



BRYANT

*Literary Review*

VOL 20, 2019

EDITOR AND FICTION EDITOR: Matthew Neill Null

POETRY EDITOR: Sarah Kruse

MANAGING EDITOR: Ron Pitt

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Lucie Koretsky

STUDENT POETRY EDITORS: Shannon Flaherty, Alexandra Miernicki-Dufresne

STUDENT FICTION EDITORS: Lena Erauda, Danielle Veith, Matthew Yuen

DESIGN & LAYOUT: Rebecca Chandler, [studio@beccachandler.com](mailto:studio@beccachandler.com)

PRINTING: Pucino Print Consultants, [pucinoprint@verizon.net](mailto:pucinoprint@verizon.net)

Since our first issue in 2000, we have actively sought to expand our audience. We expect readers of the *Bryant Literary Review* to be sophisticated, educated, and familiar with the conventions of contemporary literature. We see our purpose to be the cultivation of an active and growing connection between our community and the larger culture. The *BLR* provides a respected venue for creative writing of every kind around the world. Our only standard is quality.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: Published annually by the *Bryant Literary Review*. Send no more than three to five poems with name and address on each page. Fiction should be no longer than 5,000 words (approximately). We do not accept previously published work. Reading period is September 1 to December 1. Payment is in contributor's copies. Copyright reverts to author upon publication.

COVER ART: "I have never been here before," by Martha Kuhlman, 2019

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$10.00

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:

*Bryant Literary Review*

Faculty Suite F, Bryant University, 1150 Douglas Pike, Smithfield, RI 02917

The *Bryant Literary Review* is indexed in The American Humanities Index.

The *Bryant Literary Review* is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

Visit our website at [www.bryantliteraryreview.org](http://www.bryantliteraryreview.org)



© 2019 Bryant Literary Review ISSN 1526-9426

# Table of Contents

## EDITORS' NOTES / 4

## POEMS & SHORT STORIES

- The Good Son* by William Torphy / 6  
*Vaya Con Dios* by Russ Allison Loar / 22  
*Monkey Time* by Eric Greinke / 24  
*When Fall Arrives* by David James / 26  
*Dog Whistle* by Tina Cane / 28  
*Saying Goodbye in Brussels* by Lawrence F. Farrar / 29  
*Saudade* by Lisa Russo / 46  
*All I Know About Pool* by Charles Harper Webb / 47  
*Is It Alice, Amy or Anne?* by George Longenecker / 48  
*The Bush Burned With Fire And The Bush Was Not Consumed* by Peter Munro / 50  
*The Help* by J. Tarwood / 52  
*Little Mercies* by Terry Sanville / 53  
*God and God's* by Sandy Weisman / 61  
*Night Shadows* by Jimmie Pennington / 62  
*Copy Cat Music* by John Krumberger / 64  
*Outsider's Shovel* by Mark Taksa / 66  
*Young Tragic Heroines* by Elaine Little / 67  
*Living Dolls* by Andrena Zawinski / 78  
*Lachrimae* by Allen Strous / 80  
*The Wandering Buddha* by Cate Gable / 82  
*Only Touch Is Impossible, So We Touch* by John Sibley Williams / 84  
*Tiny Bills* by Susan Johnson / 85  
*Judge* by John P. Kristofco / 86  
*The Book of Bad Faith* by Noel Sloboda / 100  
*Fortress* by Yvonne / 102  
*Learning from Her* by Emily Madapusi Pera / 104  
*Object Permanence* by Jacob Nelson / 105  
*The Commandment* by James Armstrong / 106  
*Chicago - 1966* by Michael Walls / 123  
*Another Gen-X Icon Dead* by Ace Boggess / 124  
*Mastery* by Ken Victor / 126  
*Constructing Border Quilts* by Martha Brenckle / 128  
*The Lariat* by Marc Pietrzykowski / 130  
*Home Visit* by Jesse Mardian / 131

## CONTRIBUTORS / 140

## *Editors' Notes*

In *Following the Equator*, Mark Twain wrote, "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't." I remembered this quote when the semester provided me so many opportunities to read about life's daily dramas. Usually, I consider myself a man of science fiction—you can find me writing about futuristic worlds full of robotic AI. I like to explore the endless possibilities of technology and how to write a meaningful story made out of seemingly-impossible parts. There's a certain joy in trying to make the implausible plausible. Yet Mr. Twain is right: it is hard to imagine web-slinging through Manhattan, finding out who shoots first at the Mos Eisley cantina, or trying to survive in the Hunger Games as a normal human being. What makes the stories we chose for this year's *Bryant Literary Review* so compelling is their connection to the woes of everyday reality. We may be safe from the supervillains of a fictional universe, but we aren't immune to the dangers of 'normal' life.

This is the *BLR*'s twentieth edition, the twentieth time we have curated a diverse collection of voices from America and abroad. A special thanks to each and every one of you who reminds Bryant of its literary roots by reading this magazine. Your loyalty inspires us, and we are hopeful for the next twenty years.

Thank you to my fellow student editors, Professors Matthew Neill Null and Sarah Kruse, and members of Bryant University staff for helping make this issue possible.

Matthew Yuen

Student Fiction Editor

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as Student Poetry Editor for the *Bryant Literary Review*, and I enjoyed reading the variety of poems. Although I am a Business major, after being selected for the position, it truly opened my eyes to the world of Liberal Arts. Whether I was reading a haiku, a free verse, or a narrative poem, the experience was one of a kind. All of the submissions were unique in their own way. The selections featured here vary in scope from observations of the mundane, to memories of the past, to family dynamics, to questions of politics and the social in the current moment. The voices range from some well-established authors to others who are budding new writers. In honor of the recent retirement of Tom Chandler, founding editor of the *Bryant Literary Review* and former Rhode Island Poet Laureate, we are delighted to include a new poem from current Rhode Island Poet Laureate, Tina Cane.

We appreciate your time and hope you enjoy reading the selected poems as much as we did!

Shannon Flaherty  
Student Poetry Editor

## *The Good Son*

WILLIAM TORPHY

I'm on Trailways, staring through dirty windows at mounds of snow piled on the side of the road. I couldn't face everyone's questions, their judgments. Even Shirley at the bank gave me a suspicious look when she handed me my cancelled savings book and the \$357.45 from my account this morning.

We've stopped in practically every town since I got on in Aurora, which is so far north that it might as well be in Canada. The dictionary definition of "aurora" is "dawn," but for me it means "dull." Forests surround the town, so dawn comes late and darkness arrives early, especially at this time of year. I've basically lived in the wilderness with grouchy bears all my life, but I'm out of the woods now and travelling on the Interstate through farmland. Silver silos and farmhouses. Frozen ponds and beaver dams. Battered cornstalks stretching to the horizon.

San Francisco, that's my plan. Stand on a steep hill, look all around and scatter small town rules and restrictions to the wind. I've wanted to leave home since I was thirteen, but I never thought it would happen like this. I know people in town are talking, agreeing that I'm a big disappointment. They'll focus on the sex part, not that I was a coward, not thinking about how I lied to save my own skin.

I bet Mom is crying right now and Dad is pissed. They'll go to church on Sunday and everyone will pray for my "safe return" like I've been kidnapped or abducted by aliens. Reverend Perry will read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but he'll be thinking Leviticus.

Kids called me a fag. I thought it was because I was a brown-nose. An Honors student. Teachers liked me. I got all A's except in math. I memorized *Webster's Unabridged* backwards and forwards. I won the county spelling bee two years in a row and qualified to compete in the 1994 state championship this spring. Not exactly things that make anyone Mr. Popularity at my high school. Once in a while a girl would tell me she'd kill to have my thick brown hair. But I'm almost as skinny as I was in junior high and I have a bad case of acne which my doctor calls moderate but looks like the Pyrenees to me.

I tried out for the track team because I can run fast. That's how I dated girls, too, running, always double-dating because it was safer. When a girl wanted to kiss, I gave her a light one on the lips or a peck on the cheek. Matt Hendricks never hid the fact that he liked guys, which takes a lot of courage in a town like ours. He even tried to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at school last year, but the principal, Mrs. Greggs, said it was "inappropriate for a Christian community." No one would have joined anyway except Matt's girlfriends in theater club. Mr. Willits always made Matt's life in gym class hell, assigning him extra pushups and joking that his boys should be careful in the showers. The jocks harassed him all the time too. "Matt's a fag. Matt sucks dick. Matt's a pussy!"

Matt must have worked-out all summer because, shock and awe, he returned to school all muscles. The braces on his teeth were gone. He was suddenly an A+, a hunk like the centerfold models in the *Playgirl* magazines I shoplifted from Johnson's Thrift. His biceps competed with the football players who he parodied, walking around school with an ironic swagger. Some of the girls started flirting with him, thinking if maybe they could convert him he'd make a great catch, a smart, good-

looking guy whose daddy owned the biggest supermarket in town. This made the jocks hate him more than ever.

I tried to convince myself that I was just taking a scientific interest in his metamorphosis. But I developed some pretty crazy fantasies. Matt and me making-out in the showers after school. Matt and me jerking each other off in the choir loft at church. Matt and me fucking in the produce section of his daddy's store. I went out of my way to shadow him, passing by his locker between classes or sitting near the table where he ate lunch with his clique of girlfriends.

Mystery meatloaf was on the school lunch menu so I decided to grab a Hot Pocket at the house. I headed toward the shortcut along the river and spotted Matt's car parked at the bridge. Matt was in it, Bronski Beat's "Small Town Boy" playing on the stereo. I pretended not to see him but he rolled down the window and shouted, "Hey, Jason, you want a ride?" I shook my head and kept on walking, eager to say yes but afraid. He opened the passenger door. "How about joining me? I have the new Sheryl Crow CD."

Before I knew it, I was sitting in the passenger seat. I swear I don't remember making the move. He was chattering about something but I didn't hear a word he was saying. I couldn't take my eyes off his full lips. The car was cold. I remember his breath making clouds. He kissed me and I kissed him back and he pulled me toward him and I felt like I was falling into a deep well with no bottom to it. His hands started working their way inside my fly. I pulled away at first and then I didn't. He yanked at my pants and grabbed my junk. I felt his lips graze my dick and then go down on it. I closed my eyes and pushed my head back against the headrest. I had imagined being that close to another guy more times than I could count. I was so excited it only took about ten seconds.



The windows were foggy from our making-out, but when I opened my eyes I could see faces pressed against the glass. Their spiked hair, Goth makeup and nose rings made them look like ghouls. It was those two snitches Emily and Sarah, gobbling like turkeys on speed. “Dick suckers! Ass packers!”

I pushed Matt away, pulled up my pants and bolted from the car.

The Goth Sisters’ jeers attracted a bunch of jocks smoking in the parking lot. They came running, whooping and bellowing just like they do before a football game. They surrounded the car and started pounding on the hood and windows.

Matt must have been totally freaked. One of the guys gave me a look that scared me. “He offered to give me a ride,” I shouted. “And then he tried to put the make on me!”

My lie must have set them all off. They pulled Matt out of the driver’s seat and took turns shoving him around, bellowing: “Cocksucker! Faggot!” Matt howled back, “White trash hicks!” They threw him on the ground and started kicking him. They just kept kicking and kicking. They were snarling and howling like a pack of wolves fast on a deer. Matt tried to protect his head with his arms. His mouth was bleeding and his scalp was bloody. I could almost taste the blood, like clenching a metal knife between your teeth.

I heard Mr. Willits’ whistle blow. I turned and ran when I saw Mrs. Greggs rushing toward us with a group of kids. Halfway home, I heaved my breakfast onto the frozen riverbank.

Mom and Dad were both at work. I grabbed a juice box from the fridge and staggered upstairs. I slammed my bedroom door and collapsed on my bed, my pulse beating in my throat. The news would spread fast.

By the afternoon bell everyone at school would know what happened. Mrs. Greggs would call me into her office. Mom would find out about it from some busybody and she would tell Dad. There was no telling what he would do.

I buried my head in a pillow. I was dead meat.

\*\*\*

Hail is pounding on the metal roof of the bus, beading on the windows like crystal bracelets. It makes the landscape look all distorted like a Salvador Dali painting.

We're passing an Indian casino with a giant neon wigwam on top of the roof. It reminds me of the "genuine Indian powwow" the folks took Kat and me to see one summer. Loads of monster trucks and SUVs in the parking lot owned by white folks emptying their wallets at slots and gaming tables owned by red folks. The Car Castle next door is closed. My dad always says, "What's the sense of washing your car in the middle of winter?"

*Mount Pleasant. 1 mile.* I don't see any mount, just a Texaco station and an Arby's. More signs on the road: *Free Alignments*. I definitely need one of those right now. *His & Her Hair Salon*. Which style would I ask for?

The bus pulls up to Carson's Family Restaurant. *Closed for the Winter*. A family huddles together at the curb. They look like they're Mexican, from someplace south of the border anyway. The father has the boy and girl pulled up close to him. He's wearing a straw cowboy hat like the workers wear at the truck farms all summer. The mother is tiny, not much taller than the two kids.

The pneumatic door opens with a hiss and a blast of freezing air whips through the bus. The family gathers up their belongings and the

mother climbs onboard followed by the boy and the little girl. The father gets on last. Skipping down the aisle, the boy turns and pokes his sister in the stomach. The father says something sharp to him in Spanish.

It's still hailing. Everything outside looks like it's underwater.

\*\*\*

I pushed the lock on my bedroom door, opened a window and lit a joint. The smoke curled over my anxiety and I floated until I heard the front door open and slam shut. Thinking it could be Mom, I mashed the joint out on a sandal, but it was my sister. You can't mistake Kat. Her shoes drop on the floor with a loud thud and she tromps up the stairs sounding like a herd of horses.

Kat is only sixteen, a year younger than me, but she's way more advanced in certain departments, more confident and rebellious. She skips school sometimes with her friend Annie and defies our parent's curfews. Her latest insurrection is becoming a vegetarian. "I think I must be adopted," she says. "Maybe I was a crack baby."

Sometimes our father gets so angry I think that he will hit her.

Kat calls me Mr. Suck-Up, teases that I always play it safe. I'm the Good Son and she's the Bad Seed. Still, we confide in one another. When she told me that she was having sex with Brad Daley, I confessed that I had a "thing" for Matt Hendricks. She didn't seem surprised at all and laughed. "I know you better than you know yourself, Jason."

