terrified of the day when I'd look like that, shocked by how cold and dry his raisined hands were. Death a motivator for me now, inescapable, yet my wrinkled hands begin to mimic his, and I am petrified—not in time but in spirit, which may be worse. To resist the friction of fate's cogs causes lacerations that will only bleed and scar, reminders of time lost to petty foolishness, laziness, denying the only natural and certain thing that awaits us all.

He told me to be unafraid of this inevitability. And here I am, stagnant, ignoring his advice. There is a certain respectability in stillness, and yet the earth moves with or without. A slight breeze blows ashes around my face. I'm reminded of him; I resist believing that he is all but ashes now. He clearly lives on, does he not? A reshapen life can still be vibrant.

And he told me to reach out to the people around me, but the people around me have always simply been puffs, mists, downy feathers that could never support Icarian ambitions—here and gone before anything really happens. Purposeful for a moment and indistinguishable the next. Maybe my flights have always been my fault, more akin to jumps off a cliff than pushes from a nest.

As I feel the glass of the watch face below my haggard fingertips, I concede I have missed many chances to understand, to be understood. When one is confronted with such opportunities, they are often caught unawares.

I pull my quilt around my shoulders as a draft blows more smoke toward me, filling my nostrils, billowing around my lungs. Unharried, I refuse to change positions and cough the haze away. I

should be sleeping.

The watch hands make their way past the twelve, past one, past two and three and four, and the fire tentatively gasps a few more breathy flames all the while, and the birdsong halts, as if on cue. And yet the world is anything but still.

The sun rises in the east, as it always has and always will, and I am reminded what a miracle the color yellow is.

Arjun Razdan

Le *zok* de Marie

Upon crossing the border from the Indian mainland to the outpost state of Sikkim, a journey during which a man got deported at the border being labelled a 'foreigner', an incident which told him that Indians had no humanism, the bus conductor leaned out of the window and signalled to the Police a 'foreigner' was inside, not even a *'Monsieur Étranger',* an *Étranger,* un *Réfugié,* a Supplicant, and not *Un Monsieur dans la condition d'être Réfugié,* Raunak Churangoo (C.R.) walked into a bar, where upon seeing the faux-blonde girls drinking tall beers, he nearly wept tears of joy. *'Voilà, ce qui me manquait,'* he thought to himself having trudged through half of the 'Dry State' of Bhikhaar. *Mesdames,* if you really want to keep your *maris,* under a tight leash, there is one solution: join them. *If you cannot stop them, join them.*

His girlfriend kept him on a very tight leash. Marie's strict injunction was that he was to keep his weight under 68 kg or she would stop making love to him without a condom. It is an agreement they reached after much afterthought, having slugged out many permutations and combinations. Marie was initially against it, but Raunak Churangoo (C.R.) liked it so much that he insisted on it, having said that, Marie said the only way was for him to consistently maintain his weight under 68 kg, out of *pudeur,* out of that tender everlasting quality of French women, where they do not give themselves up so easily. The *sous-entendu* being of course, she would never do it with her other lovers, not that they discussed in front of him. He liked her belly, the downy wisp of golden *zok* running down from it, and he was eager to return to France, first thing, put his sperm in every corner of her body. Once, before that made love, after a heavy dinner he checked his weight, and he was 68.4 kg he was very nervous. He was not to make love to her, naked. He hated the smell of condoms, the *déchiring* of the packs, the vomit-inducing nausea of it all. He checked his weight in

the washroom, and was very nervous to be relegated to secondary service tonight. Then, he thought of the trick of his father-in-law he had seen in the Normandie *campagne.* Always, after a heavy *repas,* there was a *trou normand.* A heavy glass of strong liquor. That is he what he did. He quickly gobbled four quick glasses of *cerise l'eau de vie.* In twenty minutes, his weight was 67.9 kg and he made love to Marie, like mad. *'Dis-donc, t'es si chaude dans la bouche...tu me donnes les baisers de feu'* his girlfriend told him, little knowing this Kashmiri nationalist had stomach trouble the next day and had to visit the Docteur Benjamin Memmi, at Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts, 28, Rue de Charenton, Paris 75012.

Here in Rawangla, South Sikkim, for the 16 days he stayed, he visited every bar, and bar and restaurant, and restobar, and lounge & bar, in the town. There was only one bar with the Indian flag flying on top of it. It was the only one in which he never stepped in for a drink.

Taxi-drivers asked him, on his long walks, what he was up to and why they saw him for so long on the routes, besides and the red pandas *(Ailurus fulgens)* the back-striped weasels *(Mustela strigidorsa).* How he were to explain to them what a Damocles' sword lay on his head? For long hours, he kept slurping on *churpi* (hard cheese) candies as his energy dipped, and he desperately tried to ward off the weight he had picked across India. *'Hein, Farzdan... what is tastier than the top-half of qaymak or gaymak or kaymak served in a cold valley along with a top-half of honey, hein Farzdan...what is tastier than the Brie de Meaux of May had with a crusty baguette and a bottle of Bordeaux, hein Farzdan...what is tastier than white makhan from Harāmyana's fields, hein Farzdan...what is tastier than a cassoulet simmered from many hours with the legs of duck confits and with saucisses and various assorted parts of pork...hein Farzdan, what is tastier than the taste of tomatoes in Napoli and the taste of cream in Normandie...bah voilà, la chatte d'une française'.* He knew the time. He would return to France, and they would both eagerly look at the weighing machine. More so, he hated to disappoint her. He knew she wanted the same thing, but dare not say it.

Girls let their hair down when they sang in bars here. They invited him in their invisible ways. A girl said: 'Are you coming to *Homely Sex*, tonight?' When she wanted to say *Homely Shacks.* Maybe, she did it deliberately. Maybe, she was just Nepali and the fricative 'Sh' sound was too much to muster and came out invariably as a 'Ssssss....'. But, he détourned his yeux. No amount of inducements, can make this Kashmiri turn his head from the implacable reality: *toute cette Répubique indienne ne vaut pas un cheveu du zok de Marie* (to borrow Camus).

He drifted on the avenues, and a daze came over him. One day, while having negotiated a bend next to the Buddha statue, he came across a group of Bengali pilgrims who come for the pilgrim pilgrimage to the mountains, that is to click photos next to statues. He wanted to use the lavatory. When he took a step up, to enter a restaurant, he saw on the door of the outside washroom a poster posted in red. It read:

No Pork
No Beef
No Smoking
No Alcohol

Raunak Churangoo (C.R.) took a demi-tour. Something shook in him. He felt like the culprit beyond Camus's pastor who grabs his *soutane,* and shakes him very hard. He walked into the nearby Grocery store, and bought a Rorito® Permanent Marker HD, Manufactured in Pondicherry, Rorito International Pvt. Ltd., R.S.NO.34/1 PART, 34/4 – 34/7, H.M.ROAD, SEDARAPET, PONDICHERY 605111, and wrote, while returning back, on the wall:

No Pork
No Beef
No Smoking
No Alcohol
No Esprit.

