

THAT



THAT

LITERARY REVIEW

Number Two





Over the past year, brewing and stewing, accruing and compounding, we've become more *THAT*, though we're not all *THAT* yet. We have discovered the following: *THAT* is a hermit crab wearing a mason jar, a loose shutter beating out a samba, and the hum of a slushee machine. *THAT* is the drop in the roller coaster ride after the long climb, key lime pie dissolving on the tongue, and the ladybug you see taking wing at twilight. *THAT* is all these things and more, as evinced wonderfully in our very contents. Many thanks to those who thought of sending their beloved work our way; we feel entrusted with the world.

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2017

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a faint light at the end of the corridor
strangely draws me;
as a fierce storm threatens to
shut forever the door leading to it, I run

At Fresh Harvest Grocery

Christine Butterworth-McDermott

The local actor is standing by the honeydews
again, salaciously fondling them with both hands.

He doesn't look clean, I tell my husband later.
My husband suggests he's researching a role.

The actor wears frayed shorts and Birkenstocks,
a ratty t-shirt and a sweater that goes to his knees.

I saw Jeff Bridges dressed like this in that old movie,
and all I can say is, "*This* is not pretend." I keep shelving

olives and capers and Nellie's Hot Okra in a jar.
I try not to stare when he slips one of the melons

up his t-shirt. I consider calling the manager. But
the way he smooths the fabric over his now round

belly in a tender gesture makes me think of my sister
Missy before she lost the baby. I stop and stare

at the kalamata olives as if in their saltiness
they could tell me about tears. The actor replaces

the fruit and shambles toward the exit. *This* is not
pretend. I keep shelving jar after pickled jar.

Swim, Camel!

Ken Craft

What's night but a frustrating wait
to unlock the foil coffee
bag, take a sniff, and listen to the crackle
of the beans? Why count sheep when you
can recite mantras to the clean stream
of boiled water, the silver string from kettle
to mug, the steam and soft baby-bubble steep
of wet grounds easing into filters?
It's the day's gift to me, the Sumatra smell,
the earthy taste of coffees rising on the tongue.
Second and third reassure, but it's the first
that marries you to the morning.
Trouble is, molding ritual
from coffee makes a man
late, rushes you,
forces you to take a cardboard circus
of animal crackers to the bathroom
and breakfast there
as the shower heats. Sweet hissing.
Steam again. Getting naked
with a cupped hand of cookies. Plunging
in. You'd think you could keep
a prayer secret from the showerhead's
prying eyes—and I admit the cookies
stay dry and crunchy
at first—but somehow the giraffe's neck
darkens and swallows
itself soft before I can eat it.
And the elephant's next. Its trunk drops
off and inches for the drain
before I can trumpet the alarm.
That leaves the camel—
or is it dromedary? Hell with it.
I just open my hands and make of its hump
an offering. One camel sidestroking
in circles, in its private oasis yet.
That'll be me at work in an hour
as I do the brainless mechanical again.
Me. The beast of burden
dissolving in style, counterclockwise.



Window Rain

Ken Craft

Sitting at the table near the window
while you visit the ladies' room,
I look out at the rain and recall
college when the drinking age
was 18 and my buddies and I had the stolen
luxury of drinking on weeknights.

We ordered plastic pitchers of beer
at Huskies, topping mugs
before they were empty so no one
could count and no one could brag nine
or nineteen. The drunker I got
the more religion I sensed, both in myself
and in the beer's rising
rosaries. No one else noticed.
No one said what the hell.

One night like this it stormed
and Glenn started in about this girl
he had taken to his dorm room,
how she said, "My God!" when she saw his naked
glory. "My God!" he kept repeating
in his cracked-corn girl voice.
We laughed until I noticed the booth
behind us. Six girls. As is true
in all restaurants, you could hear every voice
and none. Between dishes and silverware
and bottles, I figured we were safe.
Still, they had gone quiet when Glenn
invoked his gods.

I wondered what they thought, those girls.
And when, exactly, they got their educations.
The ones their parents paid for
unknowingly. I haven't recalled Glenn
and the girls since that night, really.
But you are still in the ladies' room and, out
on the window, the raindrops are still beading.
They're pausing to think before sliding down the glass.
No one else notices.

Implied E

Douglas Cole

I say, I play a C, there.
He narrows his eyes
and thinks about that for a moment,
then he says, no, no you've got to play the E,
the song lives in the E.
But just listen, I say, and I play it again.
Ah, he says, I hear it, I hear how you sing it,
but you can't imply the E.
He hammers the piano keys.
I strum along and sing.
Tom's kid, Olive, toddles across the room
and pets the dogs. Shelley sings along.
We're rockin' and having a fine time.
Then the song is over and we all go out back
to smoke and have a few drinks,
and I wander at the edge,
play with the dogs and look at my friends
and eventually drift away
and into those dark city streets.
It all dissolves. It was all beautiful.
There was trouble behind it that I carried,
that I know showed in my eyes
or the way a certain note comes through
even if you try to stay true
to the way it's supposed to be played,
the way I drive right through the wall,
the way I fly right through that hole in the head,
singing in the key of C
that sounds if you really listen
like the ocean wave tanker chains
fog horn and train whistle morning
you wake up and I'm long gone.



First Communion

Russell Rowland

We are shepherded into the parish church:
boys in suits like apprentice morticians;
girls, snowflakes on legs. Love's cameras flash.

We are restless, but feel the weight of *mysterium*.
It is an aged Sister, one lens of her glasses opaque.
It is heavier than a Protestant child could bear.

Our parish priest is old, he cries at everything:
Your bodies are temples, boys and girls, never
abuse them. He weeps, till the bishop seats him.

My temple has an itch I dare not scratch.
My cousin will open hers to various men,
later, and never wear so white a dress again.

Father's palsied fingers tremble the Host into
our noses, our hair, and eventually our mouths.
Christ melts on tongues where butter wouldn't.

We can't wait to get out of here, wash away
this first taste of Jesus. What have they done
to the man who took kids in his lap, laughing?

Seeing Miranda after Eighteen Months

Russell Rowland

Hero, villain, clown, I enter by
my exit door of a season past—
only today there's this blue Neon
in the drive beside your mother's car.

As if all that time observed the unities,
or was but an intermission, you show off
your honors project of Shakespeare's Globe,
rising out of glue tubes, popsicle sticks.

You're a topic of discussion now, I bet,
for Calibans in the boys' dressing room.
My adult eye doesn't want to see, but sees,
as I hover godlike over the theater.

May you and your leading man of choice
find delight in each other always—
just not too much delight, too soon.
Remember Capulet and Montague,

mistaking death for love. May my advice
to the players not go in one ear and out
the other: there's sufficient brain between
to absorb it. Again I leave the stage;

for you a school night, ding dong bell.
This Globe merits another A, I know.
Your conscientious stage-mom will
get back to me on that. Love, Prospero.



The Healing Powers of Yellow Mustard

Kaela Martin

A woman lived in a trailer behind my parents' house. She was all scarecrow, broom handle arms and threadbare jeans, hair dry, straight straw. Her teeth were as jagged as sunflower petals. When I was little, she held me to her chest, curled her head over my blonde curls and pulled me from a deadened fire, the coals red and burning beneath the ashes. I was barefoot and brave and I didn't understand the workings of fire and hidden embers. She took me back to her trailer rolled in cinders, startlingly white beside her sun-yellowed siding and shag carpet. My feet never hit the ground. She set me down on the counter, still sobbing, before grabbing a jar of French's mustard out of the fridge. "It'll take the heat out," she said. The jar was emptied into her hands and applied ankle-to-toe in strokes lighter than should have been possible with her taloned nails. The smell was so strong. I could taste it, spicy and almost medicinal. It lingered, stinging my nose, even after my parents came to take me away. Even as my mother's hands fluttered around my face like canaries. Even as my father murmured his thanks and eyed her yellow-stained fingers, it lingered. Longer than any scar or scarecrow.

A Lyrebird's Tale

Laurie Byro

Well, of course, I was used to men imitating courtship,
but how many years had gone by since you found me,

your beak glittering like the North Star, your strut
destined to win me over: what a strange bird you are.

Today when I found you dead, no longer able to try
and charm me, white bones delicate as the inside

of the shell I held to my ear, I hoped that is what
this new mimicry will be for you. An ocean bird

or a flock of parrots, easy in your mouth, spray
on the tops of your feathers, the endless sky rocking

you to sleep. But I imagine you just can't get real
that way. I wonder if what you imagined me to be

was genuine when you thought of me, as Queen.
How many of us are liars? When I wiped spittle

and shit after Mr Wilkinson's stroke, how much
of it was for the neighborhood chatterers and not

what I could muster from my heart? How must you
have felt not knowing if my affection for you

was returned? James, the time has passed for me
to say that I am glad that you have honored me

with your music, that I would sing back
to you if it had been allowed.



Snow Bees

Laurie Byro

Before you died, you became the snow I walked through,
sentinel trees shooing moths and snow bees, same as

the stories I had been raised on, or the string of pearls
I counted like ivory roses. I wished for the end of winter,

even before that first day. Wrens kept hurling themselves
at the windows, bursting into splinters of wing. If this

were an omen, I said it was because the snow queen wanted
pheasant, tricking the birds with reflected clouds. I apologized

to the air, the clothing of the feathers never fades, a speck
in the eye as the moon peels back its light. How many

broken song birds would satisfy the snow queen? How
many walks through the dripping forest before you became

that crusty wind, the crystals that came down in November,
blinding us all from escaping through the canopy of wings?

Incubus

Laurie Byro

To try and knit the bones of a child,
I leave sugar cubes on our windowsill.

Robins peck them to dust, peck the blue
right out of your eyes. I steal the eggs

of jays. I sip delicate shells clean
through the membrane, yellow with suns.

I weave feathers into my hair.
I clip it down to the scalp, invite

all predators to rob each shank, to spin
a nest with my leavings. Now, when

I carry groceries up to the door, I tear
the bags into ribbons to tie in my thrush

brown hair. I am no longer sure that
an egg with blood in it needs to be curdled

into paint when I smear each breast
with an orchid, with a sunrise. I swill

shadows and rain down my parched throat,
flood my mouth with a curse. I leave worms

thick with blood back on my windowsill
to be borrowed, to be used up.



Snow in Wind

Laurie Byro

Years ago, the sculptor finished
with her. When he lit winter candles,

adorned her with ice he became an Eskimo,
chanting all the words for snow.

Snow fell while he explained this,
making me glisten, making me dissolve

like a snowflake on his tongue.
Wind howled and wrapped itself around

our cabin in shrouds of fresh ice.
Inside, the sculptor carved moonlight;

His hands formed new bones for me.

No . . . It's Not a Dahlia

Mary Bevan

I don't know what it is. But fancy finding one in *your* garden! One came up in ours last summer just after Peter . . . you know. No, he wouldn't have planted it. He liked his flowers in groups of five—said five was the right number.