I supposed she must have come home early to bust my balls about what had happened at lunchbreak, but Kat made a beeline to the bathroom, gagging. I could hear her vomiting. She flushed the toilet and knocked at my door. "Are you in there, Jason? Can we talk?"

We have a family a rule. Our bedroom doors are supposed to be left open unless privacy is absolutely required. It's probably some guideline

our parents read about in *Midwest Christian Family*. Kat of course barges in anyway, probably hoping she'll catch me doing something embarrassing, like jerking off.

"Can we talk?" Her voice sounded almost pleading which meant the buzz at school must have been even worse than I thought. I really didn't feel like dealing with her right then so I only opened the door a crack. Kat's eyes were red like she had been crying.

I pulled her inside and closed the door. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

She brushed pot seeds onto the carpet and plunked down on my bed. "The entire universe is blathering, Jason."

"What are you talking about?"

"Like, you and Matt Hendricks making out in his car."

"That's not true. He came on to me. I fought him off."

"Really? Like didn't you tell me you had the hots for him?"

"Kat, it was awful. They beat the holy crap out of Matt."

"I know. It was really crazy. I was eating lunch with Annie and then suddenly Mrs. Greggs and all these kids were yelling and running outside. Someone called 911. The ambulance came and took Matt to ER."

I knew that I was totally screwed. "There's no way I can go back to school. What are Mom and Dad going to say? They're going to kill me," I wailed.

"Mom and Dad are going to kill us both."

"At least you've been doing it with a church-approved member of the opposite sex."

She screwed her face up, looking forlorn. I should have known something was up with her but I was way too concerned about my own problem to ask.

“I mean, why did you do it at school in his car, Jason?”

“The same reason you’re having sex with what’s-his-name?”

“So it looks like gay conversion therapy camp for you this summer.”

“Not funny.”

“And permanent exile for me.”

“What do you mean?”

Kat gave me a sad, crumpled look. “I’m pregnant.”

I *had* noticed that she had gained weight lately and her hair looked dry. I automatically reached out to check for split ends but she swatted me away.

“Pregnant! Are you sure? What are you going to do?”

She drew her knees to her chest and hugged herself. “Annie knows a doctor. I’m making Brad pay for it.”

“You’re getting rid of it? You can’t do that, Kat!”

“Oh, for God’s sakes Jason, you’re not exactly Reverend Perry. Brad a daddy? Like that’s ever going to happen. I’m not going to keep it.”

She laid her head against my shoulder, sobbing. I put my arms around her, telling her everything would be okay and wondering if her “little problem” might divert Mom and Dad’s attention from my own.

\*\*\*

The Mexican family stow their bundles in the overhead and take two rows of seats across from me. The kids climb in the row in front of the parents. The boy takes out an old handheld Radio Shack console from his backpack, just like the first one I had. The little girl holds a doll on her lap and makes it do a jerky dance. The father takes the mother’s hand and kisses it, reminding me of how lonely I’m feeling.

I had a doll once too. I wanted a Ken but settled for an ugly troll I found at a yard sale. I only played with it in the basement. I liked to tease

its long bright yellow hair and make clothes for it from scraps I found in Mom's sewing room. The troll was ugly and weird, so I could pretend it wasn't a real doll. *Only girls play with dolls*. It was my secret. I felt ashamed but also excited about doing something forbidden.

That was how I felt when I stepped into Matt's car. I can see him lying on the ground, his clothes torn and covered in blood. I just can't deal with that right now.

"Dubuque! Five minutes!" the driver's voice blares over the P.A.

The bus slips across the state line. The sides of the road are jammed with fast food places, strip malls and subdivisions. The sun appears like a fanfare, settling a patch of light over a Wal-Mart before it retreats behind the clouds again.

The Mexican kids turn and stare at me with big brown eyes. It must be rough travelling on buses all the time. I'm starving. I hope we stop long enough to grab something to eat.

\*\*\*

Kat left for Annie's. When I called the Gay Crisis Line in Minneapolis, once before, I talked with Mark, an older guy with a mellow voice. He told me that he had come out in college and that I had a lot to look forward to in a couple years. A guy named Jim answered this time. "Tell me why you've called, Jason." He sounded a little geeky, like someone who volunteered because he couldn't get a hot date.

I told him about what happened that morning. Jim asked me if I felt in any physical danger. I told him that I was at home but scared about going back to school.

"Coming-out is not easy. Have you had a discussion with your parents yet?" I could tell he was reading from a script.

“No way. They would totally freak out. They’re fundamentalists. They believe that gays go to hell.”

“Is there anyone who you feel comfortable talking with?”

“Not really.” Minister Perry quoted from Leviticus practically every Sunday. Our high school’s guidance counselor was a retired Marine sergeant who thought ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ was a Communist plot to undermine the U.S. armed forces. My homeroom teacher went to the same church as our family.

I heard the front door open, the rustling of paper bags. It was Mom.

“Sorry, Jim, I have to go.”

“Jason? Katherine!” I tossed my stash under the bed and messed up my hair. She knocked twice before I opened the door, blinking and yawning, pretending that I’d been asleep. My mother looked distraught. She was frowning, her forehead wrinkled, and her hair, usually lacquered in tight curls, hung loose around her face.

“Emily’s mother stopped by at work this afternoon.”

Of course she would have. She was a busybody cunt like her daughter.

“She mentioned something—disturbing—about you and that boy Matt. You were seen in his car and—well, Emily’s mother said there was an—incident—between you and an awful fight.”

My parents try hard to be good Christian people. They avoid talking about stuff. My mother pretends to be meek and everything but underneath she’s as stubborn as Kat. The difference is that instead of raising hell she gets all sullen and silent until she gets her way.

“You’ve never given your dad and me any reason to think—”

My mother lives in denial so it wasn’t hard keeping to my story.

“Matt asked me to help him with a trig problem and used it as an excuse to make a pass at me. I pushed him away and ran from the car and—”

“I just pray your father hasn’t heard anything yet.” Her voice trailed off and she gave me a plaintive glance, as if it were all too much for her. “We can talk about this later. I should put the groceries away.”

Mom needed to believe I had done nothing wrong for her own sake. I was the good son.

Dinner that night was tense even though I could tell that Mom hadn’t told Dad anything yet. I pushed my food around my plate and excused myself early.

Kat called me later from Annie’s house. “I thought you should know. Matt is still in the hospital but at least he’s not in a coma or anything.”

My stomach was churning. “What about the jocks who beat him up?”

“Two of them were taken to the station but they were released. You need to tell the police what happened, Jason.”

“Are you kidding, Kat? No way.”

“It’s all going to come out one way or another.”

“You mean like with you and the kid?”

“That’s real nice, Jason.”

“I’m sorry. I’m upset.”

“That makes two of us.”

“I think I’m going to be leaving, Kat.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have to get out. I can’t stand it anymore.”



“Please don’t, go Jason. I’ll be all alone.”

“You have lots of friends.”

“But I won’t have my brother.”

“You’ll still have me. I just won’t be around for a while. I know that you’ll be okay. You’re stronger than me.”

“I’m not as strong as you think I am. Take care of yourself. I’ll miss you.” After she hung up, I wanted to call her back but what else was there to say?

I stuffed my backpack with a sweater, a pair of jeans, my favorite t-shirts, warm socks and some underwear. After the folks went to bed, I snuck into the kitchen and grabbed a couple juice boxes and filled a bag with snacks. And just before I left the house this morning, I searched for the silver cross and chain my parents gave me and fastened it around my neck. I don’t know why. I thought I was done with all that.

\*\*\*

An old guy in the restroom smiles oddly at me but I ignore him. The station’s cafe is closed but the vending machines are working, so I get a candy bar and a soda and head back to the bus. It’s windy and snowing and so cold it hurts my lungs. The bus is heading south, right?

Three men wearing camouflage jackets and carrying rifle cases are arguing with the bus driver. They look like kissing cousins of the survivalist guy back home who stumbles into town every few months to stock up on cigarettes, ammo and beer.

“You can’t take those onboard,” the driver insists. “Interstate Transportation Rules.”

The older guy shifts his Day-Glo orange cap backwards. “We stowed them in the overheads on the last bus.”

“I don’t care what you did on the last bus. You can’t bring them on mine.”

The two younger guys grip their rifle cases and step toward the driver.

“Easy, dudes,” their older friend cautions. “We need to get to Des Moines by nightfall.” My mouth is full of Snickers. Otherwise I’d laugh at the cowboy movie cliché.

“You boys need to make the right decision real quick,” the driver says. “This bus is leaving in two minutes.” He grasps the lid of the baggage compartment to pull it down.

“Total bullshit!” the youngest one shouts.

I don’t have an easy time with angry straight men so I get on the bus and take my seat just in time to see the three grizzlies stash their cases. The youngest one stomps onboard first. “Motherfucker,” he bellows, darting glances at everyone in the bus, and takes an aisle seat in an empty row so he can have it to himself. Just like the jocks hog all the big booths at the A&W after a football game. The little girl and the boy are in the row behind him playing a game of patty-cake and singing in Spanish. The man bolts from his seat, scowls at the kids and shouts at the father: “What the hell are you wetbacks doing on our bus?”

Real nice. I wonder what he would call me. Fag, Fairy, Cock-sucker? Pansy, Poof, Queen? Cock Jockey, Donut Muncher, Fudge Packer? Ass Bandit, Bone Smuggler, Butt Pirate?

The father takes his kids’ hands and moves to the seats behind him. He studies the man as if he’s a piece of broken farm machinery.

“Who you staring at, spic?”

His friends chuckle.

The muscles on the Mexican's forearms are twitching. He could probably handle all three of these guys if he had to.

"You should all be goddamned deported! You hear me, Pancho?" The hunter sneers and stretches, showing off his beer belly. "No parlo Americano, huh?" He tromps down the aisle and leaves the door to the toilet open so everyone can hear him pee. He heads back, zipping his fly, and patting the little girl on the head as he passes.

The father stands up.

"Sit back down, wetback."

It hits me. He's no different than the sick morons who attacked Matt. It's like a switch flips inside me. All the anger I've stored up. All the stupid crap I've heard from idiots and said nothing. "Why don't you leave them alone!"

A hostile leer appears on his face. "What you going do about it, faggot?"

"You're a cacophonous cretin with a puny phallus." *Webster's Unabridged.*

His friends choke with laughter and punch one another. Big Mouth lurches toward me. I clench my fists. I'm about to get my head bashed in but I don't care.

"Hey, stop this right now!" yells the driver. Gears squeal and the bus edges off the highway onto the shoulder. He scrambles off his seat and heads toward us. "Stuff it right now, if you guys plan on getting home," he tells the hunters. "Otherwise I'm contacting the highway patrol. Your choice."

"We ain't doing nothing," growls Big Mouth.

The driver heads back to the front, grabs his radio and waggles it in the air. "Let's see what the authorities say."

“Cool it, man,” warns the older one. “We need to get to Des Moines without you making any more trouble.”

“You win.” Before sitting down, he flicks his fingers at the family. “Boo!”

I unclench my fists. My palms are sore from the pressure of my nails.

The father nods at me and touches his heart. “Gracias, senior.” He whispers something to his wife. She reaches into a bundle on the floor, takes out a package wrapped in waxed paper and hands it to me. “Un burrito para ti,” she declares. “You enjoy.”

She breaks into a smile, and I could burst into tears. Leaving home has opened up a big hole in me and until now I’ve had nothing to fill it with but guilt. I was selfish with Kat, thinking only of myself. And I can’t take back what happened to Matt. But at least I’ve finally stood up to a bully. Maybe I’m not the coward I thought I was.

I unfasten the chain and the silver crucifix from around my neck and place it in the mother’s hand. I manage to cobble together a sentence from my one year of Spanish. “Quiero que lo tengas.” *I want you to have it.*

She looks down at the cross in surprise and tries to give it back. I keep on insisting she keep it until, at last, she closes her hands around it. “Muchas gracias. Usted es muy amable, señor.” It’s the first time I’ve ever been called ‘sir.’

“Des Moines! One half hour and none too soon!” shouts the driver.

\*\*\*

I see wolves and a wounded deer, tracks of its blood across the snow. I see Kat holding up her squalling newborn.

I wake up and wonder if I had dreamt it all. Matt’s lips against mine. Kat telling me she was pregnant. Leaving home.

I glance across the aisle. The family is gone, vanished during the night at some stop along the way. A piece of paper lies on the seat next to me. On it is a kid's drawing of a boy asleep on a bus. Outside the windows lollipop trees glow brilliant green. A bright yellow sun's rays stream across a blue sky filled with puffy white clouds. Another boy stands by the side of the road, smiling and waving. □

## *Vaya Con Dios*

RUSS ALLISON LOAR

I could kill you with this little finger,  
He says,  
Jutting the scabrous thing out into the shivering night,  
Pointed menacingly toward the enemy  
Only he can see,  
While tourists scuttle by  
Keeping a wary eye on this ragged man  
Who has me cornered by his confessions,  
And his need  
To tell me how three tours of duty  
Left him so - strung - out.

He is enlarged, distended,  
Eager to tell anyone on this street  
About his hotel room and how much it costs,  
Only a few dollars a month left over for food  
From disability checks that come in the mail,  
How his first wife drove him crazy,  
How he was crazy anyway because of the war,  
How he killed a man he thought was the enemy  
But it was long after he returned  
And the man was just a man,  
How he spent thirteen years in prison  
And how *I don't want to be like this anymore,*  
And the hospital

Where he missed his last appointment with the psychiatrist,  
 How he wants to find his way back to something good inside,  
 But this guy grabbed him by the throat last night  
 And threw him against a wall,  
 How he gets so angry sometimes  
 He just explodes,  
 How the woman he lives with made him so angry  
 He punched his fist through a window  
 And he shows me the open cuts  
 On his dirt-encrusted hand and arm.

I am tempest-tossed  
 Between seeing him as my forsaken, younger brother  
 And my murderer,  
 My insane executioner who forgot why,  
 Why he was on the street in the first place,  
 To get a little money so he could buy something to eat.

I give him five dollars and he nearly weeps,  
 Puts his festering arm around me,  
 Hugs me tight as deeply disturbed tourists  
 Sidle by apprehensively.

*Vaya con Dios man, Vaya con Dios!*  
 He shouts as I walk briskly away,  
 Inspired,  
 Repulsed,  
 Ultimately torn.

Vaya con Dios to you too buddy.

# *Monkey Time*

ERIC GREINKE

Communication devices destroy communication.

Text messages erode the language,

stripping her in public, violating  
her adverbial flesh & adjective soul.