Now he felt content. Now, he put the cap roughly on the marker and descended the three stone, stairs, to the main road, next to the: *No Parking* sign. He walked on further, without realising, that the cap came loose, and inadvertently there were three paisley-shaped spots on his black jeans, similar to what Marie carried one morning of making love, when her colleagues asked her what was it visible on her skirt, in dark spots, and she had to say: *'Yaourt'*.

He continued walking past the dogs, dismembering their limbs in a frenetic shake. He walked past the bend, up the slope, next to the girls sunning their pickle bottles in the unnatural November sun. Further on, a wine shop and the only sight which makes him as pleased as the neck of Frenchwomen: the *goulots* of wine bottles. Three racks above the wine bottles, the sight which makes his heart exfoliate in joy. The only tricolor that ever mattered to him: *Bleu Blanc Rouge.*

Matthew Wherttam

Into the Business District

The roots of the older trees had pushed apart the cement blocks that made up the sidewalk, leaving ridges and gaps that I had to avoid on my way down to the business district. My sophomore year had ended, and I was heading toward the office of an attorney/notary whose name and address I had gotten from a fat phone book.

May wasn't over yet and it wasn't even midday, but it was hot, and beads of sweat were forming on my forehead. In fact, I was sweating everywhere, but the sweat on my forehead was what I was noticing. I saw a barbershop, and just beyond it an ice cream parlor, so I stopped for some ice cream.

Mint chocolate chip.

I ate it at the counter. Around me were gumball machines, tall flared glasses filled with straws, and candy canes on top of clear plastic cases, which in turn were filled with lollipops. And there was a soda fountain and a collection of ice cream scoopers, one for at least a dozen different flavors, each in its own tub. Overhead, a huge fan rotated slowly and the store's front window was open. But that fan and open window weren't doing much to lessen the heat of the day.

The chocolate chips in my ice cream didn't taste like chocolate, and crunching on them wasn't much fun either. And though the ice cream itself was green, it didn't taste minty. It didn't even taste green, whatever that might mean. But it was ice cream so it must have been cold even though I don't remember it being cold. Nevertheless, I finished mine and amazingly, my mouth felt dry when I was done. I remember that.

Then I was back on the sidewalk and into the deep, outdoor heat of that day.

The door of the attorney/notary's office had a window filled with gold lettering, spelling out his name, his street number, and a lot of other stuff. I knocked, was told to enter, and found myself in

a hot room filled with law books. The man in that room was seated behind a large, carved dark brown wooden desk. He was half bald, and only the top of his head, not his face, was pointed at me. All he needed was a visor and a light bulb blazing down on him from above and he would have looked like one of those silent guys in the movies who takes in and dishes out the money during late-night poker games.

He had on a long-sleeved white shirt and tie, over those a dark green vest, and over that a dark green suit jacket. I remember that. It was too much dark green and too much clothing for the weather we were in.

I couldn't seem to say anything. I sensed I might be annoying him. I was a bit nervous and felt I had a right to be.

"Yes?" he asked.

"I need this notarized." I handed him the tax form I had brought with me.

He squinted at it while reaching into his desk for his notary stamp.

"You'll be working this summer with one of the professors up on the hill?"

"Yes."

"And you'll be getting minimum wage?"

"Yes."

"And you walked all the way here to get this notarized?"

"Yes."

"What will you be doing for this professor?"

"Chemistry. Lab work."

"You'll be working indoors? This entire summer?"

"Yes."

"No field trips? No going outdoors?"

"No."

He notarized my form.

"What do I owe you?" I asked.

"Nothing."

And I turned and walked back out into the deep heat of that day.

Nonfiction

R. Nemo Hill

Questions Of Sorrow

11 May, 2005—Petulu, Bali—

When the rays of the sun can slant no further, and they vanish—when a million moving shadows become one motionless shadow—then all the sadness I am capable of rises to the surface of self. What is this sorrow-for-no-object that runs through my life like a pale quiet stream along whose banks I insist on spending, in solitude, so many seasons? It's almost palpable this evening, silhouetting each leaf in the garden, each stone in the path, isolating each element of the landscape, separating every atom of creature and creation with a distance as vast as that which isolates the stars. Why do I find that space torn open each year by travel, by exile, so necessary, so irresistible? What is it that I am trying to strip from myself, layer by melancholy layer, down to the deepest kernel of a sigh?

David Hughes

Listening After Goretti

The wind names nothing.
It only removes what cannot hold.

On the evening the warnings turned red, Cornwall began to listen. Not the listening that waits for reassurance, but the older kind—the kind that attends to what the world is doing rather than what it has always done. Phones lit up across the peninsula with the same blunt phrase: danger to life. The words sat there, flat and modern, while outside the air was already shifting its weight. It had that charged feel that arrives before serious weather, when the world seems to draw breath. Gulls dropped lower. Hedge tops shivered without wind. The sea, unseen but unmistakable, sounded closer than it should.

We have become used to named storms, as if a name makes weather manageable, or at least familiar. Goretti. A syllable you might mistake for a person arriving at the door. But this arrival did not knock. It leaned its shoulder into the county.

Cornwall has always lived with weather as presence rather than background. Wind is part of the grammar here: shaping cottages with low profiles and thick walls, encouraging hedges to grow dense and defensive, teaching generations how to tie down, shore up, wait. But Goretti felt different even before it made landfall. Forecasts hardened. Maps darkened. Language shifted from caution to instruction. This was not a storm to be observed safely through metaphor; it was one to be prepared for with rope, torchlight, and hands made useful.

```
SW gales veering NW severe gale force 9 to violent
storm force 11, increasing to hurricane force 12
later. Significant risk to life and property. —
Met Office, Amber Warning, Update 4
```

Before the gusts arrived in force, there were gestures—small, precise acknowledgements of scale. A neighbour on my road lashed down their bins with an unexpected care usually reserved for boats. Someone hauled a plastic chair indoors as though rescuing a child. Across Cornwall, windows were checked twice, torches laid out, kettles filled not with optimism but with habit. These actions weren't panic. They were recognition. On a peninsula, you learn early that weather is not scenery. It is actor.

When the wind came, it did not rush. It gathered.