At least here it's in a border; at home it was right in the middle of the lawn. Funny thing was, its head seemed to swivel—following the sun or something I suppose. I thought only sunflowers did that. I looked it up in the *Gardening Encyclopaedia*—couldn't find anything like it.

Well, it got on my nerves, so I dug it up. Then another came up nearer the house. And when I got rid of that one, the same thing happened. That's how it went on—the last one was right under the lounge window. So in the end I just poured weedkiller everywhere. Ruined the lawn. Can't think what Peter would have said; he loved that lawn—never let anyone else touch it.

And now I come here and one turns up in *your* garden. Horrible thing—all those veiny leaves and that big white eye in the center. Gives me the jitters. Anyway, it's not a dahlia—that's for certain. 🍀



Final Rinse

L.G. Corey

“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Matt. 10:30

Lath and plaster
peeling from the walls
like flakes of dandruff
from Jehovah’s shoulders.

And *Archy and Mehitabel*
dancing on the table
(a flamenco on the table)

covered with the lath and plaster
falling from the walls of Jericho.

“Fall!” shouts Joshuah,
and they fall
like flakes of dandruff
from the shoulders of Jehovah,

into Deborah’s Palm—
into a little puddle from a bottle

of Selsun Blue.

Kinetic

Tessa Adams

Yellow

as in sugar crust
and honeyed men.

Rusty

like toys left untouched
in the rain often get.

Punishing

by setting forth consequences in mockery and
rubbing raw the
emotionless; pining for
a response of heart and habit.

Yellow

as a cautionary sign.

A promise that blinks
on and off and on again.

Drenched like a rusty rain-soaked
leaf drooling its duality
and decay.

It is untouched.

It is kinetic energy.

It is everything that you never did.

Ah, but it's yellow.



If You Spoke of Paradise

Sarah Puschmann

I would tell you I don't listen to the products
of unplanned pregnancies. You would tell me
planning is for frauds, for people
who don't value important things
like static shocks.

I am grateful for the paradise I glimpsed
when, as kids, we wrote letters to the devil,
asking for specifics about hell,
when we stole the poppies from mom's grave
because we didn't deserve to see it beautiful.

I never did strut. You were the turkey,
the one with stick-on earrings
and ethnically inappropriate corn rows.
You were going to be a fortune teller
but ended up forecasting the weather.
Not so far off, really.

If you'd have told me that on the day I turned sixty
you would help me reupholster the sofa
only to shoot a staple into my thumb,
that we would spend the whole day
in the ER waiting room trying to recall
what we asked the devil in our letters
and the blindness that possessed us
to ride our bikes to dad's boss's house
and drop the letters through his mail slot,
I would have laughed in your face.
I wouldn't have believed this paradise.



Beat On, Boats Against the Current

Sarah Freligh

My father calls and asks if we might get together for a cup of coffee or something. “I know it’s been a while,” he adds.

I wind the telephone cord around my index finger until it turns purple, something that used to drive my ex-wife crazy. That and the fact that I insisted on keeping a landline even though we had *two perfectly good cell phones*.

My father clears his throat and tries again. “Just a quick cup.”

I check the clock; *The Price Is Right* comes on in an hour. In the six months since getting fired, I’ve never missed a show. It’s like church to me. Like yesterday, when a woman from Detroit won a new Kia playing “Rat Race,” she kissed the floor and cried about how she didn’t have to take buses anymore. I thought of her standing on some cold street waiting for a bus and I almost started bawling, too.

“Please?” my father says.

“Give me fifteen,” I say, agreeing to meet him over at Clayton’s. Someplace neutral. I don’t want to set foot in his house and I sure as shit don’t want him over here.

I swear to God: in all my years of knowing him, I can’t recall my father ever saying the word *please*.

My father’s waiting for me in his red pickup truck, a dent in the side where a teenage girl hit him in the Wegmans’ parking lot last year. He got an estimate and then pocketed the insurance check, saying that if he had known how much money he could make, he’d have let her hit the other side, too.

As soon as he sees me, he motions me over and unlocks the passenger door.

“Ordered you a cup of coffee,” he says. “Black, right?”

“Right.” I look at him. He’s shrunk some since I last seen him, but he’s still got that prickly glitter to him, like a stray cat that’s learned to live outdoors.

“So, what’s so important?”

Just then the carhop appears with our coffee, two big Styrofoam cups on a tray that she hooks to the driver’s side window. My father hands her a five and tells her to keep the change. This is new. He never used to tip, never ever. On the rare occasion they went out to eat, my mother would lecture him about how little servers get paid, and he’d shake his head and say that wasn’t his damn problem. No one was forcing that girl to wait on tables, were they? Far as he knew it was a free country. Eventually my mom gave up. If and when they did go out to eat, she sent him out to start the car and then made sure to leave some cash on the table.

“You going to drink your coffee standing in the parking lot or get in here?” he says.

I open the door. Climb in.

“That’s better,” he says, handing me my coffee.

I take a sip. It’s bitter, a little sludgy. Breakfast leftover.

“Not much like your mother’s coffee, is it?” he says.

I check my watch. Less than thirty minutes to go until *The Price Is Right*.

“Coffee’s hot,” he says. “It’s got that going for it all right.”

“Yup,” I say. I take another sip, wishing for some sugar. Sometimes I need a little sugar with my coffee.

“Saw Carol down to the hardware store yesterday,” he says. “That her-name? Jessie’s mom?”

I blow on my coffee. “Caroline.”

“Down to the hardware store,” he said. “Looking for some bags for her vacuum.”

“That’s nice,” I say. The last time I saw Caroline, she was in the grocery store looking at cocktail olives. She likes her martinis double-dirty and up in a chilled glass, the first one promptly at five. It was too late to turn my cart around and head back up the aisle, so I pushed past her and pretended to be interested in a display of tomato sauce. *Oh, hello*, she said when she saw me and went back to studying the rows of jars. It was not a friendly hello, the kind that invited conversation, but a hello that you said just to be civilized. Which was good, because I had nothing to say to her except maybe to set her straight on what had actually happened: *Your daughter left me for the Bank Teller. Someone she was sleeping with when I was doing a tour in the sandbox, isn’t that the shit?*

“A Hoover,” my dad says. “She’s got one of them old Hoovers, the kind with the bag in back. Like your mother’s old one, remember that? Blue.”

And a light on the front. I remembered. *Monster coming to get you!* she’d say, and I’d wedge myself under the sofa and cover my eyes. I don’t remember when I understood it was just a vacuum cleaner and not a monster. Or when I understood that monsters are everywhere, and good at disguise.

“That’s how I knew what to tell her. Which bag to get,” my father says. “Caroline.”

The air feels full of arrows. I say, “Look, what’d you need to see me about?”

My father fiddles with the plastic lid on his coffee cup, thumbs the rim of the opening.

I let out a deep and what I hope comes across as an exasperated breath. The theme music from *The Price Is Right* plays in my head. Already my day feels fractured and off the tracks.

“What?” I say. “What is it?”

He reaches over my lap and the glove compartment falls over. He yanks something out, fists it. He looks around and only then does he open his hand.

A baggie. Full of dope.

“Shoot,” he says. “How the hell do you smoke this damn stuff?”

Jessie used to say I was slow. Sometimes I still am. But even I can add two and two so it comes up four: The sharp edges, the glitter to him. The pot.



“Okay,” I tell him. “Okay.”

First thing I do is turn on the TV so I can watch the contestants come on down. Then I make sure the doors are locked—back, front, and side—and lower the shades on the side facing the Barnes’ house in case Mrs. Frieda Busybody Barnes is spying on me from her kitchen window on the pretense of doing the breakfast dishes or watering the plants in the living room window. I suppose I should be grateful to her for tipping me off about Jessie and the Bank Teller, how my ex-wife was sneaking him in for nooners and then overnights while I was in Iraq. He’s not really a bank teller, but a loan officer with a desk in a glass cubicle that faces out into the lobby of the bank, which is where I imagine he first laid eyes on Jessie. In my mind she’s wearing the white sundress with the red polka dots, buttons down the front, cut low, but not too low to be indecent for daytime, and carrying a red purse over her arm. Looking so damn good, who wouldn’t want to get to know her? Fall in love with her the way I did in senior English class when Mr. Barksdale made her read the last page of *The Great Gatsby* out loud. I can still remember her voice choking up when she got to the last lines, *So we beat on, boats against the current.* . . . Only she read it as “beat off,” and everyone laughed, even Mr. Barksdale.

I call him the Bank Teller because it pisses her off. His name is James. Sometimes I call him Jamie or Jimmy or Justin. *You are such a juvenile*, she’ll say.

“Sit down,” I tell my father who’s wandering around the living room the way my cat Ferdinand did the day I brought him home from the animal shelter. It took Ferdinand a good hour to work his way around the room, sniffing and rubbing and finally hiding out under a chair where he stayed for the better part of two days. There isn’t much to see anymore, actually. Jessie took most of the furniture and the area rug when she moved out and ever since, the room has sounded echoey and too big. I moved in a couple of kitchen chairs and set them opposite the couch in what the magazines call “a conversational grouping,” but instead of making it homier in here, it looks rundown and temporary, like the basement of a church where they hold twelve-step meetings.

I drew a line in the sand at the TV. *Over my dead body*, I said.

From the couch I remove a pile of T-shirts that I’ve been meaning to fold and toss them in the bedroom. “Sit,” I tell my father so he’ll quit his prowling around. I pull one of the chairs up to the footlocker that I use for a coffee table and set the bag of pot on top of it.

“Okay. So look here.” I hold up a pack of Tops. “These are your rolling papers. They’re flimsy, so you got to be careful.”

I show him the glue side of the paper and how to lick the rim: not too much spit or it’ll tear but enough to get a good seal. I have him practice licking and sticking until the footlocker is covered with joint papers fluttering in the breeze from the ceiling fan.

Meanwhile, no one’s won anything on *The Price Is Right*. Two games, two duds.

“Okay,” I say. Only then does my dad take the bag of pot out of his pocket, but not without looking around first like he expects a bunch of narcs to bang down the door and arrest him.

“Relax,” I tell him. I scoop a little dope out of bag and spread it on a couple of papers. Evenly, I tell him, unless he wants a joint that looks like a bowling pin. It’s good clean pot, no seeds or sticks anywhere, and has the good earthy smell of a tomato plant. Or maybe it’s the other way around, I don’t know. I pack it in there and start to roll, slow and careful so he can see what I’m doing, finish with a lick and a twist at both ends, a fine slender joint just slightly thicker than a Q-Tip.

It’s a funny feeling, all of a sudden being the expert on something instead of the dunce cap. Ironic, too, that the something is dope. My Son the Pothead is what he called me after I got busted by the sheriffs. Third time. It was jail or the military, a no-brainer.

“Okay,” he says. Ferdinand has climbed up on the couch by this time and is nudging his arm.

“He wants you to pet him,” I say.