We wait for the next exit, hope  
the infrastructure doesn't implode.

When the bridges are collapsed  
the traffic will be blocked.

You can't go around every river.  
Some of them must be crossed.

Yesterday two icons, four superstars  
& a diva met up for an exclusive confab.

Subjects included skin care & hair care.  
Gift bags were filled with decadent cosmetics.

Their collaborative conclusions were confidential,  
producing several viral YouTube videos.



Online commentary trended ominously  
& friendships ebbed like a flood tide.

This morning a superhero & a megastar  
announced acquisition of mechanical hearts,

shifting media attention to themselves while  
simultaneously stimulating a lucrative feud.

All a-twitter, many lonely alien planets  
refriended, all sentimental, some subliminal.

Several dictators dictated suggestions  
to the world at large, modestly attempting

to ignite some brand new world orders,  
each of them a mock monarchy.

Meanwhile, canine support continues,  
even though it's already monkey time.

## *When Fall Arrives*

DAVID JAMES

Fall in four days and another year  
winds down to a grinding stop.  
The apples ripen in the sun  
while the serrano peppers implode.  
The fuchsia sends out its last blooms  
for the frantic bees.  
One blink and the trees will be on fire,  
blowing apart like IED's,  
cutting the truth across our hearts.  
Another blink and the world will be buried  
in white, frozen and invisible for months.

\* \*

The glory days come and go like memories,  
lost at the end of my fingertips.  
I reach out and grab air.  
Last night, I misplaced the harvest moon  
in a clear sky of stars.  
It was there, I swear to you,  
and when I went to show my wife,  
it was gone.

\* \*

I take nothing for granted anymore:  
waking up, drinking sake, staring into the sweet face  
of our first grandchild, one week old.  
As he sleeps in my arms,  
he smiles, or at least it looks like that.  
I remember my Uncle Darrel's words  
from another life: "Look, he's talking to the angels."

\* \*

Four days when fall arrives,  
there will be no way to keep it here.  
I find myself talking to the angels:  
be with my family, watch over us,  
keep this baby safe and strong and healthy,  
give us this day  
    what we want  
        but don't always deserve.

# *Dog Whistle*

TINA CANE

It begins with a tweet   the bird kind   in which a friend of mine  
deems the hummingbird   her spirit animal   delicate engine  
come to sip   just as my text comes in   its ding serendipitous  
nectar   red as blood but thin like water   tenuous  
needle and wings   quick to whip   a portrait  
of what it looks like   to be going nowhere  
fast   we talk about art   and life as Sisyphus  
with a sponge   the nature of crumbs  
how they regenerate   no emoji for that  
or for the *de*generation of all the climates  
known systems   in which we live

## *Saying Goodbye in Brussels*

LAWRENCE F. FARRAR

It was a day like many others that had passed since Brett Smalley's arrival in Dusseldorf. It differed, however, in one significant respect for the sales representative of Chicago-based Windham Metallurgical, Inc. On this autumn day in 1975, Brett would drive his wife and kids to Brussels to put them on a plane for the United States; they would not be coming back.

Brett gazed out the window of his sixth-floor office and monitored the progress of a pair of barges snaking their way along the Rhine. Located on Count Adolf Platz, his building afforded a sweeping view of the river, alive with barges, motor launches, and cruise boats, even a sailboat or two, set below a near-flawless sky. The vista pleased him. As he slipped on a dark blue blazer and adjusted a sedately-patterned Italian scarf, Brett whistled a happy tune. It mattered not a whit to him that his coworkers deemed him a calculating self-promoter. It mattered not a whit to him that they treated him with less-than-complete respect. These things troubled him little because he'd persuaded himself their attitudes derived from simple envy.

Approaching forty, Brett looked at himself and liked what he saw. He believed with certainty women found him irresistible. Conceit embraced him like a best friend. Perhaps it was the neatly-trimmed beard and mustache, the wavy gray-blond hair, the blue eyes, the impeccable taste in dress and manner that he assumed drew women to him—all characteristics he credited himself with possessing to an unmatched

degree. He also assumed women, young and old alike, viewed him as a bit of a rogue. He cultivated the image and sought to perpetuate it.

Standing in the common area of the office suite he shared, Brett announced, "Well, I'm on my way. See you all on Monday."

Harry Maxwell, an ordinarily jovial fellow, appeared to swallow whatever it was he'd intended to say. He simply said from behind his desk, "Give Adele our best. Tell her Sally and I will miss her and the kids."

Brett nodded. "Right. I'll tell her." Brett disliked Harry; he disliked Sally even more. The two meddlers had been especially supportive of Brett's wife, Adele. None of their damned business.

"I expect it will be hard to say goodbye to the kids," Harry added. "That Mary is a little charmer."

"Yeah. It won't be easy. But then I don't see much of them anyway. Besides, once I drop them off at the airport, I expect I'll be able to get a good meal in Brussels. There's this great restaurant I know not far from the Grand Platz."

Brett went out and paused in the corridor. Through the half-open door, he heard Harry speak to Margaret Telford, the office director. "A good meal? Did you hear that? *A good meal*. That's a curious compensation. I wonder if that guy has any human feelings at all."

"All I know," Margaret said, "if there's such a thing as an elastic conscience, he's got one."

"That assumes he has a conscience," Harry added.

Envy. Pure envy, Brett thought to himself.

\*\*\*

Brett stopped the BMW sedan in front of his house in Benrath, a residential area near the Rhine and Castle Park, one favored by foreign

businessmen. The brick and stucco houses stood in disciplined rows, like well-behaved burghers. There would be no need to put the vehicle in the garage. The front door stood ajar, and the suitcases had been placed on the step. Adele clearly wanted to be on her way.

Well, so did Brett; time had come. He killed the motor, swung out of the driver's seat, and lingered for a moment admiring the midnight-blue car his wife denounced as an *egotistical indulgence*, as a *pathetic effort to behave twenty years younger than he was*. Indulgence, indeed. It was a sedan for Christ's sake—not the sports car he really wanted. Long ago, he had concluded her view of the world—and of life—was pinched and narrow; she just didn't get it. The car was his due; it symbolized the lifestyle to which he aspired, one she would never understand, never accept, and never be part of. He had good years to go, and he intended to live them.

Parked there on that cobblestone street lined with chestnut trees, the car appeared very much as it might in an upscale German magazine. Brett often sought to measure idealized images against reality, and he found it especially gratifying when his fantasies succeeded. This car, he thought, appealed to those with discernment, to those who appreciated a fine machine, to those who found ripping down the autobahn at 110 miles an hour an exhilarating experience. Adele grasped none of these things.

Brett extracted a handkerchief from his pocket, meticulously wiped away a blemish he'd spotted on the car door, then strolled up the brick sidewalk. It was an old house, but one that had been cared for and was well-preserved. Halfway to the entrance he stopped and glanced up at one of the gabled windows. He caught a fading glimpse of Adele's face; she must have been on watch for him. She had no doubt become

impatient, even though he'd only arrived ten minutes late. Among her off-putting behaviors, her impatience particularly bothered him. Well, that would soon be a thing of the past.

Brett shifted his attention to the sky where dark-bellied clouds had begun to crowd the western horizon. Cologne television had forecast rain but it was not likely to arrive until evening. Brett hoped so. He did not relish the idea of driving to Brussels in the rain.

By the time Brett let himself in, Adele had come down the stairs to the parlor. A bone-thin woman, she teetered on the brink of middle age, physically and psychologically, if not chronologically; her face, which he once considered pretty, was now severe, the effect intensified by her red-rimmed dark eyes and frame of brown hair. It was the face of a woman whose pride had been wounded. Outfitted in slacks, blouse, and a light sweater, she stood ready for the trip back to America.

"Frau Bremer thought you might want something to eat," Adele said. "I told her no, but she went ahead and made sandwiches anyway. They're in the kitchen."

"She needn't have bothered. I've already eaten."

"She's worried you'll let her go once you're *alone* here."

"I hadn't thought about it. Where are the kids? Are they ready?"

"Tommy is in his room saying goodbye to Konrad."

"He really likes that damn hamster. Not very sanitary, if you ask me."

"Tommy's six years old, Brett. Konrad is the only pet he's ever had. And now he's leaving it behind."

"He'll get over it. I'm sure you can get him a new one in the States."

Adele just looked at him, shaking her head in quiet exasperation, then said, "Here's Mary now."



Frau Bremer, a plumpish, gray-haired woman, had entered the room with the Smalley's four-year-old daughter Mary clinging to her hand. Neither the housemaid nor the child looked happy.

"She's ready to go, Mrs. Smalley," the German woman said in a tremulous voice. She could burst into tears at any moment. "I put on those Oshkosh B'Gosh overalls your mother sent her."

Brett extended his open arms and said, "Why don't you give Daddy a hug?"

Instead, Mary fled into the folds of Frau Bremer's long skirt.

"Not very friendly, is she?" Brett said.

"She's hardly seen you in the last several weeks. What do you expect?"

Tommy came into the room, head down, dragging his feet. A tousle-haired, smallish boy, he exuded unhappiness when he spoke. "Why are we going away? I like it here."

"I'm sure your mother told you, Tommy. You're going back to Michigan to visit Granny. I have to stay here to do my job."

The boy regarded his father with disbelief. "I like it here," he said again. "I don't like Granny's house. It smells funny and it's dark and the floors creak."

Brett consulted his watch. "Twelve o'clock. We'd better get going. I'll load the bags." He gathered up two suitcases and carried them to the car. He made another trip with two more small bags, then placed all four in the trunk. Arms folded, he lounged against the car waiting for his family. Despite the casual pose, his tapping foot betrayed impatience—the same impatience he attributed to Adele.

After five minutes his wife appeared with the kids, shook hands with Frau Bremer, and came to the car. The housemaid hovered on the step, her apron drawn up to her face in two hands to hide her tears.

“I thought you were right behind me,” Brett said to his wife.

“Sorry. We were hunting for Mary’s Elmo.” Barely able to restrain herself, she said, “I know you’re in a hurry to get rid of us.” Bitterness laced her voice.

“Those are hurtful words, Adele. It’s just that . . .”

“It’s true, Brett. You know it’s true. Your little playmate’s probably waiting for you right now in some cheap hotel.” She slid stiffly into the back seat with the children. “Let’s go.”

Brett got in and turned on the ignition. Adele had been right about one thing. The sooner they got free of one another the better. But she had it wrong about Maria. The German shop girl who waited for him did so in the Brussels Renaissance, hardly a cheap hotel. He wouldn’t be savoring those mussels by himself. Not at all. But then how would Adele know? She’d stopped asking questions long ago.

\*\*\*

Perched uncomfortably between the children, Adele spoke not a word as they drove out of the suburbs and on to the autobahn in the direction of Maastricht. For a long time, she maintained an icy silence, seemingly caught up in watching the farmlands, villages, and factories roll by. Finally, she said, “How long will this take?”

“A little over two hours. It’s 220 kilometers or so.”

More silence. Then she said, “When we get to the airport, you can just let us out. I’ll get a porter to help with the bags.”

“Oh, come now, Adele. No need to put on your martyr robe. I’ll see you to the gate.”

“We’re going to be on our own anyway, Brett. We might as well get started sooner rather than later.”

“I said I’ll help you.” Okay, he said to himself, if that’s the way you want it.

She ignored him. “Do we have to go so fast? You have two children in the car.”

“It’s the autobahn, Adele. It’s perfectly safe.”

“You’re going too fast.”

“For Christ’s sake, Adele. Did you see that Mercedes that just blew by? He’s been flashing his lights. Trying to get me to speed up.”

“I wish you’d watch your language.”

“You won’t have to hear me for much longer. Anything else?”

“No. Nothing we haven’t been over a hundred times.”

A stultifying silence saturated the car as they flew past Liege. Adele stared straight ahead. The children dozed.

Brett felt no need to engage in self-reflection. After all, he had a life to live. He’d already told Adele he’d send her money. What else did she expect? People move on. He had moved on. No point dragging it out. The children would adjust. This was how his mind worked. Like the driver of the Mercedes who passed him, Brett, in turn, impatiently flicked his lights at the car ahead. The jerk was only doing 140 kilometers an hour.

Just as Brett entered the Brussels ring road, a blackening sky poured in and rain splattered on the windshield. Traffic thickened, and Brett had to slow down.

A North Sea front had moved in early, and brilliant forks of lightning relentlessly lit the sky. Within moments the flailing wipers could barely fight back the sheets of rain that engulfed the roadway and the car.

"I don't like it," Tommy said. "It's scary." His little sister flinched at each flash of lightning and began to whimper.

"Don't worry, children," Adele said. "We're almost there." She said to Brett, "Do you think our flight might be delayed?"

"Oh, I don't think so. It will probably clear up before long." He had no real idea of the expected duration of the bad weather. But he *did* have a dinner reservation. The place enjoyed real renown and he didn't want to lose his spot. "Even if it's raining, with today's aircraft they can lift off and fly right out in no time."

Brett's words failed to reassure her. "I just hope we don't have to wait around in the airport. The trip is long enough as it is."

Brett said nothing and peered through the rain-swept windshield. "There it is." He had sighted the turnoff leading to the Brussels International Airport at Zaventem. Traffic had coagulated in a rain-soaked mess, and he didn't want to get stuck waiting around at the airport. Why drag it out? After all, Adele had fended off his offer to help them through the departure.

The rain cascaded down the face of the multistoried terminal building that stood like a glittering glass box. Brett maneuvered through the double queue of buses, taxis, and cars that crowded the vehicle lanes in front of the entrance and found a place at the curb.

"You sure you don't want me to park and give you a hand?"

"No," she said. "We'll manage."

He'd anticipated this answer. Any other would have discomfited him.

They stood uncomfortably under the entrance portico, while a porter trundled away a cart laden with their luggage. After a strained interval, Brett said, "I guess it's time to say goodbye." When he

awkwardly tried to embrace her, Adele turned away. "Too late for that. Goodbye, Brett," she said.

"How about a hug for Daddy?" Brett said to Mary. She, too, pivoted away and retreated behind her mother.

Then, contrary to Brett's expectation, Tommy ran to his father and clung to his leg. "I don't want to go," the boy sobbed.

A bit flummoxed, Brett said, "You'll like it in Michigan, Tommy. Granny has a nice dog you can play with." He reached down and loosened Tommy's grip. "Shake hands, now, and go with your mother."