The sound arrived first—a deep, continuous roar, like something immense crossing ground too quickly—and then the house began to speak back. Rafters shifted. The roof lifted fractionally and settled again. The chimney drew hard, as if it had been instructed to breathe for the whole street. Outside, the dark moved sideways. Rain did not fall so much as enter, finding seams and weaknesses, crossing thresholds.

At the height of the storm, sleep fractured into intervals. You woke not to alarm but to instinct—to test the pitch of the noise, to count seconds between gusts, to decide whether a particular crack meant damage or merely protest. Somewhere nearby, a tree went with a sound too heavy to misinterpret. The impact travelled through the ground, a blunt punctuation that would not be undone by morning.

Later, the reports would catalogue the event in figures: winds approaching a hundred miles an hour in exposed places; thousands of homes without power; roads blocked; rail services halted; trees torn from the ground. Figures have their place. They anchor shared memory. But in the moment, the body keeps a different record: how tightly you sleep; how often you wake; the precise quality of silence that follows each surge.

Storms do not just fell trees. They fell assumptions.

```
Penzance: 97 mph gust recorded at 03:47. Multiple
trees reported down on A394. — Network Control,
log entry
```

By morning, Goretti's reach was visible everywhere. Fallen trunks sprawled across lanes as though flung there carelessly. Dry-stone walls slumped where roots had been torn from beneath them. Entire roads were rendered provisional—passable only if someone came first with a saw or the strength to drag a branch clear. In some places, a single fallen tree was enough to isolate a village, reminding everyone how narrow the margins had become.

Power and water outages followed quickly, sometimes together, sometimes staggered enough to tease false relief. Homes were intact but abruptly uninhabitable. The modern contract—warmth, light, communication—had been quietly suspended. For many households, days would pass before normality returned. Fridges became cupboards. Mobile phones dimmed into silence. Weather updates, briefly absent, became rumours again.

For some households, the loss that lingered longest was connection. Broadband cabinets were damaged. Masts failed. Internet service dropped out and did not return for days. Work paused. Payments stalled. Appointments evaporated. The world contracted to what could be reached without a signal. It was a modern deprivation, but a revealing one—a reminder that connectivity has quietly joined heat and water as something we notice only when it disappears.

When systems fail, silence changes shape. Not the chosen quiet of a winter walk along the coast, but an imposed stillness built from absence. No fridge hum. No boiler click. No router blinking its small, reassuring pulse. Without these sounds, houses feel larger and less obedient. The senses recalibrate. Cold draws through keyholes. Candlelight turns kitchens into chapels. Time loosens its grip. The house becomes a place you listen inside.

Silence is not empty.
It is infrastructure paused.

`Estimated restoration: 48–72 hours. Priority given to critical infrastructure and high-density postcodes. — Western Power, automated message`

There is a particular vulnerability in this quiet—a reminder of how tightly daily life is wired to continuity. Without power, phones dim. Without signal, weather becomes guesswork. Without water pressure, even cleanliness turns into negotiation. What had seemed abstract—resilience, preparedness—becomes bodily and immediate.

And then—because this is Cornwall—people arrive.

Someone always has a camping stove. Someone knows where the spare key is kept. Someone has a power bank charged just enough to share. Flasks appear. Extension leads snake across thresholds like gestures of trust. Lanes are cleared by hand where machinery cannot reach, branches dragged aside by neighbours who greet one another less with words than with nods.

Help travels here the way weather does: hedgerow to hedgerow, village to village. It does not announce itself. It simply happens.

This resilience is genuine. It is earned. But it is often misunderstood.

Stoicism, observed from elsewhere, can look like self-sufficiency. They'll cope. They're used to it. Yet coping does not mean unscathed. It does not mean unangry. It does not mean systems are adequate. It means people endure together, and later—more quietly—take stock of what was lost. It reveals a difficult truth: that community action is too often the stopgap for systemic failure, a local fix mistaken for a sufficient solution.

Some of those losses resist easy accounting.

After Goretti, familiar landscapes looked abruptly rewritten. Parks stood stripped of their canopy. Gardens were rearranged as though by careless hands. In West Cornwall, the scale of tree loss was not simply ecological but emotional—an assault on long-standing witnesses. Trees that had marked seasons, framed views, buffered wind, and held soil lay where they fell, exposed and oddly vulnerable once grounded.

Roots remember longer
than the body standing.

When a tree comes down, time behaves differently. Decades of growth resolve themselves into a moment of noise. The land suddenly appears younger, harsher, less forgiving. Wind that once arrived filtered now comes straight through. Birds begin again elsewhere. Rain runs where it never ran before. On a coast built from slopes, stone, and thin soil, the phrase trees down describes not an outcome, but a chain reaction.

These shifts are not abstract. They alter how people move through space, how fields hold, how paths flood, how villages weather the next storm—because there will be a next storm. This is the emerging grammar: repetition, not apocalypse. Attrition.

This is where Goretti stops being spectacle and begins to instruct.

The temptation after storms like this is to reach for superlatives: worst on record, unprecedented, once in a lifetime. These phrases soothe. They imply an arc with an end. But the land offered a different reading. Stripped and exposed, it spoke not of culmination, but of rehearsal.

Listening to place, in moments like this, is no longer metaphor.

The coast has always spoken—through erosion, through tide and undertow, through the slow negotiations between sea and stone. But extreme weather amplifies that voice until it becomes impossible to ignore. The land tells you what it can no longer hold. The sea reminds you it has no interest in routine. The wind moves through our designs as if they are provisional agreements, subject to revision.

And then, once the noise subsides, the quieter messages begin.

A compromised branch creaks under new strain. A hillside looks wrong in a way that cannot yet be named. An absence where something once stood becomes its own presence. Frustration

surfaces—about delay, about isolation, about the familiar sense that rural places often wait longest for restoration.

None of this is dramatic. That is precisely the point.

The aftermath of Goretti was not cinematic. It was cold mornings, careful steps, improvised meals, small calculations about heat and light. It was also grief—not only for damage, but for continuity interrupted. A view altered for a generation. A shelter lost. A confidence dented.

Cornwall will recover. It always does. New hedges will be laid. Saplings planted. Roofs repaired. The green will return, slowly and unevenly. But the storm leaves an imprint that repairs do not erase: an awareness of exposure. This coastline is not merely home. It is frontier.

The future implied by Goretti is not one of singular catastrophe, but repetition. Weather as punctuation. As governance. As something that decides when roads open, how homes are heated, whether water runs, and how often communities must stretch themselves around absence.

What returns
will arrive faster
than what is repaired.