“Okay,” my father says again. He gives Ferdie’s head a couple of palm pats. Ferdinand kind of sighs and settles in for good, or at least until someone tries to win A Brand New Car. He loves that part.

“I used to roll my own in the army,” he says. “Cigarettes. Cheaper than buying them at the PX.”

I used to roll my own in the army, too, only not cigarettes. It made the prospect of dying seem not so terrible, though I was never close to any real fighting. But I saw some shit, all right. I heard some, too. “Just like a cigarette, yeah,” I say.

“So,” I say again and fire up the joint. I show him how to inhale and hold it in, though I nearly choke on it, the way I did back in high school when I used to enjoy a doob before class with a couple of guys who rode the bus in from out-county farms. The pot they grew smelled like horse manure but did the job.

“Okay,” I say without exhaling, and pass it to him. He takes the smallest toke, but he keeps it down and passes the joint back to me. We do that a time or two more. “Good,” I say. What I mean is, he’s a good student. Which means I must be a good teacher.

This is some badass good weed.

“Car,” he says suddenly, pointing to the television screen.

I grab the remote and turn up the sound. It’s A Brand New Car all right, only it’s not a Kia or a Dodge or a Ford Focus, but a freaking Mercedes, a little two-seater convertible. I’ve never heard George so manic. And the contestant, a hefty woman in a green sweatshirt with a blonde bubble of hair, is rolling around on the floor like she’s on fire.

“You got any potato chips?” my father says.

“In the kitchen,” I say.

It’s the Three Strikes game. You draw numbers from a bag and try to guess where they go in the price of the car, only there are three strikes in the bag, and if you draw those before you’ve filled in the numbers of the car, you lose.

No one wins Three Strikes.

My father comes back with half a bag of popcorn that I’d forgotten about. Cheddar cheese flavored, from the bulk aisle at the grocery store. Sometimes when I feel too lazy to cook, which is most nights, I eat popcorn for dinner and finish



it off with fruit for dessert, an orange or a handful or strawberries, so I don't feel totally unbalanced.

"Pretty tasty," my father says, extending the bag to me. I shovel a handful in my mouth and dust the cheddar off my hands. Another thing about good pot, it can make even the crummiest food taste better. The popcorn that tasted like cardboard the other night is melting in my mouth, blazing a trail of cheddar from my throat to my stomach. I've never tasted popcorn so good, not even at the movies.

I watch Drew one-handedly the microphone, while the other stirs the numbers in the bag. "Five dollars she don't win," my father says. My stomach knots. I feel like I'm up there with the bubble-haired woman, hell, I am the bubble-haired woman and everyone is watching me, waiting for me to fuck up because that's what I always do: Caroline with her straight-up gin martini drowning in olives. Jessie and the Bank Teller sharing a bottle of expensive wine in a French restaurant strung with cages filled with cooing doves.

Yes, I think, even the French are watching *The Price Is Right*.

"Ten," I say, though I'm not sure I have that much in my checking account. And no one—no one—ever wins this game. But what the hell, I'm feeling reckless and good.

I'm seeing all kinds of possibilities here, me traveling around the country teaching chemo patients how to twist up their own doobs. I could call them "medical marijuana seminars," wear a white coat and stroll the aisles of tables filled with patients, being all very hands on.

My father scoops another handful, scattering kernels. "Your mother and I used to eat popcorn for dinner."

He shakes his head. My mother's name was Julie, but I don't remember that he ever called her that. Only "your mom" or "Mother." Several of her friends spoke at her funeral about what a hoot "Jules" had been in high school, a real fun girl. It was like they were talking about someone I'd never known.

"She'd put it in bowls and light a couple candles," he says. "We'd sit there, spooning it up, pretending it was some exotic kind of stew or something,"

"Popcorn," I say.

"We didn't have a pot to piss in," he says.

Bubble Hair sticks her hand in the bag and yanks out a number. Six.

"First number," I say.

"No shit?" my dad says. "That's a sixty-thousand dollar car?"

The Bank Teller drives a Mercedes. I saw it parked in front of Jessie's condo one night when I couldn't sleep. I do that often, walk around town in the middle of the night. Sometimes I'll see a light on in some house, a rectangle of yellow, and I feel like ringing the doorbell. But what would I say if someone answered? Hello, I can't sleep; how about you?

The Bank Teller's Mercedes is blue. Bubble Hair's is black, the shiny black of patent leather.

One strike, two numbers now. She pulls out a three.

"Fourth number," I say.

"Fifth number?" says Bubble Hair.

It is.

Holy shit. She could win this game. She could.

“Our first house cost only ten thousand,” my dad says. “The little brick one over to Feeman Court, you remember that?”

“Sure,” I say, though I don’t remember much at all. Only Mom on the couch when I’d get home from school, saying how it was the strangest thing, how she shut her eyes for a few minutes after lunch and here it was, four hours later, almost time to fix supper. She got tireder and tireder and finally she went to the doctor’s, only it was too late.

Bubble Hair pulls out a seven. “Second,” she says.

It is. The crowd goes nuts.

I think about Jessie, about my mom. Both gone. How me and my dad are in the same boat, both adrift.

Bubble Hair sticks her hand in the bag, reaches for the last number. Or the last strike. One way or the other, it’ll be decided.

“She’s gonna win,” my father says. “I can feel it.”

Ferdinand climbs into my lap, turns around twice and settles in. I scratch his chin. He purrs, his motor revving up under my fingers. I kiss his head. He smells clean, like T-shirts strung on a line to dry in the sun.

“She might,” I say. “She just might.” 🍀



I Like Watching Korean Dramas

Michael Minassian

The King appears to be surrounded
by sycophants who smile
and bow, then plot his death,

while rival factions pile up dead
bodies like woodsmen felling trees,
stacking up cords of corpses

outside the palace wall.

The serving women stay bent
in a permanent pose while standing
still, and the eunuchs, mutilated

as young boys, remain unshaven,
wearing the characteristic green robes,
(symbolic of what I am not sure)

and manage to outlive
the kings several times over.

Later, when I practice my few
Korean words, my wife laughs,
then explains these are all archaic terms.

as if I were an air traffic controller
speaking in iambic pentameter:

(“My planes fly up, some flights remain below”)

And she refuses to call me King
in any language, or practice archery
in the living room, although she lets me

check my food with a silver spoon—
the traditional test, she says, for poison,
laughing since I cooked the meal myself.

Unlit Wicks

Laryssa Wirstiuk

Glass jars filled with wax and wicks,
stamped with identifiers like “Cinnamon
Pumpkin” and “Cider Web” are fixtures
in my parents’ house. They’re unused,
and—like colors outside—they’re cruel.
Saffron and jasper are better crunched
under my boots. In just two months,
the only hue will be—a shade of nothing?
It hurts to look. I think if I can just light
a candle, I can adjust to time indoors,
but I live with those averse to scents:
spiced curries and patchouli deodorants.
If I had to guess why they purchase
candles, I suppose a house isn’t a home
without objects. A nomad, I’ve sold
nearly everything I own, and my nose
appreciates what has settled in the empty
spaces. Please, enough with all this color.
Take me to a city where grey is preview,
where the October wind only arrives
in bursts between buildings, where I smell
decay of things inorganic. From the Metro
I’ll emerge and inhale the Krispy Kreme
commute. If my Bath & Body Works dreams
come true, a bottled version of sweetened
determination will be available for Christmas.
With single hand, I’ll clear the store of its stock
and sell it for double via online auctions.
I’m a teenager again, with my one mall find:
a mini candle burning near an open window.



You Pick Fruit and I Pick Poems

Heather Truett

You pick fruit and I pick poems.

Old woman
in a red dress
on the front porch
of a blue house

You could have been me.

I am a feather falling
in the soft curve of your hearing.

I sing of ghosts and graces,
of filigree and faces.

I remember kissing in the churchyard,
boys who whispered God's name and then
lifted mine from my lips
like prayer.

Life is a sign of dying.

What if I don't want to hear
the feather falling,
lily-lips half parted,
poison already praying?

You pick fruit and I pick poems.

What if I catch the moon?

I remember leaning forward slow
and kissing soft and wishing
he would play my body
like he played his guitar.

I don't want you to like me.
I want you to like me
best.

I am afraid of falling through,
white and naked in the water.

Old woman in the red dress,
stretch my body on your loom,
Weave my soul with lace and glue.

You pick fruit and I pick poems.

Tattoo my heart with swearing,
with kissing and with sin.

Life is a sign of dying.

I am afraid of falling.

What if I catch the moon?



That Book

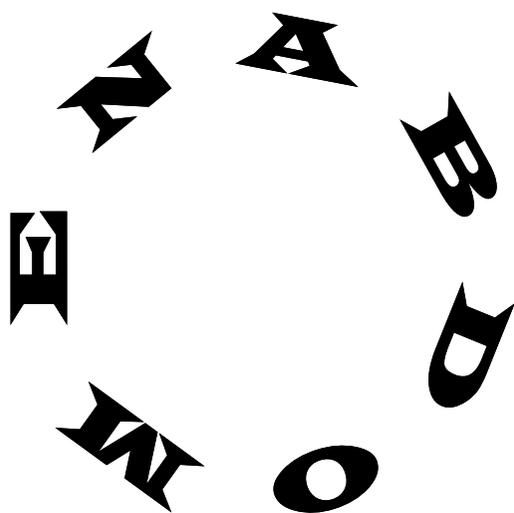
Heather Truett

Cover flopped open,
imagine the way
her wings spread,
her words spill,
her spine just waits
to be tingled, touched,
tantalized.
I bury my face inside
her folds,
breathe her musty, antique,
come-hither smell.
She is much handled,
much loved.
Loose with her
affections, she chooses
the reader and then
gives all, everything,
her secret treasure,
buried among
the pages.



Ouroborostories

Richard Kostelanetz



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March

Michael McConnell

Here we are again.
Clouds roll low
and silently. We

have both lost
each other over
the course of months.
Spring is early,

and the hills have
been tricked into
blushing. We made

love in the river
when we were still

learning how we
kiss. Our garden
does not know our
dysfunction. Now, God

lives in a 12-step prayer,
and even these new
freedoms breathe thick
through doleful chains.

I know the summer
will find you

in a surrogate man's
hands. Pebbles on
the ground tell me this

future as they forage
over the Earth like lice.

Panama City | Panama | 9°05'59.4" N 79°24'18.0" W

Nicholas J. Molbert

Which part
of you goes

back ten, fifteen
million years?

When my mouth
touches your sediment,

to which era
am I speaking?

Where lingers
your line of

biospherical
segregation?

Could I kiss
the marriage

of Cocos
and Caribbean?

Or should
it be called

collision, raw,
writhing?

Had I lived three
million years ago,

would I have caught
your ungulates
trekking south?



How breakage,
how grinding,
how pressure,
has given way
to so much history—
perhaps time
itself—

when now it is
companies, then,

saber-toothed
carnivorans, rodents,
and proboscids, for

what will you tilt
your head next

Panama?