"That dog tried to bite him the last time we were there," Adele said. Without looking back, she marched off with the children toward the check-in counter.

\*\*\*

Traffic crawled and then, owing to a crash, stalled altogether. His family out of mind, Brett daydreamed about Maria Mueller: her wonderfully soft lips, large blue eyes, long legs and cascading chestnut hair. She was not, he thought, overly bright and seemed somewhat shy, but she compensated; in bed her shyness gave way to wantonness. A nice find.

Much to his unhappiness, it took Brett more than an hour to reach the hotel. When he arrived, Brett turned the car over to a valet, quickly crossed the lobby, and rode an elevator to the third floor. He knocked gently on Maria's room door. "I'm here. It's me." There was a near lilt in his voice.

When Maria unlatched the door and let him in, Brett smiled broadly and said, "They're gone. Now, you lucky girl, you have me all to yourself."

To his disappointment, Maria was dressed demurely in a skirt, blouse and cardigan. Brett's daydream had led him to anticipate something more alluring.

“Yes. They are gone.” She said it matter-of-factly, without enthusiasm and without a reciprocal smile. When he kissed her, she responded mechanically, without passion.

“What’s the matter, Maria? It’s what we’ve been waiting for.”

“Yes. What we have been waiting for.” She pulled free of his embrace and sat on the edge of the bed. “I need a drink.” She wouldn’t even look at him.

Brett said, “I think I’ll have one too.” He fetched a bottled water from the fridge and went to a side table stocked with liquor and an ice bucket. He made two scotch and waters and handed one to Maria. “It’s really coming down out there. I hope it stops before we go to dinner. Might be hard getting a cab.” The ordinary bustling sounds of the city were absorbed by the rain. Rain—all he could hear.

Maria drained her glass in two swallows. “Were they sad?” she said. “Your wife? The children?”

“I suppose. But once they get to the States, they’ll be fine.”

“Very sad? Were they very sad?”

“I don’t know. Tommy had to leave his hamster. And Mary was pretty attached to Frau Bremer.” Brett turned back from the window.

Maria lit a cigarette and took short, nervous puffs. “Maybe you shouldn’t have . . .”

“Hey. It’s not the end of the world for them. They’ll be fine.”

“I hope so. I don’t feel nice.”

“Anyway, how about us? I haven’t seen you in two days.” He put down his drink and tried to pull her down on the bed.

But she resisted. “No. Not now. I want to finish my cigarette.”

“Why the face? What’s bothering you anyway?” Miffed, Brett sank into an easy chair. He picked up his drink and swirled the ice in his glass.

“You said you really love me. Do you really love me?” Maria said.

“What else do you want me to do? I’ve packed them off to the US, haven’t I?”

“I don’t know. Maybe there was some better way. Maybe this is not good.”

“Where’s all this remorse coming from? None of this seemed to bother you before.”

But in fact, he’d detected signs of her growing feelings of guilt much earlier. She’d been restrained when he first told her he was sending them home, and as the departure date approached, she had become increasingly uneasy, increasingly moody. He reassured himself; once Adele and the children flew away, everything would be fine, just fine.

Maria pushed back a straggle of hair. “Don’t you think it is cruel?”

“Necessary, Maria—not cruel. We’ll all be better off. We’ll be happier. They’ll be happier. You’re a very considerate person, Maria. That’s one reason I am so drawn to you.”

“Really? I thought it was for sex. You said your wife was, how you say, a cold fish.”

“Well. That too, but . . . Anyway, they will soon be safely on their way and you and I will be enjoying a nice dinner and a nice glass of wine. Starting a new chapter. Right?”

“Maybe you will send me away, too,” she said morosely.

“I’m going to take a shower,” Brett said. He sounded petulant. “I want to see a smile when I come out.”

When he emerged from the bathroom wrapped in a towel fifteen minutes later, he found Maria perched on a chair, her legs tucked beneath her. She had refilled her glass.

“Come on, Maria. Brighten up,” Brett said, his voice tinged with irritation. He snapped on the television set. “Maybe they’ll have an update on the weather.”

At first, he thought he had tuned in just such a broadcast. A newsman positioned in front of a map gestured with his hand toward an area of the North Sea not far out from Blankenberge. Then came a video clip of what appeared to be an armada of small boats crisscrossing a storm-tossed ocean. But the grim-faced man was no weather forecaster.

“What’s going on? What’s he saying, Maria? You speak French.”

Before she could answer, the broadcast cut to a shot of the Brussels Airport terminal. Her hand flew to her mouth. “It is a crash. An airplane crash.”

Brett riveted his attention on the screen. At a live press conference, a harried Belgian official sought to cope with a barrage of shouted questions from the reporters.

“What are they saying?” Brett asked again.

“It’s a bad crash. Oh, could it be...?”

“Could it be what?” he said. The question sent a convulsion roiling through his gut.

“It’s our fault.” Maria began to snifle, then to cry. “It’s my fault. It was the TWA flight to New York. It crashed into the water soon after the takeoff. They are all killed. Every one of them. Oh, Brett. Every one of them.”

He could not accept what he was hearing. An awful sense of loss struck him, one he could not have imagined earlier.

“I have to go to the airport,” he said, his voice shaking. “Wait for me here.”



\*\*\*

It seemed to take forever. Traffic crawled, and in his agitated state, Brett missed the airport off-ramp. When he finally did get back to the terminal, Brett encountered a disconcerting spectacle. The lounge to which he was directed brimmed with crying people, anxious people, angry people, all of them waiting for word of family members and friends. They wanted to reject what they had heard, wanted to believe the reports were wrong. There had to be some survivors. Perhaps the first reports overstated the extent of the tragedy. But such hopes soon curdled.

Brett pushed his way through the crowd toward one of two tables where harried airline representatives consulted passenger lists as distraught relatives and friends pleaded for information. There was no mistake; there had been no survivors. Boats at the crash site were now engaged in the recovery of bodies. A temporary morgue had been established in a nearby hangar, and some relatives had already identified remains brought in by helicopter.

“God, Smalley. It’s awful.” Brett recognized the speaker, a fellow member of the American Club in Dusseldorf. “I put three colleagues from the office on that plane,” the man said. “Apparently nobody made it.”

“My family was on the plane,” Brett said, touched by a spark of emotion.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Momentarily mute, the man stared at his shoe tops, uncertain of what to say. “I’m sorry,” he said again.

Brett nodded and threaded his way further forward to a table. The man directly ahead of him groaned in despair and shuffled away mumbling something unintelligible.

It seemed futile, but, like the others, Brett had to be certain. And, a grim prospect he wished he could reject, he had to determine whether or

not he would be required to make any identifications. Or if there would be any remains to identify.

“My name is Smalley. My wife and children were on the flight. Can you tell me if...?”

The young man behind the table looked at him through steel-framed glasses set on a prominent nose above a faint gray mustache. He said, “Yes, sir. I understand.” He then ran his finger down a column of names. “Please spell,” he said.

“S-M-A-L-L-E-Y. Three people.”

The clerk scanned the list a second time. “There have been some mistakes I fear to say. But I do not find this name.”

“Please check again. Is there some other list? A spelling error?” English was not the fellow’s first language.

While the man scrutinized the paper for a third time, Brett sensed the agitation and anguish of those waiting behind him.

The answer did not change. “I do not find this name.”

Brett had stepped away from the table, baffled and at a loss as to what to do next, when a familiar voice captured his attention. It was Harry Maxwell.

“I’ve been looking all over for you. They didn’t make the flight, Brett. They didn’t make the flight.”

A look of disbelief, and then of relief, transformed Brett’s face. “Didn’t make the flight?” he said weakly.

“Mary apparently got sick. They never even checked in. Adele couldn’t find you. Called the office. So I came right over. Traffic was impossible. Just got here a little while ago. They’re in the PanAm lounge. I said I’d look for you here.”

Brett stood transfixed, like someone unexpectedly pardoned for a heinous crime. “I should have waited. I just dropped them off. I . . .”

“Doesn’t matter. They’re here. And they’re fine. It’s right down the corridor. I saw Peter Jackson’s wife in that other line. I’d better check on her.” With those words, Harry walked away.

\*\*\*

The reason for the missed flight turned out to be uncomplicated. While they waited in line to check the bags, Mary had suddenly announced, “My tummy hurts,” followed by session of vomiting, multiple trips to the bathroom, and the appearance of a fever. By the time the child had got through her bout of nausea, clothes had been changed, and Adele’s misplaced passport (yes, that, too) located, the plane had finished boarding. A gate agent told Adele she could expedite their bags and, if they ran, they could still make the plane. But frazzled by the problems she’d had to deal with, Adele decided to wait for a later flight.

When Brett arrived, Adele said, “We could have been on that plane. We were so lucky.” She spoke in low tones to mask her concerns in front of the children. For a brief moment, there was a glimmer of affection in her voice. “Thanks for coming, Brett.”

“I was shocked when I heard the news. I only imagined the worst. Then I saw Harry. Good old Harry.”

Adele’s demeanor stiffened, and she said, “I’m not sure why I even felt the need to contact you. But I had the odd notion you might like to know we were safe. I had no idea where you had gone. So, I called the office. Harry came right over. I think he must have set a new land speed record.”

Not quite certain what, but aware something bad had happened, both children gravitated toward their father. “Can we go home now?” Tommy asked.

Caught up in the moment and surprised at the intensity of his own reaction, Brett said, "Maybe, Tommy. What does Mommy think?"

"Mommy thinks not," Adele said. "It wouldn't work. "A week, two weeks. You'd be gone again, Brett. I realized driving over here that I was really saying goodbye to nothing."

"But perhaps . . ."

"If it wasn't the current one, there would be another, and then probably another." Adele's voice stayed steady. "I'm sorry Brett. I know you. We are going. Bags are already checked on a PanAm flight to Detroit. Leaves in a couple of hours." Her eyes seemed more burdened with resignation than with belligerence.

Brett hung around the lounge for twenty or thirty minutes trying to play little word games with the children. But the children lost interest, and with nothing much left to discuss long silences fell between Brett and Adele.

Finally, she said, "It's time. It will take a while to walk to the gate. Let's have the goodbyes right here. We'll let you know when we get there."

Brett lingered in the corridor and watched them walk away. Adele had a child by each hand. Once or twice Tommy looked back. Then they turned a corner and disappeared.

Swept by a surge of contrition, initially Brett felt uncomfortable and somewhat downcast. But he soon concluded the mood would pass. After all, they were safe, and everything was as he'd originally intended it, just somewhat behind schedule.

When he came out of the terminal, the rain had stopped and left the early evening sky rinsed clean. By the time he merged onto the ring road, his spirits had begun to rise. There would still be time for a late

dinner with Maria and then a sexual dessert with Maria. He salivated at the prospect of both. Brett switched on the radio, and the sounds of the Berliner Philharmonic wrapped around him. He felt better already. He'd have to get Maria back on track.

\*\*\*

When he returned to the hotel, however, he discovered Maria had gone. She had left a handwritten note on a piece of hotel stationery.

*Dear Brett: I am an awful person. It is my fault—and yours too—they were in that terrible crash. I am a murderer. I don't even want to live anymore. I always knew it was wrong. But you were so handsome. I think you kind of tricked me a little. I will go back to Koln. Then I don't know where. I am sorry for your loss. Don't call because I do not want to see you anymore. Goodbye, Maria*

Brett tossed the note in the trash and poured himself a drink. He opened a can of cashews and popped them into his mouth one after the other. So, Maria thought they were finished. Well, he had dealt with conscience-stricken women before; they always managed to get over their moral afflictions; they always came back. Maria would be just like the rest, he told himself. She'd come back when she found out Adele and the kids were okay. □

## *Saudade*

LISA RUSSO

Now that you're gone, you've left me longing.  
I smile softly because you were here  
lying on this pillow  
with your thick black hair  
leaving your scent behind,  
yet  
I sit silently because you have left me  
here with oceans in my eyes,  
desperately inhaling you,  
believing that if I close my eyes and wish hard enough,  
I will manifest you back here, magically...

But then I lose you once again,  
as the mark of your cologne  
begins to fade from this fabric,  
and my tears take its place.

# *All I Know About Pool*

CHARLES HARPER WEBB

Winning depends on the right numbers and hues.  
If White rolls in a hole, like a dog, you *scratch*.  
If the 8 rolls in, like a dieter, you *lose*.

Colliding balls are said to *kiss*: a Judas-smooch that dumps the kissed one in a hole, and leaves the kisser victorious and bereft:

ambivalence perfect for Art, which pool-playing has been called, as has trimming a hedge to look like Rodin's head.

Men think they're studly, circling the table in tight tees, stroking their wood.  
Women bend to line up shots, breasts rolling

out of tank-tops as their skirts ride high.  
I love to watch a woman "run the table," knocking every ball into a "pocket"

she "calls" while her male opponent—cue dangling uselessly—prays, "Miss!"  
I lost a woman I loved to Darwinian pool.

My cue wilted; my balls broke. I should have hung around more pool halls when I could, not whizzed my youth away in school.

## *Is It Alice, Amy or Anne?*

GEORGE LONGENECKER

Huddled with four other nameless people,  
who sleep on cardboard and blankets,  
in the entry of a garage alcove,  
just a block from Grand America Hotel,  
the finest place to stay in Salt Lake City—  
*soft beds in a chic setting.*

It's still cool at dawn  
but before long pavement's too hot to touch,  
all day they rest on a narrow strip of lawn,  
by a parking lot shaded by lindens,  
robins and sparrows nest in the trees,  
search for bugs or scraps.

Behind a wall hotel guests  
rest on chaise lounges  
order drinks and lunch by the pool.  
All day people pass by—  
*how sad, disgusting, lazy, addicts.*  
Once in a while somebody drops a few coins.



By October icy winds  
will slice down city streets—  
who knows how many will be left after winter,  
though some will die in heat long before then,  
slow euthanasia for these castoffs,  
who search for scraps in trash bins.

Hotel guests come and go from restaurants,  
high above, balcony lights come on.  
Together they huddle for another night,  
maybe dreams will bring them a little peace.

# *The Bush Burned With Fire And The Bush Was Not Consumed*

PETER MUNRO

Skin draws gaunt to his skull, deflating  
jowls he has borne across eight decades.  
His dying scrawls revelations, the unadorned  
face of this child burned through in a cell-  
by-cell immolation of his mask.