After Goretti, the county fell briefly into a deeper quiet. Generators were switched off. Repairs completed. Routines cautiously resumed. But the land did not forget. It seldom does. It carries memory forward—in altered growth patterns, shifted boundaries, new lines of stress.

Listening, now, in the raw quiet of January, is not about waiting for the next storm to arrive.

It happens when nothing else is speaking.

David Milley

Penn's Landing

Bicentennial year, winter came early. After dark, even though it was only November, wind slashed Philadelphia's streets. Three or four times a week, I bundled up and walked the thirty blocks from West Philly to Center City. I strolled from one bar to another. At each stop I measured how long I could make a single beer last. Sometimes, I struck up sudden, passionate friendships, acquaintances that lasted only as long as the passion. Other nights, when closing time came, I made my way alone back through the cold streets.

I met Warren on one of my jaunts, just a week after I turned twenty-two. I made my way to the downstairs bar in time for last call. Standing with my foot on the brass rail, I looked to the seat next to me, to see him perched there. Tough-looking, strong, he had a stern face and a heavy black beard that grew almost to his glinting eyes, their corners crinkled in a grin. He stuck out his hand. "Warren," he said, "like the place where rabbits live."

I took him home. We rode the subway through a city which was suddenly empty, except for us. I was wearing a big square fake-fur hat and a long gray coat from the thrift shop. He jumped onto a bench to make himself tall. *"Khorosho!"* he proclaimed to the echoes of the subway station, in Russian, in honor of my furry hat, "Nice!"

That night, in the light through the window of my basement room, I watched Warren's face and body move, a breathing bronze sculpture, moonlit. I still feel the soft touch of his rough hand against my beard. I still feel his arms around me in my tiny bed that night.

In the morning, he laughed at my attempt at breakfast—instant coffee, cold hard-boiled eggs, and desiccated cheese—and pulled me close for another kiss. We wandered through town together that morning, marveling at everything new. We didn't say goodbye at all that day.

That winter, Warren came to visit nearly every afternoon.

Night after night, we walked the Philadelphia grid, talking as we walked from my room at 42nd and Spruce all the way downtown. Some nights, we went to the bars to drink and dance and party in the intoxicated carnival that was gay life in the 1970s.

Other nights, we trudged through the snow and slush down to the Delaware River at Penn's Landing, talking the whole way. The wind howled, but we kept our hats and scarves on tight. Warren wore long johns under his clothes, so his denim jacket and gloves, and occasional hugs, kept him warm. I wore my Russian-looking, thrift-shop tweed overcoat. It was like wearing a heavy wool blanket.

I told Warren about growing up a child prodigy. I told him how—when my entire junior high figured out I was queer before I did—skipping grades became my superpower. It protected my secret, gay, identity from being talked about out loud, kept word from making its way back to my parents. I told him how I escaped after tenth grade, only to be tortured by my college professors. I told Warren how I escaped again to graduate school.

I related this adventure, too: I marched in my first Gay Pride parade in June, only five months before we met. "The organizers signed up a Mummers string band to lead off the parade. The brigade didn't figure out what the parade was for until the march began, but they honored their contract anyway."Warren cocked his head; I kept talking. "The Mummers marched and played right up front, as a thousand of us made our way around Rittenhouse Square. Everybody cheered."

Warren offered, "I saw that parade on the news."

"Yep. I saw it, too, that night. Even caught a glimpse of myself marching. Hard to miss me in my overalls and glasses." I shook my head. Warren grinned.

All our first year together, we told each other stories from before we met, but we lived new stories, too. Warren took me to his bee yards in New Jersey. I watched him move from hive to hive, hypnotically squeezing the bellows on his smoker. He cracked the hives open and gently lifted the boxes to make sure all was well with

the honeybees inside. Other times, when he took his truck into the woods, I watched Warren fell trees, cut them into cord wood, and toss the wood like toys from his truck into his parents' yard. He stacked the pieces into nearly identical piles to sell.He showed me how I could carry even very big logs on my shoulder, once I'd found the perfect balance point. That winter, I wrote my first sonnet to Warren.

One February night, we made our way to Penn's Landing. The wind whipped in from the west during our entire walk down from west Philly. We knew our trek back would be brutal, but we were too busy talking to care.

Born in Philadelphia, Warren was raised in a little house in the New Jersey woods. He grew up nearly wild, defied his Catholic school nuns, rode the neighbor's horse through the woods, learned the ways of people who'd lived in the Pine Barrens for generations.

Warren was full of stories. He told them, as we marched east: "The old man moved us to Cecil right after I was born. My mom said it was a surprise. I always figured he'd gotten in trouble with the Philly cops, not sure for what, maybe running numbers for the mafia." I smiled in my scarf; I already knew what was coming.

"Anyway, before I got drafted, old Ethel Bonnett let me farm the field next to her house. After I got back, Mae and Reno Allsbrook—they owned that property—had moved in and moved Mrs. Bonnett out, so I had to rent the same field from them. Mae had just retired from some kind of office job in New York, and they had a lot of money in stocks, so they didn't have to work. They drank a lot. I farmed the field, and they got to keep the agricultural tax rate on the land, and my rent covered that."

"What did you grow?"

"Corn and tomatoes and eggplants, watermelons—anything that would fetch a price. I sold it out of a road-stand at my folks' place on the highway. It was a good business, too, up 'til I got drafted in '64."

I offered, "Vietnam was heating up then."

"I was supposed to be shipped off there after basic training,

but they gave all of us at the base a lot of tests and my orders got changed. They shipped me off to Massweiler, in Germany, with a top secret clearance. I was there the first year, repairing generators. Then they transferred me to Pirmasens for the second year, where they stuck me behind a desk in a big stable that the Nazis had converted into an office building." Warren stopped a moment, fished into his back pocket for the little round tin and tucked a pinch of wet, powdery snuff into his lower lip.

I'd never known anybody who dipped snuff, but I wasn't going to judge. I was smitten: Warren could get away with anything. I fished out a cigarette. Standing face to face, Warren cupped his hands around mine to protect my flame. We resumed our walk.

"They had good beer in Germany. They drink it warm there, you know." I knew. I'd known it for years. Also, even though we'd been together only a few weeks, Warren had already reminisced about good German beer several times, usually while we were drinking cheap tap beer ourselves. At those points, he would punctuate recollection with explosive German or Russian or Spanish or Irish.

"I hated the Army!" Warren leaned over the edge of the sidewalk and spit into the gutter. "Bunch of lifers who don't know their ass from their elbow telling everybody else what to do. But the beer was good. And I had a lot of time to myself. I drove all over the south end of Germany. One time, I even crossed over the border into France. And I didn't spend my money or play cards, so I saved up all my pay. When I got near the end, I had some money saved up. Enough to get set up again when I got home. I saved up my leave, too. Just before my tour was up, I flew over to Ireland for two weeks, all on my own."