—how you have
given your neck
in exchange

for so much.



Retirement

Michael Onofrey

“Well, here comes Darlene Hastings,” Sid said.

An overcast sky prevailed, beach crowd yet to arrive, sounds muted, air with a breath of moisture. Sid and I were sitting on a bench, and in back of us there was a wide sandy beach, and in front of us there was the so-called “boardwalk” that in actuality was an asphalt walk, but everyone called it the “boardwalk.” Both Sid and I had Styrofoam cups of coffee, small cups, and Sid was dunking the end of a big broken-in-half sugar cookie in his coffee to soften the cookie up, just as I was dunking a broken-in-half onion bagel in my coffee to make the bagel chewable. Opposite us, on the other side of the “boardwalk,” there was a day-old-bakery-goods shop.

“Ain’t she something,” Sid said, “her and that cat on a leash?”

And indeed the woman walking along the boardwalk had a cat on a leash, a tabby. She looked to be Asian, but that could be explained, father European extraction, mother Asian, European-American naming, thus Darlene Hastings. Darlene was maybe thirty years old, give or take.

“She lives near me,” Sid said. “To be precise, within eyesight of my kitchen window.”

On Sid’s side of the bench there was an aluminum cane with a horizontal handle and a three-pronged foot that looked like a claw. The cane was standing upright next to the bench. Sid was a retiree and so was I, but I didn’t need a cane, not yet. Darlene wasn’t within earshot, but she was approaching.

“She plays the piano naked,” Sid said. “That’s what I see from my kitchen window. It’s fascinating.”

I sipped my coffee.

“That cat sits on top of the piano and looks down at the keys as she plays. It’s an upright piano.”

Both Sid and I were wearing billed caps. Sid’s was red, mine gray, neither cap with a logo or any other type of advertising. Beneath the bills of our caps there were bifocals.

“She keeps the windows closed so as not to disturb the neighbors, but I can still hear her playing, and sometimes I can make out the tunes.”

Sid and I live within walking distance from the boardwalk/beach, but Sid lives in one direction and I live in another. It’s only at the day-old-bakery-goods shop or on the bench in front of the day-old-bakery-goods shop that we meet up and talk, which means that it’s coincidental, but since we are regulars down here, coinci-

dence is not uncommon.

“‘My Favorite Things,’ a Rogers and Hammerstein composition, she does that so well. It’s jazz that she plays, jazz piano.”

Darlene Hastings has thick, short black hair, a bowl-like cut. A long-sleeved flannel shirt, plaid, is loose on her torso, shirttails untucked. Then there are blue jeans, which aren’t real tight. Huaraches are on her feet. In other words, she dresses local, having strolled down to the boardwalk to walk her cat. There’s a nonchalant disposition to the people around here. I think Sid and I picked the right place to retire—cup of coffee, cheap bakery goods, bench, quiet mornings, mists, fog, sun breaking through in the early afternoon. It’s a bit of a circus on weekends during the hot-weather months, but that is avoidable, for the crowds are on a predictable schedule, a time-clock schedule: punching in and punching out at certain hours.

“She’ll stand up from the piano bench sometimes and stretch. Oh my.”

It’s the onion in the bagel that makes for a strange combination with the coffee. Sometimes I get a plain bagel, but that’s not as interesting as a hard onion bagel that gets dipped into milk-and-sugar-added coffee. Sid prefers sweets, cookies or Danish.

Sid is clean-shaven, usually. White skin, thin wrinkles, a nick or two from a razor, no aftershave scent. I’m like that, too. Our clothing is similar—plaid shirts, un-pressed khakis, sport shoes. Now and then a windbreaker or a sweater. We are not destitute, but neither are we flashy in a moneyed way. I sense that Sid only carries enough cash for incidentals—coffee, a sugar cookie, a newspaper perhaps—because that’s the way I am.

“At times, her playing is inspired, and I think it’s because she is naked. But of course there’s her cat looking on, which might add to inspiration.”

Sid’s eyes are blue. My eyes are gray. Darlene’s eyes, I can already tell, are hazel. Also, Darlene isn’t wearing glasses. I’ve seen her before along the boardwalk, but only at a distance. The cat on a leash is truly unique, which means that she is easily recognizable. But now, as she approaches, I have a closer view of her, and I can see that there’s more to her than a cat on a leash.

Darlene and her cat stroll over to stop in front of Sid and I, and this surprises me. But then again, perhaps Sid and Darlene are acquainted. The cat has yellow eyes.

For my part, I moisten my lips with my tongue because some sort of standoff has developed. The four of us, two and two, cat included, are squared off, each pair looking at each other.

Darlene breaks the tedium, and what strikes me first is her raspy voice, smoky perhaps. Maybe she is a jazz musician.

“In the delineation of what composes our worlds it is best not to fully trust words,” she says, “particularly those arranged in a certain order that convey mean-



ing or description, for it is in that way that stories are told, which wouldn't be a problem except that 'story' has a couple of meanings and realizations, one of which is fibbing."

It takes a long moment for me to digest this, after which I glance down at the cat. The cat is sitting its haunches and is looking around.

Darlene, who now motions toward me with her chin, says, "Has he been telling you lies?" Her free hand, the hand without the leash, indicates Sid.

I swallow in an effort to summon saliva. After that, I respond, "I'm not sure."

A half-grin begins around Darlene's mouth.

"That may be an honest answer," she tells me.

Darlene then motions to down the walkway and says, "A few days ago, down there at that bench, I was Lisa, and a few days before that at the bench beyond I was Rachel. Last week at this bench, in the morning, I was Yoko. In the late afternoon on that bench over there, I was Kim." Darlene is looking at me as she speaks. "This old duffer next to you has told stories up and down the boardwalk, and some of those stories concern me."

I nod hesitatingly while understanding that Darlene is not from out of state. She speaks Southern California English, but her delivery is much slower than most Southern Californians. Perhaps she has reduced the speed of her words to accommodate Sid and me. Or maybe Darlene always speaks slowly. Sid and I speak slowly as well, which is to say that neither Sid nor I employ TV-speak.

"So, who am I today?" Darlene asks me.

"You are Darlene Hastings," I tell her.

She nods slowly and then enunciates, "Darlene Hastings—the All American Girl. Do I perchance sell Girl Scout cookies or anything like that?"

"No, Sid didn't say anything about Girl Scout cookies."

"Sid?"

"The gentleman sitting next to me."

"Yes, of course. But it all depends, doesn't it?"

She lets this hang, so I'm not sure if her question is rhetorical or not. Maybe I'm supposed to answer. I moisten my lips with my tongue again. Fortunately, Darlene comes to my rescue.

"Given the present time and the present situation, he is Sid. For at other times, he is Roy or Dwayne or Howard, and probably so forth and so on."

The half-grin has been resurrected on Darlene's face, and now I notice, or understand, what is so remarkable about her face. It's the plumpness of her lips. Whoever she is, Darlene or otherwise, and whatever she does within the walls of her habitat, and wherever that residence may be, will never erase the contrast of her long face with her sleek eyes running horizontally and her mouth running horizontally, but with her lips plump. Her face is moving in different directions, and everything about it is trim except the lips. I hope to see her smile.

"And what is your name?"

“Sid calls me Roscoe.”

“Roscoe, huh?”

Again, is this rhetorical? Darlene seems to be waiting for an answer. In my peripheral vision, I notice Sid dunking his cookie in his coffee.

“Yes. On this bench, I’m Roscoe.”

“And you accept that?”

“Why not?”

Her eyes shifts to Sid, who is chewing.

“I think we have a different sort of individual here, Sid. In our previous discussion, people raised objections about their names, among other things.”

Sid, with cookie bits still in his mouth, says, “Roscoe accepts.”

I turn my head to look at Sid. On Sid’s thin lips there are crumbs.

“Accepts? Accepts what?” Darlene asks.

“The situation.”

“The situation? Do you mean fabrication?”

“Yes.”

I sense that Darlene is intelligent. Well educated perhaps, maybe even a member of academia.

“And do I accept?” Darlene inquires.

“I think you do,” Sid responds.

The cat is now stretched out on its side on the asphalt. I sip my coffee.

“You must tell me what Sid has told you,” Darlene says to me, “so that I, too, can accept . . . the situation.”

I look at Sid and he raises a shoulder. So I tell Darlene what Sid told me—naked piano playing and so forth.

When I finish, Darlene smiles, and for the life of me I’d like to say that her teeth are beautiful. But . . . there are a couple of uppers that are squiggled.

A gull glides by overhead and lets out a long cry. The cat looks up at the bird. My view is of the cat and Darlene, and Darlene, too, looks up.

“What is the seagull’s intent?” Darlene asks. “Food, we assume—because that is neat and pragmatic. Pragmatic is a truth that we revere, but within this there is a further truth, which is assumption.”

Darlene’s eyes and the cat’s eyes have left the bird. The cat is looking down the walkway. Darlene looking at Sid and me, and that’s what’s disquieting, for I can now see that it’s not only the lips and the squiggled upper teeth that disturb her long, Asian-like face. It’s her green-brown eyes as well, and all the more so as those irises slowly shift from right to left within elongated eye-slits. I wonder if Darlene is a model. Have I seen her picture somewhere?

“So, it’s you that’s been peeping,” Darlene says, while looking at Sid. “A peeping Tom. Or should I say, a peeping Sid?”

Darlene’s smile is long gone and so is any hint of a grin. I look at Sid and discover that his face has gone scarlet.



“You nasty, nasty man. Peeping into my . . . music room. I could pursue this, you know. I could, for example, ask, ‘Does this activity result in masturbation?’ But I won’t ask that. Instead, I will take up a larger topic. A more pertinent topic. Which is: what is the motive for spinning stretchers?”

Those wonderful eyes leave Sid to find my face, as if maybe the answer to her question were on my visage. This, for whatever reason, spawns embarrassment, perhaps because I am dumbfounded. I look down at my nearly empty cup of tepid coffee that’s nestled in my skinny hand, other hand nearby with a gnawed half-bagel. There are crumbs on my lap, and some of them are little bits of burnt onion.

“The other day, on that bench down there,” Darlene says and motions, which causes me to look in the direction she’s indicating, “Sid, who at that time was Dwayne, told an elderly gentleman that I was a painter, an artist, and the subjects of my paintings were similar to those of Gustav Klimt, but instead of depicting women, as Klimt did, my art revolved around men—naked men.”

Darlene smiles and says, “Imagine, comparing my art to Klimt. I am honored.”

I smile in response, but is this in response to Darlene’s smiling. Or maybe it’s in response to her sarcasm. Or maybe both. Or maybe Darlene and I are smiling in response to Sid slash Dwayne’s inventiveness, which entails imagination.

“Of course, sometimes we lie for definite reasons,” Darlene says. “When I was in school, I used to lie on tests and papers. I did this because I understood what the instructor wanted, which was his or her ideas and/or opinions repeated or regurgitated with regards to responding to a question or a topic. I did well in school.