Horned into body all his life,  
this new task of leaving  
leaves him exhausted among exhaust fumes,  
acetone blown past the gaskets in his lungs.  
Inhalations come hard, drawn  
against the weight that presses his chest.  
As he combusts, electrons unhook. He parses  
proteins. His rattletrap contraption of cells  
triggers and he exhales.

Let the breath that breathes him put on a new vessel.  
Let the breath that breathes him reform him from gales.  
Let the breath that breathes him  
breathe storms through him in sentences  
gusted beyond what any frail  
construct of dust may countenance.

Departing this land of sound,  
he wrestles ragged cadences.  
Syllables metastasize slowly.  
Breath shall cull every particle of him,  
word by word, charring that holy ground  
on which all children must walk.  
As he walks into distance and then beyond  
distance, wandering new fields,  
what consumes him all his life  
shall unscroll flame, written invisibly  
into, then out of, mask and skull.

## *The Help*

J. TARWOOD

In the morning, the radio  
praises God while the maid  
cracks eggs. Her mother battles  
demons and cancer, her father  
angrily soldiers on. The doctor  
waits to be fed, holiness  
in the kitchen barbed wire  
in a yeowing wind. Belief  
is forgiveness, and Jesus  
killed her husband decades ago,  
as He will soon kill her,  
and all the rest, in His  
good time. Firing the maid  
drifts in, idle vengeance,  
but she never thieves,  
and now sets a plate before the doctor.  
Take, eat. It's another blessed day.

## *Little Mercies*

TERRY SANVILLE

I hadn't seen him in fifty years. But I still wanted to kill him. I didn't know when, where, or how. But the why of it seemed crystal.

Driving home from my daily visit to the downtown, I stopped at my neighborhood coffee shop for a mocha and a slice of lemon cake. He sat at a corner table and flipped through a copy of the *San Jose Mercury*. His David Niven mustache had turned white and a cane leaned against the wall. The scar along his left jawline glinted silver and his hair stood snowy and full. It was him, definitely him.

I eased onto a counter stool, pulled the brim of my hat down, and ordered. He looked up from his newspaper, stared right at me, then resumed reading. Did he recognize me? Would he remember Chet? Did he care? I'd make sure he did.

\*\*\*

I'd known Chet all through high school. We ran track, double-dated the Paylor sisters, then attended the same California university, and roomed together in the dorms. Like born brothers, Chet and I shared everything including details about girlfriends, dictatorial parents, music and how our duo—he played guitar and I sang—would make it big. We also shared a fear of getting drafted into the Army and killed in Vietnam.

By the late 1960s, the military needed more and more draftees to fill its quota. Chet and I were safe so long as we stayed in school and maintained our student deferments. But therein lay the rub.

"I got another letter from the Dean's Office," Chet told me near the end of spring quarter.

“Ah man, what they say now?”

“Nothin’ good. If I don’t bring my GPA up, I’m out.”

“What do you mean out?”

“Gone, you know, expelled. *Hit the road, Jack and dontcha come back no more, no more.*”

“That’s fuckin’ heavy, man. So how you doin’ in your classes?”

“I’m pretty much screwed. I need to get at least a 3.2 GPA this quarter, tough with Corkass for design and practice.”

I groaned. *Corkass* was the moniker we architecture students gave a professor with a name that nobody could pronounce. He taught two required sophomore classes and considered himself the gatekeeper of the architecture profession, winnowing out any student that didn’t show the proper aptitude and drive.

“So have you talked with Corkass? Maybe he’ll cut you some slack.”

“No, but I want to do it before grades come out. Once they’re posted there’s little chance of changing them.”

“Do...do you want me to come with you?”

“Yeah, that be cool.” Chet grinned. “Two of us groveling might be better than one.”

We met the professor during his office hour, on an April afternoon. Sunlight slanted through venetian blinds above his desk, casting a convict-striped pattern on architectural models, delineations, blueprints, and two bicycles stuffed in the closet-sized room. Chet and I sat on folding chairs in front of his desk and waited for Corkass to get off the phone, a conversation that left him scowling.

“So how may I help you gentlemen? I have a division meeting in a half hour so we need to get on with it.”

Chet cleared his throat and stared at the professor for a long moment before speaking. “I guess I want to know how I’m doing in your design and practice classes.”

“Grades will be out the week after final projects are due. You and everyone else will know then.”

“So you can’t tell me now if...if I’m in trouble?”

“What do you mean, trouble?”

“I need to pass your classes with at least B’s.”

Corkass removed his glasses and leaned back in his swivel chair. “That sounds like a demand, son. I don’t appreciate demands. You’ll get the grades you deserve, nothing more, nothing less.”

“I didn’t mean to pressure you,” Chet said hurriedly. “It’s just that I know I’ve had problems. But I really enjoy—”

“Problems, I’ll say you’ve had problems.” The professor pulled a ledger from a drawer, opened it flat on his desk, and stared at the column of names and rows of grades inked in next to each. “You failed your first two projects and the last one was incomplete.”

“I know, I know. I never seem to have enough time and—”

“The business of architecture is all about time. If you can’t complete assignments on schedule, you won’t make it in the field.”

“But I love design.”

Corkass continued to stare at the ledger, shaking his head. “You’ll be lucky to get D’s this quarter. You need to apply yourself, and for God’s sake, clean up your act. Who do you think would hire you, looking like some Cuban revolutionary?”

Chet bowed his head and stayed silent. My ears burned as I stared into Corkass’s dark eyes that reflected nothing. I leaned forward. “You

really don't understand what's going on, do you?"

A smirk flashed across the professor's face. "Maybe not. Why don't you explain it to me?"

"If my friend doesn't get B's in your classes, he'll be expelled, drafted, sent to Vietnam and maybe killed."

"Aren't you being melodramatic, son?" The professor's thin lips twitched upward at their corners. The son-of-a-bitch was laughing at us.

"No, that's what's going on, man. While you think you're safeguarding the architecture profession, my friend, my...my brother could be killed."

Corkass pulled his chair forward. "I can't do anything about the world. Young men will always be going off to war. I did."

"But all Chet needs is more time to sort things out. If he can stay in school through fall quarter, student deferments will likely go away and be replaced by the lottery."

"The what?"

"The Selective Service is going to throw everybody's birth date in a bag and then pick out the dates one at a time. Men, even those in college, will be drafted in the order that their birth dates are picked."

Corkass smiled. "Well then, your friend could still find himself in Vietnam regardless of what I do."

"Yeah, but at least he'd have a chance of drawing a high number."

The professor turned toward Chet, his face serious. "Son, do you really think you have what it takes to become an architect?"

Chet cleared his throat. "I...I don't know. But I want the chance to find out, to maybe choose something else to study, and not get killed because of bad grades."



“I’m sorry, but many qualified students want to enroll in our school. If I keep you on, someone else will not get the chance they deserve.”

“Please, professor, just give me this one break. I’ll be out of your hair soon enough, one way or another.” Chet’s voice cracked with emotion.

I laid an arm on his shoulder. He sucked in stuttering breaths.

“Now, unless there’s something else, gentlemen...” The professor grabbed a stack of papers from an inbox and began to sort through them.

I stood, laid a hand on top of the papers. Corkass looked up. “Take a good look at me, professor. If anything happens to my friend, you will also feel his pain.”

He stood. “Is that a threat?”

I glared at him, wanting to smash him right then, to destroy that smarmy little smile. Instead I flashed him the peace sign, spun, and left his office with Chet hurrying to catch up.

\*\*\*

A month after grades were posted, Chet received his dismissal letter. We talked about what he could do: disappear to Canada or Central America and wait out the war, apply for a Conscientious Objector classification. But he hated all these so-called options.

In July, the Selective Service reclassified him as 1-A and sent Chet his draft notice. By September, the Army had him. The following winter, Chet landed in Vietnam and a month later was killed in the A Sâu Valley west of Huế. The NVA ambushed his platoon and he died painfully in a hospital in Japan of sepsis from his wounds.

When I learned of Chet’s death from his parents, I went looking for Corkass. But he’d left his teaching post for parts unknown.

\*\*\*

My face burned as I stared at Corkass, who sat there smugly reading his newspaper. He'd had fifty years to age gracefully. Chet never had that chance. Corkass looked dapper, dressed in tan Dockers, a pressed sport shirt and jacket, and New Balance shoes. Only a dark bruise on the side of his neck showed that something might be amiss.

I returned to my car and retrieved my father's old .45 that I kept in the trunk, mostly to shoot rattlers I found on remote building sites. I folded a newspaper around the pistol, reentered the coffee shop, and approached Corkass's table.

He looked up at me, his face deadpan. "Can I help you?"

"Got a minute to talk, professor?"

He gave me the once over but didn't seem to recognize me.

"Nobody's called me professor for a long time. Yes, please sit."

"Thank you." I laid the newspaper hiding the pistol on the table and draped my jacket across the back of a chair.

"It's been almost fifty years since I taught college courses. You must be one of my students."

"No, I never had you for a class. But I was in the program and had friends who did."

"Yes, yes, that was so long ago, such a turbulent time. I didn't much like the politics and ended up leaving the University and working in Saudi Arabia and India, for decades."

"Huh."

"So what years did you study architecture?"

"'68 to '73. I graduated and got a job in LA. Spent most of my career designing residences for the rich and famous."

"Lucky you."

“Yes, I was lucky. But my closest and dearest friend wasn’t lucky at all. His name was Chet MacPherson.”

The color drained from Corkass’s face. He leaned back in his chair and studied me again.

I said, “Yeah, take a good look, professor. I told you back then that if anything happened to Chet, I’d settle the score.”

“Sir, I...I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You know who I am. You should have never returned to the scene of your crime.”

He let out a deep breath. “There...there was a lot of stress and pain back then. I hoped that time would have healed those wounds.”

“So you remember me?”

“Yes, yes of course. And I remember your friend. I was too full of myself and it needlessly hurt others. Tell me. What happened to him?”

“He was killed in Vietnam, ten months after we pleaded with you. His death was painful. Died of sepsis from multiple bullet wounds.”

“I’m so sorry—”

“Sorry doesn’t cut it.” I squeezed my eyes shut and felt tears of pain and rage slide down my cheeks. “You know, when the lottery came out in the papers, Chet would have pulled number 352. He would never have been drafted, never been killed, if you’d shown him just a little mercy.”

The professor bowed his head and remained silent. I leaned forward and unfolded the newspaper, exposing the dull gray .45. He looked up, his eyes wide, mouth open. A spasm shook his body. His face reddened. He reached inside his coat and withdrew a medicine bottle and set it on the table. With trembling hands he removed three capsules and downed them with the dregs of his coffee. His breathing came in hoarse bursts.

But gradually it slowed.

“I’ve been popping these things like Tic-Tacs for the past two months. They’re the only things that keeps the pain at bay. But they’re starting to fail.”

I snatched up the bottle and read its label, Duramorph. Morphine. “Maybe I should just take them and let you suffer like Chet did.”

Another spasm struck the professor. He gritted his teeth and stared at me. “I would rather have you just shoot me...please. The doctors won’t give me anything stronger, said I’d become addicted. Who gives a crap? The cancer is going to kill me soon enough.”

I stared across the table at the pitiful old man, all of his dapperness gone. I wanted to wallow in the sweet pool of vengeance that could be mine. But two cruelties, for whatever reason, didn’t add up to justice. I folded the newspaper over the pistol and slid it across the table to Corkass.

“Here, use it when the time comes.”

He reached forward and clasped my arm. “Thank you. You are too kind.”

# *God and God's*

SANDY WEISMAN

God ran our house, decided what we could or could not do. We memorized the Ten Commandments. We tried not to order one another around. *Good Christian girls do not argue*. I never hit my brothers back. I had to eat my rage.

God blessed us for our meekness, rewarded me with a ride in the Flexible Flyer wagon, rewarded you with a new doll. Two girls praying hard to inherit a place in Heaven.

We were raised by God and God's apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of them expecting goodness. I could never be good enough. Praise, praise, praise!

I played music, all attention devoted to Bach. I molded my hands to see if I'd shatter inside my private fingered dome. I did not.

# *Night Shadows*

JIMMIE PENNINGTON

Night shadows

lie on empty walls  
like the silhouettes  
of yesterday's dreams  
just out of reach  
taunting me it seems

Their silence grow around me

and their ghostly forms  
touch my soul - oh tender soul  
only to mutter broken words  
of forgotten past

The heartbeats

of their reflections  
grow hauntingly - mystically  
within my slumbered mind  
their crying thoughts  
(becoming me)  
(knowing me)  
from the inner part  
of my self being

Night shadows  
close my eyes to sleep  
becoming the foundation  
of my weary dreams  
and when i awaken  
i find them gone  
  
(replaced by gentle dawn)

## *Copy Cat Music*

JOHN KRUMBERGER

I never asked his name  
– no suitable pause between the torrent  
of New York accented syllables that flowed  
from that lovely Italian-Portuguese mouth  
dragging on cigarette after cigarette  
or erupting into the spasms  
of an in drawn, cardiac sounding laugh  
– though I marveled and still do  
at the improbable happenstance  
of such a near exotic creature  
surfacing in Racine, Wisconsin,  
wedged between the Danish bakery  
and the Walgreens store and pharmacy.

*Copy Cat Music* featured rock, punk,  
hip hop, soul. R and B, and anything  
and everything from the 60s;  
an act of love to preserve so carefully  
the essential ache and ecstasy of the tribe  
though not in candled, incensed fashion,  
just row after unscented row of vinyl  
and wall posters: Hendrix, Joplin, Donna Summer,  
the surprise of the python in the back,



sleeping in its cage, a gumball machine,  
juke box, fish tank, old and new turntables,  
a Gibson guitar for sale, dance music playing.

And whoever he was, he was a match  
lit in the rain, five years, maybe six  
then gone, without warning,  
not enough fellow oddballs I guess  
to support and care for the cat.  
I think of the tale of the Bodhisattva  
meditating all day, every day  
along side the heap of a garbage dump,  
his laughter roaring at this world,  
a world he chose to stay in, no matter  
that he had been released from it.

## *Outsider's Shovel*

MARK TAKSA

An insider promises smoke will never  
pollute the flag. The insider's pal  
is a clapping machine popping up from his chair  
and assuring the delegation the insider's plan  
proves the flag cannot be fire.

A blast hits the hotel like bad booze in a waking head.  
Over fallen hors d'oeuvres, I hurry to the avenue.  
No one person is shouting in all the shouting.  
Shattering glass falls from blistering windows.  
A burning splinter scratches my ear.