Warren spit again. I managed to get in a question, "You were in Ireland?"

"I flew into Dublin and spent the first night there. The food in Dublin was sparse." I glanced at him for the odd word. "If you bought a ham sandwich in a saloon, you'd get one slice of ham. Then I took the train to Sligo and then a bus to Galway. The food

in the west was unbelievable. It's the best beef you could ever want. It's all grass fed, you know. When I landed in Dublin that first day, I bought a tweed jacket—the men all wore tweed jackets—and a cap and packed away my uniform for the whole time I was there. I'd go into the pubs and drink draft stout and everybody was surprised to find out I was an American."

He kept on: "When my leave was up, I went back to Dublin for the last day and a night and a day. And then I flew back to Pirmasens. The plane—it wasn't a big plane like they have today, and it had propellers. It flew over the south end of England and I saw Stonehenge from the air, shining in the sun. And I saw the white cliffs of Dover, too. They glowed when we flew over the channel."

Warren put his thumb and forefinger on either side of his mouth, as if he were going to whistle, and sent the last of his wad of snuff into the gutter. "When I got back from Germany, I didn't get to farm the field right away. While I was gone, Reno had rented the field to some guy from Philadelphia. But when Reno went to collect the rent from him, he chased Reno off with an axe. Mae was a pain in the ass, but Reno was okay. He died in '72." Warren stopped a moment to wait for a car to go by.

I touched his jacketed forearm, and we started walking again. We were close to the river now. The wind picked up and both of us tucked our scarves tight around our ears.

"I used to stop in to see Mae twice a week to make sure she was okay and to change all her cat pans, but one time I brought my buddy Jack along and I think he said something to her about him and me, 'cause she started yelling at me when I came out of the cellar. She ran us out of her kitchen and off the porch, calling us goddamn homos. I never went back."

We made our way down to the south end of the Penn's Landing quay. With the moon shining on the water, on the walkway underneath the observation deck, Warren turned his face up to mine and kissed me. We hugged a good long minute in the shadows, then we started back. Walking out from the end of the quay, the wind

hitting us from our left, we heard faint cries coming over the water, "Help! Help!"

We looked at each other. For a few seconds, we thought it was some kids on the other side of the harbor, trying to tease a reaction. I started to say, "Ignore th–" And then, we both realized, the cries came from underneath us.

Warren leapt over the low gate and ran down the ramp to the pontoon walkways where the boats were moored. I jumped over the gate right behind him and face-planted onto the icy ramp: "boom!" I slid face-first, stopping at the bottom just in time to watch my glasses fly off and disappear into the icy water with a sad little "plink."

Gingerly, unhurt, I stood up, to see Warren bent over an opening in the pontoons, lifting something heavy through the slats. Warren's a little guy, five-foot-four in boots, but cutting firewood by the cord made him strong. Even blurry-eyed, I could tell that it was a man's form rising from the water.

I lumbered over to help, taking care not to slip again. I pulled on the stranger's arms, trying to anchor him while Warren hauled him out. As the dripping mass lay halfway out on the walkway, I kept pulling and Warren reached into the water, hauling his legs out, pushing him the rest of the way forward. We helped him stand. He was a big guy, about six foot two, maybe three hundred pounds, a shock of blond hair plastered to his forehead. He wore a dark uniform with a shield patch over his chest pocket.

He was shivering, so I turned my coat inside out and wrapped it around his shoulders and, one of us holding onto each arm, we helped him stagger back up the ramp to the main landing. "I'm supposed to check the boats. I didn't see the hole. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He hadn't seen the missing segment among the pontoons when he was checking the boats. His teeth chattered and he kept shivering and he was scared and sad. He must've been thirty years old, but he sounded like a little kid caught out after curfew.

We started walking back up the quay again with our drenched companion. An old man in the same uniform walked over

to where we were making our slow way. He sized us up, and started scolding. First, he started to yell at the big guy for not reporting in, but the shivering lunk just stared at him mournfully. So, the old guy started in on Warren and me, "What are you doing here!? Don't you know it's dangerous!"I guess he expected, or hoped, or pretended, that we were the ones who'd gotten in trouble. We didn't argue. I got my wet coat back from the big guy as the old man wrapped him in a blanket—so, he saw enough about what was going on to grab a blanket. The big man and the little man walked in front of us, going the same direction up the quay. I checked the inside of my coat for sogginess—not too bad—and put it back on, wet side out, snugging the belt tight. Warren and I turned west, walking into our long life together, living new stories, facing the harsh wind home.

Taylor Harrison

Should I Be Concerned If I Have a Possum in My Yard?

Possum, I type. I want to know more about them because they remind me of my father. *Should I be concerned if I have a possum in my yard?* Google tells me what I *should* be asking. I scroll down. Opossums, the term used in technical or scientific contexts, are the only marsupials native to North America. That means they aren't placental mammals; instead, the tiny hairless creatures emerge from the womb prematurely and make a home inside their mother's abdominal pouch—the *marsupium.* They are born blind, no larger than a honeybee. Sometimes the litters outnumber the mother's thirteen teats. Those in excess of this figure die. The thirteen that remain after outgrowing the pouch cling to their mother's back. If one falls off, she likely won't return for it.

***

When I was a child, my mother and I would spend summer evenings kneeling in front of the French doors leading to our backyard. Raccoons, possums, and skunks passed through, namely because my mother left a heaping bowl of cat kibble for the strays that made our yard their home years before. *Look,* she'd whisper, pointing toward a small silhouette, and we'd press our faces tightly to the glass, our breath fogging up the scene before us.

There it is! I'd exclaim.

Shhhh, she'd reply. *Not too loud.*

In my childhood memories, my father's presence is all soft edges: he is elusive, fleeting, yet omnipresent. His love is a highway mirage; it floods some recollections but dissipates when I get too close. My mother tells me that he has always loved me very much. I don't always believe her. As I aged, I found it easier to recall instances of when I saw him love others and preferred those memories to the more difficult times. In that regard, the Possum Rescue Story is clear.

Dad is watching television while my mother and I are in

the kitchen. He calls out to us.

"The fence," he whispers, "Look at the mommy and her babies. Quietly!"

A large possum balances on our wooden fence, her rotund shape illuminated by the golden wall lantern. She resembles a well-fed cat. Her babies are piled on her back. She freezes, acutely aware that she is no longer alone.

***

I continue my search on Instagram. *Possums.* A thumbnail featuring a creature staring into the camera materializes, its mouth agape. I expand the video and instinctively open the comments.