“Other lies fall along these lines, too, which is lying for reward, or lying to avoid punishment.

“Then again, other sorts of lying involve self-aggrandizement. Perfectly understandable. And of course there is lying to entertain. This often exploits exaggeration. And entertaining might very well link up with aggrandizement, for entertaining is often a form of wit—life of a party, skilled raconteur, lively dinner guest.”

Darlene looks at me. There is a moment, and then I nod, for lack of any other resource.

“But there is something other than these particulars, and perhaps Sid has stumbled upon it. Fibbing weaves a web, a fog-like patch in which desires and fantasies and likes and dislikes and opinions and images arise for both the teller and the listener. This is no small thing, for it influences belief and understanding, and even perception. Perhaps Sid is trying to show us how we think and how we perceive and how we often see the world. Thus: how we invent the world.”

She almost smiles, and as I look at this enigmatic expression I can almost understand what she is talking about.

But then suddenly, there’s an unleashed dog approaching, and the cat understands this immediately. The cat is up on its paws and its back is arching and its fur is rising. The dog rushes up and skids to a halt, cat hissing. Barking erupts as

the dog circles, a medium-size dog, a beagle mix perhaps. It takes but a moment for Darlene to grab Sid's cane and to use its pronged foot to threaten the dog, who dances to the side to avoid the stabbing ends of the cane. And just like that, Darlene thrusts the cat's leash into my hand, half-bagel falling onto my lap while my hand grasps the leash's handle-like end, which then allows Darlene to press the advantage, dog scurrying away, Darlene in pursuit with the cane. Passersby have stopped to watch. The dog cuts up a side street that's adjacent to the day-old-bakery-goods store, and I lose sight of Darlene as she disappears around the corner of the day-old-bakery-goods store. There's yapping, but it seems incidental, and then there's Darlene emerging from that narrow side street to strut back to Sid and I, and the cat, aluminum cane in hand. Color's on her face and her chest is pumping, and when she arrives it's like she's going to throw the cane down, but instead of that she gathers herself and sets the cane upright on its three-pronged foot at Sid's side.

The cat is watchful, but its fur has flattened, as has its back.

"You didn't see an owner, did you?" Darlene asks.

"No," says Sid, "no owner in sight, but if there had been, he'd be hightailing it just like that dog."

I look at Sid. A triumphant smile is rising on his gaunt face.

Darlene unbuttons the cuffs of her long-sleeved shirt and folds the sleeves up to her elbows, which affords me a vivid view of a red and green and blue tattoo that's on the underside of her left forearm. It takes a moment, and then I understand that the image is a replica of the flag of Mexico, eagle with a suffering snake in its talon. Muscle tone defines both forearms, as do wrists that hardly taper. "Whoa" is what reels through my mind.

Sid seems to be undergoing similar revelations, for he asks, "Did you kill it?"

"Kill what?" responds Darlene.

"Kill the dog."

Between the three of us, or maybe the four of us, this translates as a retake.

Darlene reaches out and I hand her the end of the leash. She smiles a half-smile and it's this that dwells, as she walks away with her cat. 🐾



Cracker Jack Prize, Christmas 1959

Roy Bentley

This one was a brass ring with an insert portrait
of Fess Parker in a Davy-Crockett-coonskin cap.
The adjustable token seemed one-of-a-kind lucky.
An artifact more magical than any four-leaf clover
culled from development lawns in summer in Ohio.

My cousin Bobby was in attendance as eyewitness.
I unwrapped it, the prize, from its paper. Passed it
off for inspection. His face was reward enough.
I said, Take it. It's yours. And he said, Really?
Lit up like the NCR Christmas tree our parents

used to take us to see in those days in Dayton.
I'm always letting something go. I let him go.
I miss him like the very best day of boyhood.
But now I give him to you here in this poem,
face thieving joy from a box of Cracker Jacks.

Air Brakes

Michael Istvan

Soon he will climb the steps of the school bus
and be thinking nothing of me. So young,
and hooked to me as he is now, though, even
when my son is mad at me or just moody
that morning, he is sure to take a window seat
where I can see him in profile from the doorstep.
And from under his hiding hoodie his eyes,
barely perceptible through the tint, will cut
toward mine at the lunging hiss of the air brakes.



A Wildlife Photographer

Michael Istvan

My father could drink his cheap beer all day, watching wildlife programs from his chair.—I have the feeling that his November hunts were at heart a child's urge to take in splendors from secret spots of stillness.

Walking to our spot, he would point out deer pebbles and reconstruct trails. He would finger the fresh rubs, spy even without beer in his system. "Bucks scrape the velvet off their antlers because it itches."—

"A doe," he whispered at our spot once. "Just a fawn." I was knocked out in our makeshift blind of branches, but his elbows were insistent. "Look! She's a beaut. Pretty one," he said in reverie. "Fuzzy still.—

Op. She hears us. See how her head cocked up like that?— Leave the goddamn chips alone a sec.—Hear that snort? Yep. She knows something's up. We might be busted. Fwhew!" he snorted back through his lips to keep her in place.

But then my father's look went grave, his eyes glassy, by some program, planting the butt at his shoulder.— He was brought into these woods by his own father. And they brought a shotgun, never a camera.

Storybook Land

John Repp

Was I more dullard or fool at Storybook Land?
I stayed still behind the wheel of the fire engine.
I wish I'd danced around, but I suppose everyone
needs to see the resolute young, too. My skull

grew wiry hair into widow's peak & cowlick.
A cousin sat with me—stolid, blonde, shot through
with glory. Margaret laughed like a horse by the punch
& barbecue beef, half a continent away from Oshkosh.

In the hot, salt wind, trees reared overhead—who knows
what kind, but probably pine. A clown in orange shoes
made the rounds, white mouth beaded with sweat
we could see from way up high. He kept falling,

his hat scooting away from him. My cousin & I
kept driving. We liked the same things then.



Old Bottle, Green

James Blevins

sticks out of the earth.
I wonder, while I'm sitting,
when was it last drunk?
When was the last time
fingers gripped it about
the collar, placed its mouth
to lips, drank from its cool insides?
Tattered label worn rakishly,
stabbed to earth. Some
remains at bottom. I bet it's
old whiskey. I wonder
why he or she would leave
even that little bit there,
not drink it to the very
last drop. Drunk enough like a
calm breeze, a promise made to
the back of my neck by a girl
named Summer—but broken,
as often is the case—broken,
and sticking out of the earth.

Let's Eat Kielbasa and Talk about Infidelity

Jaya Wagle

On a cloudless summer evening, my husband, Prakash, and I visit with our friends Andy and Brenda in their suburban Dallas home nestled amongst lush trees and curlicue walking trails. We stand around their big kitchen island, drinking red wine and talking about extramarital affairs, current and mythical. Brenda is really Vrinda, and Andy is Aniruddha. He insisted on anglicizing their names for the convenience of Americans. In between sips, Brenda attends to the crisping chunks of kielbasa sausages, sizzling in their fat in the skillet, the smoky flavors wafting up to the loud exhaust fan.

“What do you mean Draupadi was in love with Karna? I would think being married to the five Pandavas would be more than enough for her?” Andy’s voice is raised over the loud exhaust.

“Why couldn’t she be in love with Karna? It wasn’t her choice to marry the five brothers.” My voice trembles a little and Prakash squeezes my hand under the counter. He knows I’m trying to keep my emotions under control and not have a shouting match with our friend. The tale of the mythic princess Draupadi brings out the dormant feminist in me.

“I think it was unfair she was forced to marry the Pandavas when it was Arjuna who won her in the archery competition, ‘won’ being the operative word,” Brenda says, her fingers making air quotes. She switches off the exhaust fan and puts the sausages on a platter. “I mean, can you imagine a handsome archer, a prince in disguise, winning your hand in marriage only to have his mother instruct him to share you with his brothers? How debasing it is to be divided into five parts, like so much prize money!”

“Well, she did ask for it,” Andy says. He sticks a toothpick into a crispy chunk and surveys his handiwork.

I want to stick a toothpick in Andy’s mouth but I reach for a kielbasa instead.

“What do you mean she asked for it?” I say. Another hand squeeze under the counter from Prakash.

Andy is so full of himself. He doesn’t need much encouragement to show off his knowledge of the scriptures. “Legend has it Draupadi did severe penance in her previous life. When granted a boon by the Gods, she asked for a husband who was brave, strong, handsome, intelligent, and kind. The Gods said no man on earth possessed all the qualities but if she waited, she would get her wish in the next life.”

“Ah! She asked for the impossible. How arrogant of her.” I replenish my wine



glass and take a big gulp.

"I'm just saying, there is a reason Arjuna's mother told him to share his alms for the day with his brothers without checking to see who or what he brought home," Andy says. "The Gods work in mysterious ways. If they granted her the boon of a fantastic husband, they made sure it was fulfilled. Even if it took five men to make it come true."

"But you are forgetting that their illegitimate half-brother Karna had all those qualities. Why didn't the Gods just let her marry Karna?"

"Well, Karna was the son of a charioteer, remember. He was of a lower caste. He could not have married a princess of the warrior class.

"If she couldn't marry him because of his lower birth, then it is plausible she might have loved him over her five husbands. She just never got to act on it," I say. I feel smug about my logic and pop a few juicy kielbasa in my mouth.

There is no basis for my hypothesis in the conventional scriptures. It is an idea that has gripped my imagination since I read Chitra Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*, in which she retells the *Mahabharatha* epic from Draupadi's point of view with Karna as her secret love. I like the idea that a woman in Vedic times, with such strict moral and ethical mores, could love a man outside of marriage. After all, men have been doing it for millennia. The idea that Draupadi could be the pioneer woman of extramarital affairs fascinates me.

"But that is not the Indian way," Andy says.

I want to remind him he calls himself by a non-Indian name and eats pork and beef with relish. But experience has taught me that being outspoken and brash in Indian circles is construed as a sign of rebellion. The last thing I want is aspersions cast on me because I defended a married woman's right to love any man she chooses. Besides, if I push the issue anymore, Brenda will be forced to pick sides. I like Brenda. I want to stay friends with her.

Andy is in his element now. He talks of scriptures and tells us how Draupadi went through ritual purification by fire every year before taking her turn with the next "designated husband-in-line." The purification restored her virginity each time.

"That is why they call her the eternal virgin," he says. He chews on a crispy kielbasa chunk, takes a swig of the wine, and smacks his lips.

"That's a bit much, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. After all, women are keepers of chastity, entrusted with upholding our cultural values and traditions."

Across the counter I see Brenda looking uncomfortable. She wants to change the subject and silently signals me. I can only think to bring up our neighbors across the street, Sharad and Vinita, who are going through a messy divorce because she had a licentious affair with a married man. Not that much different from the current topic, but it will have to do.

"How did Sharad find out about their affair?" Brenda asks.

Prakash and I haven't discussed the affair since we learned of it. I refill my

glass and settle in to hear my husband's take. He usually refrains from passing judgment on other people's personal business and prefers to remain neutral on topics that tend to get me riled up. Though I suspect he doesn't approve of Vinita's infidelity, I want to hear it from him.