An outsider stands among chairs  
where lovers lunched under a friendly sun. I hear quiet,  
as if her foot, dainty with the diligence of ballet,  
pushes a silencer only she can press.

Her voice is calm as would be of a survivor  
of numerous fires. Travel thins her shoes.  
Her hair is twine tangled and smoky.  
Her eyes are caves. Ash tints her brows.  
Her only thing not charred is her satchel.

She says a promise is not a promise,  
and a flag can burn, and no person is an island,  
but people grow vegetables most juicy on an island  
their diligence plows. From her satchel,  
she throws seeds, unfolds a shovel.

## *Young Tragic Heroines*

ELAINE LITTLE

The letter was addressed to Diane, predictably misspelled. It was from a postal box in a town known only for its prison. When she saw the name, Ben Strickert, she tore it open. After all these years, a dream come true. Her steady barrage of letters had finally yielded a result. She slipped it out and laid it on the table.

Twenty-five years ago, Dianne's sister Miranda had been four months pregnant when she was shot in her home along with her husband Jeff, murdered by a teenager with no prior criminal record. It was the kind of crime that people read about in the newspapers and talked about on the radio non-stop for days, and still ached for more. Till now Ben Strickert had only offered a predictable refrain of denial, declaring his innocence to a series of confidants. The media, on the anniversary of the crime, always desired an update.

She had first written Ben five years ago, saying she forgave him and that now she wanted him to acknowledge his guilt. This was soon after she became convinced that her anger was a sin, just like murder was. Not to the same degree, but still something to be ashamed of.

Those who knew the extent of her one-sided correspondence did not approve. But in her heart Dianne knew she was right. Besides, she was sick of discussing things with people who were never going to agree with her.

The best gift she could give her sister would be to show Ben Strickert the real face of Christian forgiveness. When it was extended

in the right way, no one was immune from its power. People talked about forgiveness as a selfless act, but she wanted something from Ben. Nonetheless, just the thought of letting go of her anger gave her a semblance of peace, which would be completed when Ben did his part.

The details of the crime were too terrible—the woman pregnant, recently married, senselessly murdered, the baby gifts gathered in the nursery and still in boxes. The wedding photo displayed on the piano. Dianne had snapped that one. The photo depicted a big-boned, healthy girl in a white, ornately embroidered wedding dress—the dress of a woman who was perhaps trying a bit too hard. And in a sisterly way, Dianne had pronounced the gown “ostentatious yet gaudy” and then expected a laugh out of Miranda. But like a lot of her jokes, it landed with a thud.

“We just have different taste,” Miranda had said.

It was a great photo, even better, Dianne told herself, than the professional ones they had taken at the ceremony. There was always an endearing ungainliness about Miranda. The shot captured this. The term *coltishness* seemed to apply. But Miranda never liked that term. “They’re just throwing awkward girls a bone with that one,” she once said.

During Dianne’s photo session, Miranda had teased: Now for our official wedding photographs we have a professional photographer. Her voice lingered on photographer with a pretentious rigor. Like—*well la-di-da*, only the best for us—a photographer of the rich and famous. She was teasing because she knew better than to take her newly enhanced living situation for granted. She came from self-conscious working-class stock.

So during the goofy informal shoot, they’d been drinking. Miranda probably wouldn’t have consented to pose in her wedding dress in

the backyard without it. School was over, things were quiet at her job, nothing, no appointments. Let's get sloshed.

This was the photo that ran, day after day, in the papers after her death. This was the one that Ben's friend saw. Ben—who was caught after he confessed, or more accurately bragged to this friend. It was as if he couldn't stop himself, as if it wasn't real, until he spoke it aloud. The friend's name was Alan.

\*\*\*

"You read the paper?" Ben glanced up almost shyly.

"Nope." Alan shook his head. He threw a rock into the distance. It splashed in the shallow creek.

"Yeah, but, you may have heard about this anyways. That couple that got killed up in West Haven? You know 'em?"

"Christ! Of course I don't know them."

"Yeah, but you've heard of them right?" Ben seemed all puffed up and proud.

Alan smirked. What now? Maybe he knew a friend of a friend who knew the couple, had inside information? Alan wasn't too interested. Ben was always trying to impress, always building up to a climax that existed only in his head.

"What do I care about some rich assholes up in West Haven? It's crazy, though, whoever did it was stupid. They didn't take anything," Alan said. "They didn't even have the brains to hide and sneak out before the people came home."

"Maybe they just wanted to kill somebody."

"Who knows?" Alan shrugged. "Some crazy ass shit though. If I broke into a house like that, I'd do it right. Scope it out the week before

so I knew when they would leave. Check around the perimeter for signs of alarms or guard dogs.”

“Maybe he just wanted to kill somebody.”

For a moment they locked eyes, until Alan dropped his. It was October, chilly and wet. He hugged his windbreaker against his skinny chest. The cheap canvas sneakers he’d picked out this morning were a bad choice, though he would never admit it. They squished when he walked. And now icy water was pooling in the toes.

The last words his mother had spoken to him before he left the house that morning were: *Alan, are you wearing your galoshes?* It was actually a pretty dumb question. Bam, click. The door rattled behind him as he slammed it. Not out of intentional rudeness, the door wouldn’t close any other way. His mom really needed to fix it.

Alan jerked. Ben had poked him with a long branch. Alan’s short laugh was forced and nervous. “Okay—, then.” He drew the word out.

“He did it right, alright. Because nobody knows who did it.”

Alan fidgeted and pulled out a cigarette. “He? Okay fine. I’m hungry and cold and I’m sick of talking about this. Wanna go eat?”

“I know who did it,” Ben said.

“Whooo, shit. You gonna tell anybody?”

\*\*\*

They sat in silence in a corner section of the diner, the smoking area. It was three o’clock in the afternoon. Their dirty dishes had been taken away by the waitress, or in the case of Alan, the meal he had barely touched.

Ben looked up. “So what are you thinking?”

“Umm, I dunno. Can’t say exactly.”

“You said they were just some asshole couple up in West Haven and who cares, so I’m with you—who cares?”

“No, you’re right. I don’t care.” Alan’s cigarette was shaking, so he stubbed it out and put his hands under the table until they steadied. Then he went for the cold coffee. But when he picked up the cup again his hands were shaking anew, so hard that he slammed the cup back down. The saucer rattled.

Ben said nothing. There was a momentary curl of the lip, slight amusement. *I’m in charge*, he seemed to say. But instead of mocking Alan, he stared at the wall in back of his head.

“It was something, alright. They came stomping in around ten o’ clock laughing and I thought, *These are their last moments*. I knew that.”

“Weren’t you freaked out?”

“I was calling the shots. My opinion, my decision.” He shifted in his seat. “They were talking about some party they went to and I thought, *That was your last party*, and then the lady asks for a drink of water, and I thought, *Your very last glass of water*.”

Alan shrank in his seat. They were always one-upping each other, but until now he’d always felt like Ben was more of a punk and he was the smarter, ruthless one. If one dawdled on the railroad tracks with the train coming, the other wanted to do him one better, lingering for another two seconds after the other one had bailed—one Mississippi, two Mississippi. Once they had met some kids who stuck a lit firecracker up a cat’s ass. It was only a stray, not a pet. But that time he and Ben had only watched.

Ben got up to leave. “Hey Bud. Don’t make me think I can’t trust you with my deepest, darkest secrets.”

“Oh, you can trust me,” Alan said.

\*\*\*

Alan was the one who came forward. The police broke him after threatening him with “accessory after the fact,” which probably wouldn’t have stuck anyway.

The articles at the time struggled to make sense of the senseless. They speculated that these two disenfranchised, angry, semi-privileged suburban kids were a symptom of a larger problem. They were labeled latchkey kids, who came home from school to an empty kitchen instead of the smell of mom’s cookies. In the case of Ben, this wasn’t even true since his mom worked only part-time. As to whether or not she baked cookies, that remains a mystery.

But absentee parenting was brought up, maybe not as the cause but definitely a contributing factor. Because who wouldn’t notice their kid was a psychopath unless they just weren’t paying attention? And working parents? Well, you know . . . make sure your kids have everything they need and most of what they want, and also be home by five.

So Ben was portrayed as an anomaly. Not someone regular people would have to worry about unless they were very unlucky. Yes, it had happened in what used to be called “a good neighborhood.” But what were the odds of such bad luck striking twice? They could all breathe easier knowing that.

Dianne read every article published at the time and even kept a scrapbook. It wasn’t morbid. It was more like a memorial. For the most part, the commentary, the articles, were respectful when discussing the victims. As for the criminals, the smallest details of their lives were held up to scrutiny, especially the ones that seemed unexpected. She even came to know that Ben had done well on his standardized tests. Everything was carefully phrased. But there was always the whiff of privilege and envy in the stories. The tale of a young couple starting



a new life in an expensive suburban enclave. Both employed with great jobs. The wife, newly pregnant, always ahead of the game, was interviewing nannies. They had picked the most lucrative and practical majors in college. Late twenties, awfully young to have figured it all out. Spoiler alert! Obviously they hadn't—look what happened.

But some of the details didn't so much elaborate the details of Miranda's life as judge them. It seemed there was no end to conjecture as to how readers might escape a similar fate. Much was made of the fact that the house they bought lacked a security system. (Dianne always suspected this was probably the fault of the notoriously cheap Jeff.) The previous owners had one in place. But this young foolhardy couple hadn't reactivated it, at least not yet. What had they been waiting for? If only they'd been a little more proactive.

Speaking of Jeff, she had always wished, and she knew it was a bad wish, that Jeff had been killed and Miranda spared. And, of course, the baby too. Jeff and Dianne had never really clicked. He always seemed a bit preoccupied and when they talked, *Hi* and *I'm fine* were the extent of the conversation. A very nice guy, as the saying went, certainly, but a little smug, a little soft, an aficionado of expensive cigars when he could find them at discounted prices. But never Cubans since he didn't want to break the law.

*A cautionary tale*—went the headline in the Sunday section. Dianne had complained about that one, long and hard. It talked about how fate played mysterious tricks and how an opulent lifestyle couldn't protect you from life's grim and shitty realities.

After her complaint, the writer of the article called her personally. "I'm so sorry for your loss," he said. "But I don't write the headlines. And honestly I cringed when I saw that one."

“It wasn’t just the headline,” she said. And then she wondered if that was really the reason he had cringed.

Dianne never hid from telling her story. She even talked about it with her daughter, Alissa. She described Miranda in detail. The two sisters became closer in death than they were in life.

“I think she would have been my favorite aunt,” Alissa mused. “I can just tell from the way you describe her and all the things she liked. And I would be her favorite niece.” Her only niece, there were no other candidates. Not then, not now, and never in the future.

Her daughter had invented a cool persona for Miranda, pieced together from bits and pieces Dianne had parceled out over the years. “We even like the same movies,” she added.

One time Alissa told her that sometimes she brought it up with new acquaintances on purpose. Dianne understood because as soon as the story was told, there was an unearned importance conferred on the teller. You were considered unique and experienced and damaged.

When Alissa’s teachers found out they always sympathized and said that it was such a shame to have to live with that.

“They don’t press, do they?”

“No,” said Alissa. “They just give me sad looks for about an hour and then it passes. And one time it got mentioned on a day I bombed a test. The teacher came to me later and said *I’m so sorry I didn’t realize*. And then she let me retake it.” Alissa smiled. “Miranda must be my guardian angel. I had forgotten there was a test that day. So I hadn’t even opened the book.”

Dianne had experienced this feeling herself when someone once asked her when was the last time she’d seen her sister. It made her wonder. Could they have possibly thought that maybe she’d been visiting

them that awful day and luck had smiled upon her? Fate intervening as her car drove out of the long driveway just as the car of the perpetrator approached? Because, if so, it would have meant she had been spared for some special purpose. But this was nonsense; Ben had taken the bus to the vicinity of the subdivision and walked the rest of the way.

Besides, in the month leading up to the murder, Dianne hadn't visited. She'd only talked on the phone with Miranda a couple times.

\*\*\*

On the way to visit Ben, Dianne stopped at a gas station. After filling up, she spied a drug store across the street. She went in and bought a few things, using a coupon that had been spit out with the receipt on her last visit. For a limited time only, she could get 20% off her entire purchase plus extra bonus points, as long as the purchases weren't already on sale or were store buster specials, whatever that was, so she chose carefully. She piled the snacks, the crackers, nuts, stuff easily eaten while driving, onto the counter. She didn't want to have to stop. But the coupon hadn't worked. They even had to get the manager. This was a very convoluted way to save money.

Dianne sighed and smiled at the people behind her who seemed, for the most part, kind about the delay. She pulled her hat off and set it on top of a box of quick energy drinks in front of the cash register, small bottles of concentrated vitamins in a corn syrup base. She hated the taste but liked the effect. She felt the bottles through the thick fabric of her hat. She carefully grabbed two and then bunched the knit hat into a ball and stuck it into her purse.

The cashier finally returned and apologized profusely as she applied the discount and transferred the points to Dianne's preferred shopper card. "Thanks so much," Dianne said.

\*\*\*

Ben sat behind the Plexiglas window and smiled, but pretty soon it became clear that a scripted, tidy scenario was not in the making. She had been warned that he was manipulative, that he was now expressing remorse as a ploy to convince the parole board that he was rehabilitated enough for a release. The Supreme Court had recently struck down mandatory sentences of life in prison without parole for juveniles. At sixteen, that had been his sentence, the best the prosecutor could get in a state without the death penalty. She imagined a not-even-so-great lawyer pleading to a hopefully unsympathetic parole board that his client's years of denial were a natural consequence of his despondency at being put away so young without even the slightest hope of ever being released.

Ben rambled. He liked it when his parents came to visit. They came less frequently now. They were older and less mobile. Mom had stayed home last time. He put words in her mouth. *Thank God I have other children*, he pictured her saying, a small consolation. This would not surprise him.

Dianne wasn't too interested in his parents.

She tried to steer the questions around to Miranda and Jeff. Ben said that the memory of the crime was so vague to him now that it was like an apparition. But he was sure they were good people who didn't deserve to die.

So there was nothing there, nothing there at all.

Sometimes his parents called. His dad told him privately, in a phone call, that his mother wasn't up to it these days. He hadn't said what she was sick with. His dad admitted to not being in great health either, but that didn't stop him from showing up. It just goes to show you—

What had Dianne expected after all these years? An apology? No. An indication that Ben wanted forgiveness from God and she was the person who could lead him there? Maybe. But it couldn't be coerced. It had to be something offered freely. It didn't seem like a lot to ask and she'd waited so long. Ben sat in front of her, rather small, composed, and so determined to plug up any empty spaces in the conversation. But after all his talk about his life being stalled and limited, what were his exact words?