They carry rabies, a heavily tattooed man pictured with two Bengal tigers comments. I feel superior knowing that the transmission of rabies from a possum is rare due to their low body temperature, but I settle for a smug smile instead of an all-out comment war.

I select another video. The narrator incorrectly calls the possum a "rodent."

"They're *marsupials,*" I mutter aloud. How is it possible to be so misinformed?

***

A lone joey is found in our backyard. My father wraps a towel around it and places it into an oversized cat carrier, which only emphasizes the fragility of this creature.

Dad jumps into his car and drives away, returning with a mouse cage and water bottle—

My memory flounders, Dad is soft edges again. I call my mother to confirm the story.

"Mom, I'm writing about Dad. Did he rescue a possum when I was a kid? Why am I remembering a mouse cage?"

"No. I was the one who rescued the possum. I found it outside. We kept it for a day, then we released it, and its mother returned. I picked it up with my bare hands."

"She returned for her baby?"

"Yes."

"How unusual."

"Dad rescued a baby mouse. You remember what happened, right?"

***

No mirages, just floods. Dad emerges from the backyard with a pup, cupping it in the palm of his hand.

"He's sick," he says.

Dad leaves for the pet store and returns with a mouse cage and water bottle. The mouse stirs, investigating its new surroundings.

"He'll be okay," he says cautiously. Dad names him "Mickey." My heart flutters as I observe our new pet happily burrowing beneath its bedding.

An indeterminate amount of time passes. Maybe it is only hours, but in my virgin mind, it feels like days.

"He's not breathing," I hear Dad say. His voice trails away. It is one of the only times I see him cry, and I cannot help but cry for him.

Dad holds a funeral in the backyard for Mickey, and I wait for him to ask me to join, but he doesn't. Instead, he buries the corpse alone. He stands over the mounded grave, his body swaying with the wind.

***

I dismiss my mother's correction to my story and continue reading about possums because they still remind me of Dad. Possums eat mice. This contrasts with my previous image of them as benevolent herbivores. I then discover that the presence of possums often indicates that rodents are also on-site. I pause, pressing my tongue hard against the roof of my mouth.

I see the word "misunderstood" appear dozens of times when describing possums, and I consider how much of my father I've miscalculated over the years. His critical nature and physical distance loom large in my mind. I recall his ex-girlfriend asking why I never hugged him, and I told her in earnest that I didn't know. What I do know now is that he had the capability to love, even if he found it difficult to show it.

***

His nose that is my nose has transmogrified into a pointy snout. I am all sharp teeth, but I am the one who is mortally wounded. He picks me up in the palms of his oversized hands. I will be safe; he is all I see as he places me in his enclosure. I will be loved. He will return for me. If not now, maybe someday.

Kate LaDew

Outside Electric Green

He's wandering, feet just moving, as if the motion alone will save him. There's no one at his back, not now, not at this precise moment. In another moment, who knows? Reconnaissance he'd told them, but the French countryside is nowhere he's ever been, years of gray cities and gray streets, German efficiency, making all this green, all this color electric to his eyes. And then, a path appears, a flamboyance of trees. My god, this green! This light, and—it's a garden, in full bloom, so lovely he thinks this must've been what Eden was like before everything went wrong. And there, rising behind it, a castle, Baron de Turckheim's castle, the French politician who became a German diplomat. He knew this existed somewhere, assumed there would be something to guide the way, not this sudden onslaught of beauty, this unmarked glory. He turns, looks back over the hills he's crested, Blamont, a beautiful little city full up with red roofs and little potted plants on every doorstep, the double towered gothic church, gargoyles looking down, so alive you can see their mouths dripping. And here he is, on this free spot of ground in the middle of bloodshed. He looks up at the castle, reconnaissance, yes, best to go inside, just to see.

He walks through the field, lets the tips of his fingers graze the heaps of flowers, spilling out from the earth, climbs the stairs and goes inside. No door to be found, just a great opening, and he is stilled as he takes in the rubble and ruin, the rows of portraits lopsided, frames chipped and splintered, women in heavy collars, men in glorious wigs, faces slashed and curling, the paint peeling in swaths. The library, pages of books with heel marks dug into them, spines broken and scattered, desks turned over, lamps smashed, bullet holes in the woodwork. Everything ruined, everything destroyed, by his own countrymen he knows, each room a tragedy, beauty dismembered.

And now he's wandering again, eyes glazed, as he goes

from room to room, all the wonderful things upended, and then, a moment of calm, when there, in one corner of a mostly empty space, curtains torn from their rods, windows smashed, there, in the cracked sunlight, a piano, a grand piano, Steinway and Sons, perfect and gleaming, not a mark, not a scratch, as if its beauty alone saved it, the black lacquer glossy and rich, a miracle presented to him amongst the fervor of destruction.

He thinks of his mother, his father, their long fingers, sitting side by side after his little brother's bar mitzvah, heads touching, the notes long and slow, before the war, before his older brother died, before he was sent into this constant stream of gunfire and quick, sharp cruelty, death and almost death, shattered limbs and shattered hearts, before he knew the things people could do to each other. He hovers over the keys and plays hesitantly, haltingly. Slowly his body relaxes and *Shlof Mayn Kind, Sleep My Child,* fills the shattered room with perfect music. In this moment, in a French city in a French castle, he has never been more aware of his Germanness, the love he has for his country. And, in a few years, when this day seems like a dream, like something that never happened, his country will declare him subhuman, vermin. His family will flee and he will stay, not believing his own eyes, his own ears, convinced his love will win out, his patriotism will override the whims of a despot. And he will not understand he is wrong until the bullet enters his brain in a mass grave, eyes looking up at the sky as the dirt covers him.

But he doesn't know that yet, in a foreign country thinking of his home. That hasn't happened yet. All he knows is this moment is soft and beautiful, and the sun is bright and outside electric green, and he is safe for a little while, the world quiet. And his hands move over the keys as if he has forever, as if he could be here forever, as if he'll live forever, suspended in time in this room, in this place, one bright spot, a pocket of Eden before it all goes wrong, truly and completely. Before all, everything is lost.

Contributors

Mark Allinson holds a PhD in English Literature from Monash University (1988) and has taught literature at both Monash and the University of Wollongong. His poetry has been published internationally, including the chapbook *Blue Glass Cities* (Exot Books, New York, 2006) and appearances in several anthologies edited by William Roetzheim. His work has appeared in various print journals and online magazines over several decades. Now retired on the New South Wales South Coast, he focuses on long-form narrative verse and the application of traditional European forms to the Australian landscape.