"Sharad was so devoted and loyal to her, it was embarrassing to watch. He waited on her like a lap dog. Rachana, do you remember their shopping trip to India?" he asks me.

I nod and recall the fifty plus saris, four sets of gold jewelry and hundreds of dollars spent on stitching bills for sari blouses and *salwar kameezes*. I was jealous when Vinita had shown me her loot.

"Did you know Sharad had taken on two extra jobs to support Vinita's spending habits?" he says.

"I didn't know that. Is that why he took on the traveling job, because they offered him a pay raise?" My glass is almost empty, and I resist the urge to fill it up again. I want to be clear-headed for Prakash's narrative.

"The moment he got a pay raise, she wanted a new car. So he bought her that impractical Dodge Challenger," he says. His voice usually has an even keel to it, but now it is tinged with a smidgen of disgust.

"I wonder why she cheated on him if he was falling all over himself to please her," Brenda says.

"In my experience, men who coddle and indulge their wives too much are treated like doormats," Andy says. He tucks a stray piece of hair behind Brenda's ear and looks at her adoringly. Brenda works at a software company and tries to rearrange her schedule to come home early so she can cook and tidy up the house before Andy comes home. She says leaving early helps her avoid the rush hour.

"If he was so loyal, why did she cheat on him?" Brenda asks again. "And how did he find out? Did he catch them in the act?"

"Why do people do the things they do? Who knows why she cheated on him? All I know is Sharad first got suspicious when he saw an unusually high phone bill and a number he didn't recognize. He asked Vinita about it and she made up some excuse about a school friend she reconnected with on Facebook. But then he realized she was talking to this "friend" all hours of the night while he was away. He put a tracking program on her laptop so he could monitor it remotely. Armed with lurid emails and chat transcripts, he confronted her and asked for a divorce." Prakash drains the rest of his wine and reaches for the bottle again. It's empty, and Andy gets up to fetch another one from the pantry.

"Maybe they genuinely loved each other, you know, this other guy and Vinita," Brenda says.

"Ha! I'm sure the other guy was just having a good time. And I bet his wife took him back," Andy says. He uncorks the wine bottle and fills his glass. According to the Indian grapevine, the cheating guy's wife had taken him back "for the sake of the children."



“So why doesn’t Sharad do the same?” I ask.

“What do you mean?”

“Take Vinita back. I mean, the other guy’s wife took him back, didn’t she?”

“One, they don’t have kids,” Prakash says. “Two, it’s different when the woman cheats on a man. He can’t look like a cuckolded fool. Nobody will respect him for staying with her.”

Brenda sighs and refills her glass and then mine. Her dark hair is cut short, framing her oval face. She is wearing a tight shirt that accentuates her full breasts. There is a faint outline of her red lipstick on the wine glass. She gives it half a turn to drink from the clean side.

Once, while the guys were out watching a baseball game, the two of us had sat on her front porch eating cheese and getting drunk on wine. It was drizzling. I could smell the damp, musty earth. Brenda told me she had a crush on a colleague at her software firm. “He is so handsome, Rachana. I can see his blue eyes twinkle when he sits across from me for a meeting. I just want to reach over and kiss him. But I control myself. And then, there are days I come home late from work and find Andy spread out on the sofa, watching ESPN, his trousers hanging on a chair, socks lying in the middle of the room, and I just want to smack him on his balding head.” I had burst out laughing at the image. Sometimes, Brenda gets a faraway look in her eyes, and I think I know who she’s thinking of.

Andy would certainly not want her to think of any other man except himself. Of course, that doesn’t stop him from turning around, while driving, to ogle the women jogging on the sidewalk. Brenda told me about it once and how it bugs her, but if she tries to confront him he denies it. I suspect he does it instinctually, like a dog salivating over a bone. That is what he reminds me of, a small bulldog, with puffy cheeks, saucer-shaped eyes, and a receding hairline.

Prakash and I met Andy and Brenda at a friend’s housewarming party. We were the only couples without kids, and I hit it off with Brenda instantly. We sat on the brand new leather couch and exchanged information about our families back home in India. We both shuddered, watching the other women fussing over their kids, feeding them and breaking up fights. We made a pact we wouldn’t turn out like those mothers.

By then, Prakash and I had been married three years. Our parents had arranged for us to meet while he was on a three week visit from America. We had argued over the compatibility of arranged marriages versus marriages of love. I told him who got married to whom and how long the marriage lasted depended a lot on destiny. He said it was a lazy person’s way of looking at things. I didn’t tell him that sometimes the best-laid plans could go awry if they were not destined to be.

I didn’t tell him I could’ve married my ex-boyfriend whom I met in tenth grade and broke up with after a year. He was handsome, in a rugged sort of way, but

he was seven years older than me and hadn't gone back to school after he was held back his senior year. He wanted me to elope with him once I turned eighteen.

I didn't tell him about my brief fling with a colleague at the pager company where I worked after graduating at twenty-one. He was a big guy, powerful and muscular. I only went out with him because the other girls at work were jealous he had a crush on me. I even considered marrying him just to spite them some more.

I didn't tell him that the person I was truly in love with was a two-timing bastard who had a fiancée in another city. If he hadn't broken my heart, I wouldn't have agreed to meet Prakash six months later.

We sat on his parent's balcony in central Bombay, arguing about destiny as kids played cricket in the narrow walkway below us. We talked for an hour, sipping chai and eating *kande poha* his mother brought out to us. He got up to take the tray from her hands. I found myself liking him a lot. I hoped then my destiny was tied to his. I wasn't going to chance it by telling him stories.

So, here we are, four years later, in Andy and Brenda's kitchen, drinking merlot and eating pork sausages. I recall the email my cheating ex-boyfriend sent me a few days ago wanting to know if I was well. It is buried beneath promotional emails from Banana Republic and Loft. I haven't decided if I want to reply to him.

I am buzzed. Draupadi's five husbands morph into Karna, Prakash, and my ex-boyfriends. I feel light-headed as I watch Brenda. She is listening to Prakash talk about a software program he is installing at work. His eyes are shiny behind his glasses, hands animated.

"Prakash, can we go home now?" I touch his elbow lightly. I want to sit in the car, roll the windows down and let talk of infidelities and memories of broken loves wash away on the summer breeze. 🍷



Time Is Strange

Danny Earl Simmons

*A moment can be as short as a breath,
or as long as eternity. —Cornell Woolrich*

There's a gray squirrel twitching
on a picnic table. I'm not sure if he sees me
seeing him, but when a dry leaf lights
beside him, he takes note, takes flight
to the safety of the closest fir. He climbs
straight up, unaware that he is beautiful.
The breeze grabs hold of the leaf and sends it away,
leaving the mossy wooden picnic table empty
and all the way gray.

I woke up the other day headache-free.
Neither shoulder hurt. I was hungry
for oatmeal and toast. The very next day,
I woke up to the sound of horns honking
because the light was green. I could not remember
which way I was supposed to turn.
I stuck my arm out the window and motioned
for everyone to pass. It occurred to me then
that my pickup truck would make an interesting
coffin.

I remember the first time I saw her smile.
I remember the first time she smiled at me.
Those smiles were half a year apart
and those were good first days.
We share a hot tub now where I soak alone
in the evening and watch blue clouds fade
pink against my sweat. I lean back
into steamy heat, hold my breath,
close the lid.

A red-headed woodpecker bangs its way up
the squirrel's tree. I don't know what to make of that,
so it flies away. There's lots of green here, the breeze
is an easy thing. The gray squirrel descends
upside down. Beautiful.
I can't tell if he sees me seeing.
I just can't tell.

May I Have a Word With You?

Matt Zambito

Stop. Right now, a star
is exploding. A *star*. An electron is
igniting in a single
oxygen atom maybe fueling one of your
most creative neurons. Most
people on television aren't ever
watching television while we watch them
pretend to be interesting others they aren't.
Professional sports aren't anything
but innocent citizens conned out of
minutes and bank deposits for the privilege
to ballyhoo and boo in unison toward colors
moving quickly, ads scanned into minds
by fellow minds. One fool's random thought
once thought nothing of starts
a war, any war, so the only just war
will be the last one. And so, the last anyone
has got herself a tough conundrum:
not when, nor if, but *how*
to choose to end? all while
dust from that supernova shocks through
dark matter, those photons of light, implorations
to the Word to have a brief word
in private. And so, and better yet,
I really like the way it sounds
when this poem closes. Here: listen!



Candlefish

Greta Nintzel

when we shifted our
diurnal urges to talk, it
required fire. hooligan, a smelt
with wolves' teeth. light the bittersweet
adipose limb. string it on a wick. repurpose fat
for spawning to illuminate the grease trails. key
products traded to the interior, the cinders
of interrupted fins

hazardous

Greta Nintzel

there is mitochondrial eve. and snakes
shed their skin. love is less than
photosynthetic. dirty, dirty

love. let's be animal consciousness, streams of
glandular signals answer all questions. it's the
grey matter polluting the lakes. chemical

calls sweating out psychic appetites. keep them
in a shoebox. make connections. the possessed
make more. if we knew reason, would we

ruin less? let's convert carbon monoxide
and dimethyl sulfide into a pulse. extract
from the desolate. forget love. Fuck.





At Cliff's Edge

Nancy Devine

My mother's voice, like a yawn, reaches me at the bottom of the field, where the rye grass shifts and returns in the late afternoon breeze. I'm crouched there, seed tassels at eye level, stalks a weave of material that undoes itself and then reconnects loosely, so I can see our red Brush Hog, the front end propped on two cinder blocks where my father left it before he hurt his back last spring.

Some day I'm going to film a cover crop before it gets tilled under in the fall, green manure the soil needs for the black currant plants. I'll get the left and right sway, a big body of water in early morning, a wave, a rhythm you want to take on but can't.

My mother's been saying, "Go back to school, Cliff. Things'll be better. You'll learn to love classes and the freedom of being away at college. You'll make a terrific doctor." She says both she and my father wished they'd had gone to college.

I love when plants arrive in the mail as mere sticks in plastic bags, tiny white sprouts, like animal whiskers, growing from them, that they develop into thick bushes that choke out the wild vetch and yield fruit in August. Someone's got to plant more black currants in the spring. And if my father can't, shouldn't I?

"Lindsey, at least it's cold," Cliff says as I grumble as I get out of the car. Protestors usually make getting in difficult. But not today; it's zero and minus 21 wind chill.

While he parks, I go in and rest in a wobbly chair. Two women in thick sweaters sit at the reception desk. Above them on a wall-mounted TV with the volume off, the close-captioned crawl reads, "winter storm watch." The conditions are such that things could get worse.

"Thought you were going to get rolling?" Cliff says as he stomps his snow-covered boots on the entryway mat.

"Please, let's talk."

He sits across from me.

"All right, Lindsey."

"This is final," I say.