He said he was a useless and sorry excuse for a person then. Their deaths cost him, and all of us, dearly. He wasn't sorry maybe exactly in the way they wanted him to be but that was because he didn't even recognize the person he had been at that time.

But why couldn't he be sorry on the outside? He could do good things for people out there, whatever it took. He understood now how these things were important. How it means something for people to see you doing good. Among other things, it sets the right example.

Then he asked her if she planned to visit again, and she told him she wasn't sure. □

## *Living Dolls*

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI

*A living doll, everywhere you look.  
It can sew, it can cook,  
It can talk, talk, talk.* Sylvia Plath

As a little girl, I never wanted any creepy  
doll. No haunted puppet or voodoo doll.  
Not Twilight Zone's sinister Talking Tina.  
No Chucky of horror fame. Not even  
a sideways glancing Kewpie doll waif  
won tossing balls in a carny booth.

Yet they continued to arrive  
on holidays and on birthdays.  
Betsy Wetsy drink-and-pee in diaper.  
Walking Baby in gingham and Mary Janes.  
Stiff dollies with oddly cheery countenances.  
I wanted none of them—

Not the rosy-cheeked Southern belle  
with golden ringlets and starched ruffles.  
Not the newest bride doll propped up  
on the bed, collections of them crammed  
on a bookshelf or hung high on the wall  
in out of hand displays of crinoline and satin.

I favored the soft comfort of a monkey sock doll  
my mother clipped, stitched, and stuffed  
from Rockford Reds. As a little girl I wanted  
my brother's Lionel train remote  
to make the trail of cars speed, smoke, and toot  
along figure eight tracks through a tiny toy town.

As a little girl what I wanted  
was an Erector Set to assemble bridges,  
Lego bricks and beams for cityscapes,  
Lincoln Logs for cabins and barns,  
appliance box toss away turned clubhouse  
with Crayolas, scissors, and tape.

I chose, over dressy dolls, to strap on  
a cowgirl holster and gun with chaps and hat  
to cruise the block on a cherry Schwinn  
or to whiz around on slick metal skates,  
key dangling like a fancy locket  
from a string at my neck. I really loved

smacking the Wiffle Ball with a bat,  
firing glass cat eyes against a wall,  
crawling around on monkey bars,  
pumping the air on a wooden swing,  
its rattle of chains in my hands. As a little girl,  
what I really wanted was to fly—  
wind in my hair, imagination rocketing.

# *Lachrimae*

ALLEN STROUS

The man whose tears are often,  
out of nowhere

the open-up  
breakdown,

his face open, falling apart,  
nothing there that faces now,

doing what he is not supposed to do,  
public, though unblazoned—

it is so public, this private,  
or less than private, not supposed to,

so fixed in that,  
this unfixed

of letting go,  
going on

not supposed to go on,  
these hurt feelings, say,  
so trivial  
and irremediable,



or nothing,  
out of nowhere,

just crying.  
It underlies—

he rides this underground,  
level of this well,

the trite and overwhelming snow globe  
starting out like this,

stir of emotion, little sentimental,  
then the little storm

of nothing, still,  
opens out and out,

out of infinite sky,  
wail, an infinite,

the snow globe going on  
smashed open,

all the vulnerable.  
And he looks ridiculous.

# *The Wandering Buddha*

CATE GABLE

*for chef Jimella Lucas*

Entering the Bardo or another set  
of bones, you cannot know  
we mourn your knife skills,  
tinctures, sauces, sturgeon opened

with precision, sliced along the  
spine, flesh parted from skin.  
We've glimpsed you ghostly in  
whites on the line coaxing fragrance

from herbs, a two-fingered touch  
for the ripeness of steak  
in the pan, a pour of olive oil  
wedding garlic to flame.

Please take a moment, love,  
to relay your whereabouts:  
how born, to whom and if we  
might contact you by phone

or email and what language your  
new tongue prefers. We bow  
before you regardless of form:  
wolverine or dove, poi dog,

saguaro, silk worm, dappled  
trout. Just call out in the night  
(my dream-door is ajar)  
or leave a message at your gate

beside the weeping alders.

# *Only Touch is Impossible, So We Touch*

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

Silence enters us.  
These once familiar faces go strange  
over time.

In time, we'll learn to listen  
with our eyes.

Our hands trace the smiles seared into photographs.

Does it matter  
I once had a sister?

Again, we are making a bed of burnt-out fires.  
Skin's memory of warmth.

We are dredging another lake  
& pulling up unidentifiable  
bodies.

Clothes torn. Torn hymen of sky.

The hallway between her bedroom & mine is heaven  
& heaven is cold, an abstraction, wild & windy.

The wind is carved with the names of lost girls.

# *Tiny Bills*

SUSAN JOHNSON

Mist nets catch the fall migration,  
catch my hands numb and slow as  
they try to free each bird reversing

the path of entry, clearing the feet first  
even as tiny bills hammer my thumb  
for blood, more blood and my own

feet become enmeshed in roots and mud.  
It's the large birds that look dangerous  
that just lie there. Sapsuckers, flickers.

As with any transaction, it's the small  
biting words that jab, inflame a nail.  
That wake you with their peck peck

peck. Those same nets caught me  
in their fine meshed traps. Until I  
reached into their tangled pockets to

remove another just passing through,  
I didn't know how hard love could be  
standing ankle-deep in muck in the middle

of the woods in the middle of an island  
in the middle of the sea with my hands  
full of flight and nothing to hold on to.

# Judge

JOHN P. KRISTOFKO

Richard Witched noticed the small envelope in his mailbox right away. It sat like a white raft on the sea of gray, brown, and beige detritus that gathered, as it did almost every day, in his slot.

He opened it immediately.

Dr. Witched:

Would you please be so kind as to stop by my office at 4:00 today.

I have something I'd like to discuss with you.

B. Oldstreet

Richard shook his head and grinned. *How like Dr. Oldstreet*, he thought. *He couldn't use the phone or just send me an email. He's got to write me a note.*

Bernard Oldstreet was the senior member of the English faculty at Hanford College, having marked his thirty-eighth year just last month. Despite the dramatic evolution of technology at the school, the venerable Stanford grad dealt with his days and his duties there very much as he did when he was finding his way as a new Assistant Professor during the early months of the Reagan administration.

There were those who saw it as resistance; others assigned it to his age. For Richard, it was just who Bernard Oldstreet was, among the many things that made him unique.

As he shuffled through the other items in his stack, Harriett LaSalle came up to the row of mailboxes, acknowledged him with a nod, and took her mail from its slot.

Richard had turned to leave when he heard Harriett LaSalle's resonant voice.

"What the hell does Oldstreet want?" she said to no one in particular. She slid the note back into its envelope. "So, now I've got to stick around another hour." She looked over at Richard, who had not taken another step. "Oldstreet," she shook her head. "Couldn't just send me a damn email."

Richard held up his own envelope and managed a grin.

"You too, eh?" she smirked. "I wonder what the old guy wants?"

He shrugged. "I guess we'll find out in a couple hours."

\*\*\*

Richard Witched and Harriett LaSalle had been hired at the same time three years ago, primarily to teach comp with a smattering of survey literature courses tossed in. They had similar academic backgrounds and professional interests.

They both wrote, LaSalle more fiction than poetry. It was the reverse for Witched. They both very much wanted to teach creative writing courses at Hanford.

However, that small slice of the curricular pie at The College, for nearly twenty-five years now, was the province of one Bernard Oldstreet, a man whose own record of writing and publication impressed them. Just last year he completed his seventh volume of poetry and garnered his third Pulitzer nomination. He had earned Pushcart Prizes for both his poetry and his fiction. And though he was seventy-five, he was still a student favorite, adults and millennials alike.

There had been an occasion, though, when Witched and LaSalle had the opportunity to try their hands at the Holy Grail program. Last

fall, Professor Oldstreet had surgery, taking a medical leave for the term, and his three classes were assigned to other faculty members. Bruce Robbins took his American Novel class while Richard handled his Intro to Poetry Writing, and Harriett taught Intro to Fiction Writing.

In what was seen by some—and palpably felt by the aspirants—as an audition for the role of Oldstreet’s successor when that time came, the pair of ‘candidates’ did not speak of it to each other at all. If it was a contest, neither wanted to jinx the outcome by bringing their ardor into the common currency of conversation. Their efforts in those classes, though, were impressive, as were their results. Both achieved that rare pair of college teaching products: rigorous standards and high student evaluations.

For Richard Witched it was the highlight of these first years in his career; there wasn’t even a close second.

There was, however, another gold ring in the cycle of Richard and Harriett’s routine at Hanford, and it, too, involved Professor Oldstreet: judging the annual high school writing competition.

In 1990, Oldstreet established writing awards for high school students in the region served by Hanford College. It began modestly, as such things do, but, with the force of the Professor’s will and talent behind it, the event began to grow rapidly. In that first year, fewer than a hundred entries were submitted in the categories of poetry and short story. Last year, that number approached fifteen hundred.

As the competition gained in scope, its stature grew as well. The annual Awards Event on campus in May (of course, hosted by Oldstreet) had become one of the spring term highlights at Hanford, expanding the already substantial halo around the figure of its originator, patron, and, for all its years, its only judge.



And while he never complained about the task of reviewing all those stories and poems, it had become plain of late that it was now quite a burden.

Rodney Elsko, English Department Chair, encouraged by both LaSalle and Witched, had asked Oldstreet to seek help with the judging, but he had steadfastly resisted.

“This is my contest, Rodney,” he had told the Chair last year. “I can get this done. I always have.” And so the Chair relented.

Word in the Department, though, was that four new schools had submitted entries, and this year’s harvest was a barn-buster.

\*\*\*

Sitting in his small office in the ‘Assistant Professors’ Corner’ of the Department’s digs, Richard Witched flipped through the day’s stack of ads from booksellers, conference brochures, notices from the President and the dean, updated class lists and enrollment information, and late assignments/notes from students, the perfect storm of ‘white noise’ reading to conjure the subjects living near the surface of his thought.

*What if Oldstreet’s retiring?* was the first to emerge, as usual. *What if he’s going to tell us about his courses?* the usual follow-up and cause of immediate tightening in his stomach. That would mean the moment of truth, the decision he’d waited for and dreaded since he first understood the lay of the curricular land in the department. *What if it’s LaSalle?* came next, as usual. *She’s smart as hell, a good teacher, and a good writer, probably better than me* was the final ingredient in this oft-repeated recipe. *What do I do then?* closed out the sequence with its bitter taste.

That simple white envelope now sitting on his desk could be the ticket to one of two very different destinations.

\*\*\*

As it happened, Richard Witched and Harriett LaSalle arrived at the same time at the door of Bernard Oldstreet's spacious corner office (with a large window overlooking the Hanford campus quad), appearing like defendants about to hear a verdict. LaSalle's own thoughts on the matter produced a product very similar to Witched's, so their expressions were pressed from the same, anxious mint.

Oldstreet was seated behind the large desk at the center-back of the office, his tall window behind him. The whole place was disheveled yet orderly in just the right proportions to convey exactly the essence of 'esteemed professional presence.' Richard remembered thinking once that it appeared as if a design team had gone into the office and arranged the hundreds of books on the shelves and papers across the desk in precisely the manner required to achieve the effect, even down to the slightly open and askew tie and the touch of jostled hair on the venerable head. Oldstreet looked up as they entered.

"Oh, hello. Is it four o'clock already?" Both Witched and LaSalle were certain that he indeed did not know. The Professor extended his right arm. "Please sit." And as the two junior faculty members took their seats, Bernard Oldstreet reached down for two boxes of what appeared to be copy paper. 'LaSalle' was written on the top of one; 'Witched' on the other. Now standing, he yielded a slight grunt as he set each in turn onto his desk.

*This isn't about retirement,* the two assistant professors thought.

"You may have heard that the response to this year's writing competition has carried well beyond last year's. It's actually quite remarkable really." He sat back down. "And I also think you two know that Dr. Elsko has been after me to get help with all this business."

There was an odd feeling in the room, a peculiar blend of guilt and hope. It came off the two visitors like the scent of school children coming back in from recess on the playground in the fall.

“Well, I’ve not wanted to give up any of this, but these numbers have made my decision for me. There are seventeen hundred pieces submitted to this year’s contest, fourteen hundred poems and three hundred stories.”

Richard and Harriett looked at each other like dogs that had finally caught the car they’d been chasing for a long time.

“And I’ve decided to ask the two of you to help me this year.” He paused. “Would that be something you’d like to consider?”

“Oh, yes, Dr. Oldstreet,” they sang out together as if it had been rehearsed.

The old man smirked. “Well, good. I thought you just might. I’ve divided the pieces in half: seven hundred poems and a hundred fifty stories in each box.”

The scope of those totals filled the office as Oldstreet patted the two containers. “I’d like you two to serve as the preliminary judges.”

They nodded, more soberly than they might have ten minutes earlier.

“What I need is for each of you to choose what you think are the thirty best poems and the fifteen best stories in your half. I’ll do the final judging from among the pieces that you send forward to me. Does that seem reasonable to you?”

Nods again. Then Harriett half raised her right hand as if a student in class.

“When do you need these done?”

If Bernard Oldstreet still had a bashful look left in his repertoire, it showed itself at that moment.

“Well, Dr. LaSalle, I really need to get started choosing the winners in about three weeks.”

“Three weeks,” LaSalle repeated as if she hadn’t heard clearly.

“Yes. Three weeks. Will that be a problem for you?” He looked at them both.

“Oh no, not at all,” Richard Witched said before LaSalle could draw a breath.

“Because I really need this done by then. I hope that isn’t a problem.”

“No, Dr. Oldstreet. That won’t be a problem,” Witched said as if convincing himself. “You won’t be delayed.”

“Good, good. I’m a bit leery of doing this as it is. I’m not accustomed to depending on anyone in this contest. For more than twenty-five years.” His voice trailed off and he raised his eyes to somewhere above their heads. “This whole business has been mine, and....”

“Don’t worry, Dr. Oldstreet,” Richard Witched heard himself say. “We’ll get this done and back to you in three weeks.”

The Professor didn’t seem fully convinced, but he appreciated the effort and was nodding his head slowly as the two left.