Abigail-Tydale Bassey is the author of *Walking with God* (Parousia Reads Chapbook Series, 2020) and *Courageous,* third place in the 2022 Pengician Poetry Chapbook Prize. She was longlisted for the 2021 African Writers Awards in Poetry for *No Other Miracle,* and has co-authored four anthologies which include *Tales and Twists* and *The Aftermath* published by Tales from the Other Land. Abigail's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Writers Space Africa, Ekondo Review, Triune, Folio, Womanly Magazine, Bennington Review,* and elsewhere. Abigail lives in Port Harcourt, where she works, writes, and plays tennis.

Ross Bolding was born in Arkansas in 1946, and began writing both fiction and poetry at an early age. He is a retired school superintendent and an accomplished runner, having set several U.S. records and winning many National Championship races in addition to winning the World Championship in Cross Country. Being a lifetime learner, he is now working on an MFA degree.

Madeline Boles is a writer of poetry and prose living in Brooklyn, New York. Her short story "Cheese Day" will be published in *Stand Magazine* in 2026.

Garrett Bruner is an archivist for archaeology projects, processing ancient Greek script related collections and serving as a site archivist for two Roman villas near Pompeii, Italy. His poems have appeared in *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and are forthcoming in *The North Dakota Quarterly.* He lives in Austin, Texas.

Alan Catlin has published dozens of chapbooks and full-length collections of prose and poetry. Among his latest full-length poetry books are *Work Anxiety Poems* (Roadhouse Press), *Landscape of the Exiles* (Dos Madres) and *Still Life with Apocalypse* (Shelia Na Gig Editions).

Peggy Culp holds degrees from the University of South Carolina and Vanderbilt University. She retired nine years ago from a 20+ career as a fundraiser at Vanderbilt. In retirement, she enjoys writing fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Her work has been published in SHIFT, a literary magazine of Middle Tennessee State University, and an online version of FRANCE TODAY. She also sings and plays ukulele solo and with groups. She has astonished dozens up and down the East Coast with her version of "Blue Suede Shoes."

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Deborah Doolittle has lived in lots of different places, but now calls North Carolina home. An AWP Intro Award winner and Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of *Floribunda, No Crazy Notions, That Echo,* and *Bogbound.* When not writing or reading or editing BRILLIG: a micro lit mag, she's training for running road races, or practicing yoga, all while sharing a house with her husband, five housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

Julie Ebin is a queer human whose work explores sensuality, finding stillness in nature, and motherhood. Ebin is a member of the Poem Works Boston community. In her earlier years she studied with C.D. Wright and Gale Nelson. Her work is forthcoming or has recently appeared in SWWIM, *Whale Road Review, Halfway Down the Stairs, Paterson Literary Review, Solstice,* and elsewhere. A co-founder of the former experimental collaborative writing group v.e.r.b.a.t.i.m., Ebin lives in Arlington, Massachusetts with one child and zero cats.

George Freek's poetry has appeared in numerous journals and reviews. His poem "Night Thoughts" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Alexis G. Garcia aka Vexed Lex is a queer Hispanic writer and spoken word artist from East Harlem, NY. She is the author of her debut poetry book titled *Ask Me Again In Six Months.* Her poetry discusses mental health awareness, self-reflection, love and has covered other topics such as queer identity, sexual harassment and abortion.

Evelyn Griffith is a children's author, poet, opera singer, and literary editor writing from her MFA program in Norfolk, VA. She has been published in *Constellate* and is forthcoming in Wildfire & RIZE's Short Story Anthology for wildfire victim relief. Evelyn is also the Editor-in-Chief of the *Barely South Review*.

Max Gutmann has contributed to *Able Muse, Measure,* THINK, and other journals and magazines, including an earlier issue of *Shadowplay.*

Taylor Harrison is an American writer whose work has been featured or is forthcoming in a variety of literary magazines, including *Thirteen Bridges Review, Mulberry Literary, Chicago Story Press, and Yellow Arrow Journal,* among others. She was a recent participant of the Yale Writers' Workshop. You can learn more about Taylor by following her Instagram account, @tharrisonwriting.

Kathleen Hellen is the author of three collections and two poetry chapbooks. Her writing has appeared in *Four Way Review, The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, Massachusetts Review, North American Review, SmokeLong Quarterly,* and elsewhere. Hellen's work has been nominated multiple times for Best of the Net, the Pushcart and recently, Best American Short Stories. A third chapbook, *young girl in the flower of time,* is forthcoming in 2026 from Lily Press

R. Nemo Hill is the author of a novel, *Pilgrim's Feather* (Quantuck Lane, 2002), a poem based on a story by H.P. Lovecraft, *The Strange Music of Erich Zann* (Hippocampus, 2004), four poetry collections from Dos Madres Press, *When Men Bow Down* (2012), *In No Man's Ear* (2015) *Magellan's Reveries* (2018), and *Awake in Sand* (2024), as well as a book of excerpts from a decade of his Southeast Asian travel journals, *Just In Case It Isn't There* (2022). He is also the editor and publisher of EXOT BOOKS.

Michelle McMillan Holifield is a Best of the Net and two-time Pushcart nominee. She was longlisted for the Dzanc Poetry Prize. You can find her work in *Bear Review, Nelle, Permafrost, The Main Street Rag,* and *Whale Road Review,* among others.

David Hughes is a UK-based writer working across poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. His work explores attention, silence, systems, and the ethical residue of observation, often rooted in landscape, infrastructure, and contemporary life in Cornwall. His debut novel, a work of speculative literary fiction, *The Listener,* was launched last year receiving five star reviews and his writing has been submitted widely to literary journals and prizes. He lives and works in West Cornwall.

Siham Karami is the author of *To Love the River* (Kelsay Books, 2018), a poetry collection which features sonnets, ghazals, villanelles, and more, including poems in forms of her own invention. Her work has been published in *The Orison Anthology, Able Muse, The*

Comstock Review, Measure, Tiferet Journal, and *Poetry International,* among others. Her sonnets have twice won the Laureates' Prize in the Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest.

Jade Kleiner is a writer from New England. Her poetry can be found or is upcoming in *Free the Verse, manywor(l)ds, Haikuniverse*, and elsewhere. Her fiction is upcoming in *Bright Flash Literary Review.* She is transgender and has practiced in the Plum Village tradition since 2020.

Yarrow Knittel is the author of *Real Work* (Nodin, 2022), a finalist for the 2023 Minnesota Book Award in poetry, and the chapbook *Fish & Wild Life* (Finishing Line, 2018). In addition to several journals, Janna has also published poems in the following anthologies: *North Coast Voices* (Main Street Rag Publishing Company, forthcoming 2026); *Blue, A Humana Obscura Anthology* (2025); *The Experiment Will Not Be Bound* (Unbound Edition, 2023); *Broad Wings, Long Legs: A Rookery of Heron Poems* (North Star, 2024); and *Waters Deep: A Great Lakes Anthology* (Split Rock, 2018).