"You don't have to do this today."

"Do you mean wait for another day? When it's warm and there are throngs of sign-carriers with pictures of dead 'babies' on huge placards? That'll be too late." I make air quotes around "babies" and then feel as if I've gone too far.



“Too hard to be married with a kid and be in college. I want to finish school,” I add. Cliff looks at the TV, and when I realize I’ve stopped watching it, I pay attention to it. We read about a local Vietnam vet who committed suicide behind the free clinic, his Purple Heart on his chest with a note attached: “For someone braver. . . .” Without looking at Cliff, I say, “This is no world for a kid.”

No more “Robert, it’s been 30 years; just move on.” I’ll be gone, because nobody knows what grows anywhere. Those once-lush jungles so naked they, too, seem embarrassed, mist falling on you that’s not rain, helicopter blades thrashing the air until there’s nothing to breathe. Do what? Hide in a fox hole as the poison settles, extends like a membrane?

Or a plane’s belly is open and I’m there with my buddies, but they’re only my buddies because we’ve got a job to do. I wouldn’t buy one a beer or loan him money back home. Wouldn’t give one a cup of sugar, wouldn’t go to one of their bachelor parties.

And what about the pilots, flying so low they can see mothers canted right so that they can extend their hip like a shelf for a child. The future sitting at the horizon, sticking its fat finger down its dead throat and oh, sickness to come.

I try to explain this war to my grandson because he’s studying it in school. When I say who’s against who, he can’t follow it and I can’t either. And I really don’t want to anymore.

Some could say I’m lucky; I never got sick. The truth is I’m so ill all I do is wait to get worse. Now it’s cold, which is good, really good. My body won’t go bad. Someone will come and take my heart before it goes from purple to the tarnished bronze of marigolds rotting in the sun.

Cliff again is at the bottom of the field, like when he was a boy and someone said something cross or sour to him. What’s it going to take to move him now that Lindsey’s not in the picture? Every afternoon he wanders that direction, somehow past the electric fence which never gets turned off, the gate tied shut with the same knot my husband put there just before he hurt his back.

What does Cliff see among the rye grass, the tractor parts? What does he hear as the basswood catch wind in their leaves and birds screech as they fly off?

I remember that God-awful storm that took down four aspens by the pole barn, how one nicked the edges of the roof and crinkled the metal like the crimped edges of a slipshod pie crust. Cliff never left until way after the storm, until I was sick with worry.

“Mom. Did you see how the wind sheered the top of that ironwood and it went swirling over the field like tumbleweed? It was beautiful,” he said when he came in. “And then I could taste the rain, sweet as the dirt smells when you till it up each spring.”

“You should’ve come in.”

“It’s too beautiful down there. Don’t you ever want to know what the earth tastes like, Mom? Have you ever wondered?”

So my kid’s toting around some pain. Everybody does, be it a memory lodged in your mind or stuck in your body, an ongoing low thrum in each thought or a twist right down the center of your back. Pain’s how you know you’re alive, the coming together of so much sensation, your body squawking like a blackbird roused from its nest.

As much as I love my wife, I know her calling won’t bring him back from his precipice. But something will. Cliff’ll figure it out. 🐣



Lovesick at the Border

Tobi Alfier

Silence wells around us,
clouds muscle back the midday heat.

It ain't right, you leaving now,
me—sunblown, windblown, light-shot,

gut-shot. You—a lone lamp in an attic window.

Bar patrons prattle inside.
The jukebox plays "I'm Not in Love."

Why now, this slipping away from grace
while the brick and mortar of memory

calls you liar. Your face an unreadable mask,
mine red like the scent of cinnabar.

I sip truck-stop coffee like self-pity.
You order a Bud and a bourbon.

The miles between us increase
as the desert breeds that silence

I've long learned to need.

Tupelo Failed Love, 1967

Tobi Alfier

You tell him it's time
to get on his way.

The two of you
are just walking roadkill

on an ancient
highway. It's over.

You're a jukebox
with nothing but sad songs

wailing, and he ain't
got the hard cash

for anything but shots
and beers. So you're done.

Get yourself tattooed
with a line from

your first love letter tucked
in a book, tenth grade,

from the sweetest kid,
the one you never paid

no mind to—he adored
you. Now write his words

on the inside
of your arm, and never

forget, the good ones
can be taught

to be hot as bad boys,
and they'll have that change

for the jukebox. Don't
ever think you ain't

worth it. Read those words,
and go hunt that good man down.



West of Nowhere on Route 66

Tobi Alfier

Rolling easy down unsure roads, we see
first signs of spring through patches in weathered
and worn asphalt. Blades of green force up
between sealed cracks that look like ancient faces.

First signs of spring through weathered cracks—
a universe of jigsaw pieces, black, gray, shiny, old,
new. Between fissures that look like ancient faces
shoots of green sneak up, tentatively aimed toward sun.

Over a universe of monochrome jigsaw pieces,
we drive casually, regard the seedling's resolve to grow.
Shoots of green sneak up, tentatively aimed toward sun,
small blooms ignore the mountain snow, begin slowly to bud.

Driving idly, we photograph the resolve of spring,
watch the trains that are constant as they travel their own seasons
while small blooms ignore the high altitude blinding snow
and march upward, with purpose, sprig by sprig.

The trains as constant as earth and time
we say one day we will take that ride,
while someday marches upward, sprig by sprig,
we check the clock, change the station, turn toward home.

Someday we will take that ride, watch
the first signs of spring through a sleeping car window.
We change the station, then turn toward home,
our easy roll back over now-sure roads.

Memorizing Darkness

Joan Colby

They remembered how she lay all day
Facedown on the bed after the sheriff's knock
And then arose to reset the clock of her life.
Could she ever forget? Of course not.
Retold, the mind paints a scene
Even more vivid. How the cattle guard
Traps the wagon, the gunshots ringing
And there he is running and firing
His dark eyes wide as when they made love.

Memory: the stone door that locks on
An image forever, a bloodstain that can't
Be scrubbed. The lies we're told: how home is where
When you go there, they have to take you in.
Or that you can't go home. As if anything
Will ever be the same. As if a stall means safety.
Ghost horses screaming in the flames.



Pancreatic Answer

Paul Hostovsky

When she asks you to write a poem
about *her*, because you're spending so much time
agonizing over the poems you write
about everyone else and everything else in the world,
and your anniversary is coming up
and maybe just for once you could shower
the woman you love with a little attention
by agonizing over her for a change—
here's what you do: start by writing about the agony
of waiting for her reply, all those years ago,
when you first told her exactly how you felt
about her mouth, its shape, its sheer
perfection. Then write about the joy
of grazing on that mouth ever since
and never being filled. Write about
the agony of seeing her cry, how when she's sad
it makes you more unhappy than any
unhappiness of your own. Frame it
like that: your happiness on the one hand,
your sadness on the other, put it in a box
and give it to her as an anniversary present
and maybe it will be exactly what she wants.
And maybe not. Maybe she'll object to the third person,
saying it's distant and ironic, exactly the way
you are when you fight. And maybe she'll dislike
the artifice, the frank mischief and mischievous
frankness, and just the whole convoluted
serious joke of the poem. And what if she doesn't get it?
What if she doesn't understand the poem at all?
Understanding is overrated, you must say in the poem,
the way understanding the function of your pancreas
when you're dying of pancreatic cancer is overrated.
The way understanding fossil fuels and fracking
and the effects of fluctuating commodity markets
on the price of gasoline when the world is dying
from the inside out is overrated. We're alive and we are
dying (you say in the poem, so now the poem is
cooking with gas) and I love you here and now and don't
understand any of it, any of it, at all. And that's okay.
It's perfectly beautifully utterly overwhelmingly okay.

Privilege

Paul Hostovsky

Take, for example, the grass
in the suburbs of America—
how it forecloses the likes of
curly dock, tansy, clover,
creeping thyme,
buttercup, ragweed—
any raggedy brown or red
or blue or yellow
unruly thing applying for entry here,
hoping to live and to flourish here—
all the so-called weeds,
all the beautiful wildflowers—
turned away, mowed down,
poisoned. And hasn't it always
been this way, only the pure
cropped decorous green
grass and its offspring welcomed here?
But at what cost to all of us
this skewed sense of beauty
and propriety, this monochrome
monoculture with its monotonous
traditions of separateness
and supremacy, totally lacking
in any flavor, sustenance, utility
or spirit? The dispirited grass,
asleep in its vast bed
of privilege, dreams of the invading
hordes of color, riots
of dandelion, chicory, purslane,
which all make fine eating
and live on the other side,
out in the waste places,
out along the roadsides,
not very far away
but far enough away



so that the lonely, privileged,
uninflected grass begins to feel
a profound sense of loss,
a profound sense of sadness,
to think of the fine company
and the fine eating
of its despised neighbors,
all the brothers and sisters
whom it has never met
and does not know at all.



That Girl, That Place

Tom Montag

where she curves inside herself,
she found a mystery she didn't
understand. She may never

understand. That's how it is
when we let go what holds us.
We touch something beyond hope

and something touches us.
We did not yet know what love
could be. We may never know.

The Poet at Home

Tom Montag

The sweetness
of the animals

in the house.
The house itself.

His wife, and
his daughters who

sometimes come home.
His books. The lamp

which knows his hand
and how he touches

all he loves.



The Poet Remembers

Tom Montag

His father said to him,
Son, you told too much.
Yet there was not enough

to tell, the poet thinks.
The wind had blown it
all away. Nothing comes

back to us now except such
moments held to light like
glass. He sees the curve and

color of it, sees the sing
in it, the shine. *Father,*
I have seen what I've seen

and it speaks even now,
even as the light falters,
as the last light fades.

Author Bios

Tessa A. Adams is a Nebraska native and mother of three. She has taught English to teenagers for fifteen years, and she is the co-author of the blog www.familyfootnote.com. Her work can be found in *Fine Lines Literary Journal*, *xoJane*, *Empty Sink Publishing*, and *Route 7 Review*.

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Current chapbooks are *The Coincidence of Castles* from Glass Lyre Press and *Romance and Rust* from Blue Horse Press. *Down Anstruther Way* is forthcoming from Future-Cycle Press. She is co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.bluehorsepress.com).

Roy Bentley is the author of four collections: *Boy in a Boat* (University of Alabama, 1986), *Any One Man* (Bottom Dog, 1992), *The Trouble with a Short Horse in Montana* (White Pine Press, 2006), and *Starlight Taxi* (Lynx House Press, 2013), which won the 2012 Blue Lynx Poetry Prize. He lives in Pataskala, Ohio.

After a long career as a University lecturer and a Business Communications Consultant, **Mary Bevan** is now enjoying time to write—as she always promised herself she would. Her flash fiction and short stories have won prizes in a number of competitions and story slams, and her work has been podcast and published in print and e-zines in the US and UK.

James Blevins attends the College of Central Florida, studying English and Creative Writing. He's worked on the college's literary magazine, *In the Write Mind*, and the campus newspaper, *The Patriot Press*, in addition to the local newspaper's sports page from 2011 to 2014. He's also written for a sports webpage, *Bolts by the Bay*, covering the NHL and the Tampa Bay Lightning hockey team. His first published short story, "For All the Bending," is in the *2016 Scythe Prize* collection.

Christine Butterworth-McDermott is the author of the chapbook *Tales on Tales: Sestinas* and the full length collection, *Woods & Water, Wolves & Women*. Her poems have appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Normal School*, *River Styx*, *Southeast Review*, and others. She is the founder and head editor for *Gingerbread House Literary Magazine* and teaches in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Laurie Byro has been facilitating "Circle of Voices" poetry discussion in New Jersey libraries for over sixteen years. She is published widely in university presses in the United States and is recently in an anthology, *St. Peter's B List*. Laurie has garnered more IBPC awards (InterBoard Poetry Community) than any other poet, currently forty-seven. Two books of poetry were published in 2015: *Luna* by Aldrich



Press and *Gertrude Stein's Salon and Other Legends* by Blue Horse Press. She received a 2016 New Jersey Poet's Prize for the first poem in the Stein book and is currently poet in Residence at the West Milford Township Library, where "Circle of Voices" continues to meet.

Sanchita Catterjee is a photographer, writer and researcher based in New Delhi, India. Her photos and writings have been published in the *Statesman* (India), the *Times of India*, the *Telegraph* (India), *National Geographic Traveller India*, *Cha*, *iUnbound*, *MidDay*, *Public Books*, academic journals, and travel portals. She currently writes short poetry with her black and white photos, part of a portfolio titled, *Fragility, Transience and Transcendence*. Works from this portfolio have been published in the *Commonline Journal* (twice), *Star82 Review*, and the *Journal of Creative Arts*.

A writer, artist, photographer, and general creator, **John Chavers** recently had his writing and artwork accepted at *The Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library—So It Goes Literary Journal*, *3Elements Review*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Ascent*, *The Roaring Muse*, *Birch Gang Review*, *Four Ties Lit Review*, *Ground Fresh Thursday*, *Silver Apples*, *The Ogham Stone*, and *Verity La*, among others. He has a fascination for the diminutive, works of art on paper, and the desert. This September he will be the artist in residence at Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas.

The poetry of **Joan Colby** has appeared in *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Pinyon*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Spillway*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and others. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She has published seventeen books, including *Selected Poems* from FutureCycle Press which received the 2013 FutureCycle Prize and *Ribcage* from Glass Lyre Press which has been awarded the 2015 Kithara Book Prize. Three of her poems have been featured on Verse Daily and another is among the winners of the 2016 Atlanta Review International Poetry Contest. The collection *Carnival* (FutureCycle Press, 2016) will be followed by *The Seven Heavenly Virtues* (Kelsay Press, 2017). Colby is a senior editor of FutureCycle Press and an associate editor of *Kentucky Review*. Website: www.joancolby.com. Facebook: Joan Colby. Twitter: poetjm.

The author of three poetry collections, *Interstate* (Night Ballet Press, 2014), *Western Dream*, (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and *The Dice Throwers*, (Liquid Light Press, 2015), as well as a novella, *Ghost* (Blue Cubicle Press, 2013), **Douglas Cole** has another collection, *Bali Poems*, forthcoming from Wordtech Press, 2016. His work has appeared in the anthologies *Best New Writing* (Hopewell Publications 2015), *Bully Anthology* (Kentucky Stories Press, 2015), and *Coming Off The Line* (Mainstreet Rag Publishing, 2015), and in numerous journals. He is the recipient of the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry, the Best of Poetry Award from Clapboard House, and First Prize for the "Picture Worth 500 Words" from Tattoo Highway. He is currently on the faculty at Seattle Central College.

Over the course of 2016-17, Platypus Press, Ltd. (England) has undertaken to publish **L.G. Corey**'s complete collected works in four separate volumes. His poetry also appears in several anthologies and many literary reviews such as *Evergreen Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Red Savina Review*, *Rogue Poetry Review*, and many others.

Ken Craft is a middle school teacher and a writer living west of Boston. His poems have appeared in *The Writer's Almanac*, *Verse Daily*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *Off the Coast*, *Spillway*, *Slant*, *Angle Journal of Poetry*, *The High Window*, and numerous other journals and e-zines. *The Indifferent World*, his first poetry collection, was released in 2016 by Future Cycle Press.

Nancy Devine teaches high school English in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where she lives. Her poetry, short fiction, and essays have appeared in online and print journals.

Sarah Frelich is the author of *Sad Math*, winner of the 2014 Moon City Press Poetry Prize and the 2015 Whirling Prize from the University of Indianapolis; *Sort of Gone*; and *A Brief Natural History of an American Girl*, winner of the Editor's Choice Award from Accents Publishing. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Constance Saltonstall Foundation, and the New York Council on the Arts.

Kathleen Gunton is a writer/photographer. She believes one art feeds another. Her images have appeared in *Off The Coast*, *The Healing Muse*, *Owen Wister Review*, and *Perceptions*.

Artwork by **Kyle Hemmings** has appeared in *The Stray Branch*, *Euphemism*, *Uppagus*, *South 85 Journal*, *Black Market Lit*, *Sonic Boom*, *Snapping Twigs*, *Convergence*, and elsewhere. He loves pre-punk garage bands of the 60s, Manga comics, urban photography, and French Impressionism. His latest collections of poems and prose is *Future Wars* from Another New Calligraphy and *Split Brain* on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Paul Hostovsky is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *The Bad Guys* (FutureCycle Press, 2015). His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. A new book of poems, *Is That What That Is*, is forthcoming from FutureCycle Press in 2017. To read more of his work, visit him at www.paulhostovsky.com.

M. A. Istvan, Jr., good-looking despite the crookedness and skull protuberances of a criminal, is full of dissimulation and never looks people in the eye. He stands apart from others mainly from a fear of being found out. Istvan survives by poaching burl and—there is no help for it—by government assistance.

Individual entries on **Richard Kostelanetz**'s work appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers*, *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Contemporary Novelists*, *Postmodern Fiction*, *Webster's Dictionary of American Writers*, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Directory of American Scholars*, [NNDB.com](https://www.nndb.com), [Wikipedia.com](https://www.wikipedia.com), and [Britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com), among other distinguished directories.



Kaela Martin is a native Texan currently living in Nacogdoches. She is finishing her undergraduate degree at Stephen F. Austin State University and majoring in Creative Writing. She will be graduating with an MFA in December and hopes to enter the publishing field. Her work has appeared in *Catfish Creek* and *Thin Air Magazine*.

Michael McConnell's poetry and prose have been featured in such anthologies as *The Best of Electric Velocipede*, *Body and Soul: Narratives of Healing from Ars Medica*, *Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability*, and *Solace in So Many Words*, a nominee for a 2011 Pushcart Prize in the essay category. Most recently, his poetry has appeared in the *New Plains Review* and the *Lindenwood Review*. Originally from Detroit, he's now a proud resident of San Marcos, Texas, pursuing a doctoral degree in Developmental Education at Texas State University and singing in degenerate Scots-Irish bands after sundown.

Michael Minassian lives in San Antonio, Texas. His poems have appeared in such journals as *The Aurean*, *Broken Plate*, *Exit 7*, *The Galway Review*, *The Meadow*, and *Third Wednesday*. He is also a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*. Amsterdam Press published a chapbook of poems entitled *The Arboriculturist* in 2010.

Currently living and writing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, **Nicholas Molbert** is an MFA candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *alien mouth*, *90s Meg Ryan*, and more.

Tom Montag most recently is the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*. He is a contributing editor at *Verse-Virtual*. In 2015 he was the featured poet at *Atticus Review* (April) and *Contemporary American Voices* (August) and at year's end received Pushcart Prize nominations from *Provo Canyon Review* and *Blue Heron Review*. Other poems have appeared *Hamilton Stone Review*, *The Homestead Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Mud Season Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Third Wednesday*, and elsewhere.

John Moseley is a writer/editor and artist based in London. He is the co-author of the play, *Help! David Cameron Likes My Art*, with artist Eva Weinmayr, and the script for prize-winning animated short *The Chimera of M*, with Sebastian Buerkner. To unwind, he does undisciplined doodles while watching TV.

Greta Nintzel finds herself back in a place where wisteria, full with purple flowering clusters, creeps up and covers over fifty-foot hickory trees. Her recent poems can be found in *The Curator* and the UK journal, *The North*.

Michael Onofrey was born and raised in Los Angeles. Currently he lives in Japan. His stories have appeared in *Cottonwood*, *Evansville Review*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Road to Nowhere and Other New Stories from the Southwest* (an anthology from the University of New Mexico Press), as well as in other literary journals and anthologies. A novel, *Bewilderment*, is forthcoming from Tailwinds Press in 2017.

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University, Rome, Georgia. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and more than a dozen other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, and more than sixty other publications.

Sarah Puschmann has taught English in Argentina, Sweden, Germany, and South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Florida. Read her science writing at laserbeatsrock.com.

A native of the Pine Barrens region of southern New Jersey, **John Repp** has lived for many years in northwestern Pennsylvania. His most recent collection is *Fat Jersey Blues*, winner of the 2016 Akron Poetry Prize from the University of Akron Press.

Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee **Russell Rowland** continues his trail maintenance work and baby-sits his toddler granddaughter in New Hampshire's Lakes Region. His chapbooks, *Train of All Cabooes* and *Mountain Blue*, are available from Finishing Line Press.

Danny Earl Simmons is an Oregonian and a proud graduate of Corvallis High School. He is a friend of the Linn-Benton Community College Poetry Club and currently serves on the school's Poetry Advisory Committee. He is the author of a poetry chapbook entitled *The Allness of Everything* (Maverick Duck Press).

A hill-born Kentucky girl living down south in Mississippi, **Heather Truett** is a minister's wife and mother of two sons, working toward the publication of her first novel. She is represented by Peter Knapp of New Leaf Literary. Her journal credits include *The Mom Egg*, *Tweetspeak Poetry*, *Vine Leaves Literary*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Mothers Always Write*.

Indian expat and current US citizen, **Jaya Wagle** has been published, or has forthcoming publications, in *North Texas Review*, *Little Fiction*, *Re-Coded* (an anthology from Little Fiction/Big Truths), and the New Writers Fiction Series anthology from Lamar University Press.

Laryssa Wirstiuk is a poet and writer based in Los Angeles, where she lives with her miniature dachshund Charlotte Moo. Her writing has been published in *Word Riot*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, among other venues. View her portfolio at www.laryssawirstiuk.com

Matt Zambito is the author of *The Fantastic Congress of Oddities* (Cherry Grove Collections), and two chapbooks, *Guy Talk* and *Checks & Balances* (Finishing Line Press). His poems appear in *Crazyhorse*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Arts & Letters*, *Kestrel*, and elsewhere. He writes from Spokane, Washington.





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