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Arts. She lives in Graham, NC with her cats James Cagney and Janis Joplin.

Originally from NYC, **Leatrice** studied at Sarah Lawrence College, moved to the UK to pursue a master's at Oxford University, and has lived in Oxford since. Her writing focuses on belonging and mental health, and has been published in *Blood + Honey, Corporeal, Feast Zine,* and *Magnolia,* among others. Recently, she was longlisted for The Poet's Workshop 2026 prize. This March, she will be a featured poet at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Trafalgar Square, reading from her debut poetry collection, *Yearbook Signing* (Reconnecting Rainbows Press, 2026).

Felicity Marsh is an author of short stories, from flash fiction to

novellas, published in traditional print media and online. Her work often tends towards the speculative and frequently includes fantastical and gothic elements.

Bruce McCrae, a Canadian musician, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with poems published in hundreds of magazines such as *Poetry, Rattle,* and the *North American Review.* His latest book, *Boxing In The Bone Orchard* is available now via Frontenac House. https://www.frontenachouse.com/product/boxing-in-the-bone-orchard/

David Milley has been writing since the 1970s. His recent work appears in *3rd Wednesday, Bay Windows, RFD Magazine, Neologism Poetry Journal,* and *Last Syllable.* His collection of poems, *Tiller and Shears,* will appear under the Aldrich Press in the autumn of 2026. David lives in New Jersey with his husband and partner of fifty years, Warren Davy, who's made his living as a farmer, woodcutter, nurseryman, auctioneer, beekeeper, and cook. These days, Warren tends his garden and keeps honeybees. David walks and writes.

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Ph.D., the 2009-13 Kansas Poet Laureate is the author of 24 books, including the forthcoming *Back on Earth* (poetry) and recent *The Magic Eye: A Story of Saving a Life* and a *Place in the Age of Anxiety, How Time Moves: New & Selected Poems;* and *Miriam's Well,* a novel. Founder of Transformative Language Arts, she offers writing workshops, coaching, and collaborative projects. Her poetry has been widely published, including in *Poets & Writers, Negative Capability, Terrain, Half and One, Mockingheart Review, Two Rivers, The New Territory, Louisville Review, New Letters,* and dozens of other journals. She has won numerous fellowships and awards and been nominated multiple times for a Pushcart Prize. More at http://carynmirriamgoldberg.com

Liz Nakazawa is the editor of *Deer Drink the Moon: Poems of Oregon.*

This is an anthology of 33 Oregon poets writing nature poems. Her own poetry has appeared in *Willawa, Timberline Review, Amethyst Review, ahundredgourds,* and other publications.

Lauro Palomba has taught ESL and done stints as a freelance journalist and speechwriter.

Susan Policoff's stories have appeared in *The Alaska Quarterly Review, Permafrost,* and *West Branch*, among others. She currently lives in northern California.

Arjun Razdan's short story *The Abdullah Dynasty of Kashmiri Homaridae* has been published in five different literary journals, in a short span of a few months, across USA, Europe and India. This Kashmiri prosateur has a total of 27 publications in 24 literary journals in ten countries around the world, and now awaits the publishing of his roman *The Gusts of Alien Wind*.

Alison Ruth has an MFA in Creative & Professional Writing from William Paterson University. She is a four-time Pushcart Prize nominee and author of two published novels, *Near-Mint Cinderella* and *Starlight Black and the Misfortune Society.* Her short stories and poems have been widely published in critically recognized literary journals, including *CutBank, Confrontation, Harpur Palate,* and *J Journal.*

Kalina Smith (she/her) is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a poet. She teaches high school English, where she spends her days nurturing young storytellers and navigating the emotional labor of the classroom. Her work has appeared in *Nebo, The Ignatian,* FLARE: T*he Flagler Review,* ONE ART: *A Journal of Poetry, Tulsa Review,* and many others, with work recently published in *Cerasu*s and *Slant.* She served as the poetry editor for *Shadowplay* during the Spring of 2025. Her first chapbook, *Scorpio Season,* was published by Kelsay Books. You can find her on Instagram @kalinasmithpoetry or at kalinasmith.com.

Eliza Souers Valle is a writer living in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. She holds her MFA through the University of Akron. Her work has appeared in *Dog Throat Journal, Gordon Square Review, The Primer,* and elsewhere. When not writing, Eliza drinks coffee, watches birds, and plays piano.

Jim Tilley has published four full-length collections of poetry and a novel with Red Hen Press. His short memoir, *The Elegant Solution,* was published as a Ploughshares Solo. Five of his poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His most recent poetry collection, *Ripples in the Fabric of the Universe: New & Selected Poems,* was published in June 2024. His forthcoming collection, *When Godot Arrived,* will be published in 2026.

T.A.R. Wallace (he/his) is a yoga therapist and table tennis coach living on Dja Dja Wurrung country, Australia. His poems have been published in *The Brussels Review, Prosetrics, Conduit, Big Score Lit, The Poetry Lighthouse, Meanjin, Heat, Australian Poetry Journal,* and others. He won the Lane Cove Literary Awards Poetry Prize 2023.

An Arkansas native, **Sarah Watkins** is an educator by trade and a writer by necessity. She currently resides in northeast Arkansas with her husband. Her work has recently been featured in many publications, including *Pine Hills Review, The Clayjar Review,* and *Literary Forest.* Instagram: @sarahwatkinspoetry

Matthew Wherttam has worked as a patent attorney, a chemist and a summer camp counselor. His short stories have been published in *Voices de la Luna, Nude Bruce Review,* and *Umbrella Factory.* He shows his stories to his family and so far they have not disowned him.

Warren Woessner has authored six collections of poetry, most recently *Exit ~ Sky* (Holy Cow! Press). He studied poetry with A. R. Ammons and James McConkey at Cornell and then co-founded

Abraxas Press in Madison, Wisconsin. Woessner has received fellowships in poetry from the NEA, the McKnight Foundation and the Wisconsin Arts Board. He lives in Minneapolis and Martha's Vineyard.

k.d.zwierz currently lives in Lebanon, with his partner and their cat, Malishan, working with victims of geopolitical violence to create opportunities for self-expression and release through the arts. His poem "Tableau" was a Bournemouth Writing Festival, Writing on the Wall winner in 2025. His chapbook, *The Dead Speak,* was published by Falstead Art, London.