“What the hell, Witched?” Harriett LaSalle’s voice rose as the two walked away from Oldstreet’s office. “Could you have been more obsequious in there?”

Richard stopped. “Oh, I suppose you were going to turn Oldstreet down?”

“I didn’t say that, but ‘Yes sir, we can do this in three weeks?’”

“It’s when he needs it. That schedule’s not up to us. What should I have said? ‘We’ll have it for you when we have it for you?’”

“The old man’s senile, Witched, and now we get to play along,” LaSalle huffed. “Lucky us.”

“He’s hardly senile, Harriett. He’s a legitimate scholar and teacher...”

“Oh yeah, the ‘great man,’ I forgot. And he’ll probably be teaching here another ten years. You can put his picture on your wall, Richard. I don’t need an icon to look up to.”

Harriett LaSalle continued on down the hall as Richard watched her go.

\*\*\*

Three days later, Richard Witched sat at the kitchen table in his apartment two miles from the Hanford College campus. Beside him was a small stack of papers, the first thirty of the poems. He had set two aside as possible candidates, including one that had jumped off the page at him. The others garnered just a ‘maybe’ in the upper right corner where the name had been removed, replaced by a coded number. Dr. Oldstreet had the actual names of the entrants.

Richard wasn’t quite sure yet just what he was looking for, but what he had found was a fairly common and, he supposed, predictable feeling of teen angst, a bit like reading re-arranged diary excerpts. When passages of what seemed like real poetry appeared, they clearly announced themselves.

When he had gone through fifty pieces, with four now set apart from the others, he decided to change the pace a bit and started in on the stories. Twelve entries in and he began to conclude that, apart from

the obvious differences in form and structure, the narratives seemed to be fruit of the same emotional tree.

Story thirteen, however, was different. It was called “Not My Home.”

Like some of the others, it spoke of problems at home, tensions among family members, parents and children, a desire for change, the need to get away. But story thirteen seemed much more ‘real’ on those subjects, more visceral. The father in the narrative drank too much, and the rest of the family bore the weight of that behavior, especially the mother. There were suggestions of abuse, but no such scenes, though the details of other aspects of the tale were very precise. In the third-person, but that seemed a shield for what wanted to be first.

Richard set it aside after he read it, not because he saw it as a potential finalist, but because it moved him in a way unlike any he had read before; it put him off balance.

He read it again and set it in its own stack of one.

On Monday morning, returning from his 8:00 composition class, Richard Witched stopped at Harriett LaSalle’s office. She was reading from her contest entries.

“You got a minute?”

She looked up, shook her head. “Barely.” She set the story aside.

“It is a lot of reading isn’t it?”

“I told you it would be, Richard. What’s up?” She pointed to the single chair positioned before her desk.

“Well,” he began, sitting down. “It’s about this one story I’ve read. It’s so *disturbing*. I don’t know what else to call it.”

Harriett shook her head. “You’ve never done this before, have you?”

“Well, no, I haven’t, but...”

“Listen Richard, I’ve done this a couple times already, back when I was finishing at Virginia. I helped judge a couple high school contests.” A wry smile came over her. “It does take some getting used to, all this ‘poor me,’ ‘life sucks,’ ‘I’m doomed,’ ‘nobody loves me,’ ‘my boyfriend’s an asshole,’ ‘my girlfriend’s a slut,’ ‘when will my caterpillar turn into a butterfly,’ ‘let’s all just love one another,’ ‘my parents have been emotionally sucked dry by life,’ ‘why doesn’t she love me,’ ‘my team is the best,’ ‘adults have ruined the world,’ ‘butterflies-unicorns-rainbows-dungeons-vampires-princes/princesses-dark empty rooms,’ and ‘midnight’.”

Richard could feel his head nodding as she spoke.

“Yes,” he said, louder than he intended. “Yes, that’s it.”

Harriett grinned. “How quickly we forget. Before our marriages to Faulkner, Hemingway, Dickinson, and Stafford, we were writing some of the same crap. Do you still have any of your high school stuff?”

Richard smiled. “Somewhere in some dusty box.”

“Have you read it in the last five years?”

“Of course not, no.”

“Go find it and sit down with a bottle of something you like and give it a read.”

He smirked. “You know, I just might do that.”

“You’ll get a kick out of it.”

“But Harriett, this story. It’s some of those things for sure, but it’s different.

It’s not just dark, it’s...” He leaned forward. “Did you ever read something that made you *worry*, that made you feel like you should tell someone about it?”

Harriett's tone changed. "Richard, don't get caught in that. It's a story, and sure I've read pieces like that. Some of these kids like to shake up whoever's going to read it. Some are pretty good at it, too."

"I don't know."

"Don't worry about it. Is it a finalist? Are you going to pass it on?"

"No, no. It's not that it's all that well-written."

"Then flip it over, back into the pile."

"But what if...?"

"What are you going to do? Are you going to take it to Oldstreet?"

LaSalle's voice rose.

Richard drew a deep breath. "Well, I was thinking about it."

"Oh hell, Witched. That's the *last* thing the old man wants to see. You think he's going to follow up on something like that, and this, the first time you've been a judge? He's been doing this since forever, and I bet he hasn't circled back on a piece because it made him nervous, *ever*. Not one time!"

Richard Witched hadn't thought about that at all. He felt himself slide back in the chair.

"Richard, if you know what's good for you, just take the story, flip it back into the pile and move on."

"Sure, sure," he nodded, stood, and turned for the door.

"Just turn it over and move on with your reading, okay?"

"Yeah, thanks Harriett." He headed out into the hall.

\*\*\*

That night, Richard Witched returned to his contest stack right after dinner. By nine o'clock he had made it through just about half the entries. He had nineteen poems and eight stories set aside. And he had one story sitting off on its own beside the other stacks.



Harriett LaSalle had been right. So many of the poems and stories were mainly flights of teen angst. There was an almost predictable regularity to them, like chewing gum that had lost its flavor. But there were those that introduced a spark of taste, and they jumped out and declared themselves. As a result, he found the whole process, while mostly tedious, still engaging enough to keep him moving forward, like panning for gold in a stream where he knew nuggets did exist.

And then there was “Not My Home.” He had read it again twice. And while he understood and appreciated what Harriett LaSalle had said, and so much of it sounded right, he still couldn’t regain his balance after reading that story.

It was like the others, yes, but its darkness did not seem to be the Gothic painting of the writer but the real skies above that young person’s world. It all felt so real.

But so was Harriett LaSalle’s experience and Bernard Oldstreet’s years of working on the contest. His colleague’s words repeated in his head: “Richard, if you know what’s good for you, you’ll just take the story, flip it back into the pile, and move on.”

He looked up at the paintings on the wall above the bookshelf, drew a deep breath, and moved “Not My Home” back into the stack of pieces that would not be read again.

\*\*\*

As it turned out, *Witched* and LaSalle finished their first round judging three days before the deadline. Professor Oldstreet was delighted to receive their recommendations, thanking them both for their hard work and professionalism. “It will be noted,” he assured them.

They congratulated one another as they walked back to their offices, and Richard began to feel for the first time the whole experience spliced into the unspooling reel of his past.

That night, just after he finished grading a class of Comp II essays, Richard opened a beer, turned on the television, and stretched out on the couch. Tomorrow was Friday, a light day at school, and the weekend weather looking like he just might be able to get out and around a little bit.

After a commercial for a local bank, the nightly news came on with a 'Breaking Story' banner across the bottom of the screen. The reporter stared seriously into the camera.

"A fifteen-year-old boy from Bayville has been taken into custody..."

All at once a picture of a split-level house with yellow police tape stretched around the front appeared on the screen.

"...after he allegedly shot and killed his father."

The house was replaced on the screen by the picture of a fortyish-looking man who could have been anyone Richard might have seen at the mall, the library, just shopping at Kroger's.

"Forty-two year-old Robert Jennings was found dead in his home early this evening after neighbors called police when they heard what they thought were gunshots in the house on Liberty Street. The neighbors said they had heard people arguing there earlier in the day."

Two people appeared on the screen: a reporter holding a microphone and a man, apparently one of the neighbors, beside her. He seemed distraught.

"Tell us what you heard," the young woman asked.

The man shook his head. "Well, there were these loud voices coming from the house and, well, we had all heard that before, but this time, this time they were louder, angrier than ever."

“There’s been trouble here before?” She looked at Evans, then out to the camera.

“Well, let’s just say this wasn’t the first time.”

“But never so bad that the neighbors called the police?”

The man’s expression changed. “I...” He shook his head slowly. “I’d rather not say.” He began to back away from the microphone. “Okay? I’d just rather not say.” He disappeared as the shot focused now on the young reporter.

“There you have it, Jim. A man is shot dead here in his Bayville home, and his fifteen-year-old son is now in police custody. It is believed that alcohol may have played a role in this incident. We’ll keep you posted with updates as information becomes available.”

Richard felt himself slip back on the couch. His mouth hung open and he slowly wiped his left hand across his face.

The news shifted to a story about a proposed tax increase in town, but Richard could not hear the words.

He still saw the tortured face of the neighbor. He heard his shaky voice.

*Could it? Was this?* Richard’s eyes rose to the paintings above the bookshelf. *What if?* He knew in that moment he would not sleep. □

## *The Book of Bad Faith*

NOEL SLOBODA

Back when Mom first swore  
Dad rated an entire chapter  
I could not imagine anyone deserving  
more than a footnote or two—  
maybe for mowing the lawn late  
or letting math homework slide.

I could not foresee a table of contents  
swelling to capture voided contracts,  
unwritten letters and missed deadlines—  
good intentions disappearing  
like so many quarters plunked  
in a busted parking meter.

I could not anticipate my best  
wishes being crushed between covers  
worn thin by years of handling,  
pages stained by tears of ex-lovers,  
dog-eared by friends I forgot  
to pick up at airports,  
annotated by coworkers  
intent on correcting names  
I never managed to learn.

And I could not envision  
appendices I would translate  
from English into Japanese  
(one of many languages  
I plan someday to study),  
then pen in invisible ink—  
as if I might hide the broken  
promises to myself.

## *Fortress\**

YVONNE

Not a single ceiling or window fan  
In our stifling apartment on the top floor.  
Mother and I, forced out the front door.  
Across the bricked-in street, dead-end,  
An ice cream factory stared us down.  
A lumber yard to the south—no way around.  
We turned north, crossed Woodland's trolley track.  
Escape cost a long up (and down) hill trek.

Through Clark Park's dappled green,  
Past stony College of Pharmacy,  
We were off to see the wizardry!  
Spun in darkness, a movie-house screen  
Could cool for an hour poverty's sting,  
Make a vagabond, a king.  
The far-fetched caught by a finger.  
Like White Rabbit—no time to linger.

Past Baltimore trolley—Cedar, Larchwood, Pine  
 Spruce, Locust, Walnut—a roll call—  
 Spirits unfurled like prayers on a spool.  
 Along these streets did wealth of another kind  
 Shudder behind the sheerest heirloom curtain  
 As Mother and I, strange shadows in pastel cotton,  
 Far below peaked attics, Gothic spires, flat-tarred  
 Rooftops, trudged on and upward?

At journey's end, at peak of Walnut Hill,  
 Its electrifying name, *The Commodore*,  
 Magnifying fame with nonsense, trash or treasure,  
 Moorish in style, our refuge, welcomed all.  
 Today, once upon a time is gone.  
 No sign above the parapet. Just a skeleton  
 Of steel. New dreams proclaim this edifice  
 Now a mosque. Indeed, a fortress.

*\*420 Row, on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, is a collection of eight ornate homes on the west side of 42nd Street in University City. The three-story homes were designed and built by G.W. and W.D. Hewitt in the early 1880s, the first Queen Anne-style development in Spruce Hill.*

# *Learning from Her*

EMILY MADAPUSI PERA

A lot you could learn from her,  
you thought.

Her coy method of copying answers,  
charming the plagiarized  
with her lopsided smile.

How she drove with a casual foot up on the dash,  
while drinking a Coke & polishing a toe  
in hot pink.

Her technique of cinching thrift-store clothes to fit,  
& how she did as she wanted  
not one step more—  
with boys.

And the casual way she had of walking in chunky heels,  
gesticulating broadly while blowing her loose hair  
up from her face as she talked  
about painters & poets, casseroles & profiteroles,  
Led Zep, Lester Bangs, Leonard Cohen, the 27 Club—  
about worlds that could open up  
if only you knew—

Yes, that was the main thing you wanted  
to learn.



# *Object Permanence*

JACOB NELSON

When the sheet is pulled over  
your father's face is still there,  
his mustache, too, for you to tug.

When later he shaves it  
you cry and run—understand  
the sharp edge of loss.

Delight now in the comedy  
of return. Father disappears  
momentarily,                    then reappears—

A boy wades in, turns over cold  
stones in the stream to see what  
wiggles. (put them back)

The salamander's tail in  
the mayonnaise jar regenerates  
not quite the same. (put it back)

When Luke vanishes through the wooden  
slats of the platform you will know  
a thing gone                    is always gone—

the doll, your first love, your first tooth (sharper  
than what grew in its place), your balsa wood plane  
on the roof, your classmate with the ovarian cyst, Tara, Gram, Uncle Ray

# The Commandment

JAMES ARMSTRONG

Brontë enthusiasts tend to be a bit fanatical. A university hosts their conference each summer, and grown men and women—not just scholars, but librarians and secretaries and retirees—pay for the privilege to live in cramped dorm rooms for a week, eat lousy food and attend lectures on *Villette* and *Agnes Grey* and storm imagery in *Wuthering Heights*.

Greg and the young woman had each attended conferences in the past. Two years ago they had gotten into an animated discussion on how Grace Poole adds to the Gothic elements of *Jane Eyre*. Greg was fully dressed, but the woman wore a robe. Her hair was wet, and she clutched a bag full of toiletries.

“Oh!” he said. “I guess this floor is coed.”

“Yes,” she said. “I was feeling sweaty after the plane. The shower is kinda crummy, but it did the trick.” Her robe fell open ever so slightly, and Greg actively managed not to gaze down at her breasts. “There’s another at the end of the hall, but I couldn’t tell which was for which,” she said.

“What was that?”

“The bathrooms.”

“Oh! Yes.”

“One must be for women and one for men, but there were no signs, so I just picked one.”

“Of course,” he said. “What you have to do, I guess.”

“Rebecca.”

“Right. Grace Poole and all that. I remember.”

“I wasn’t sure you remembered my name,” she said. He hadn’t.

“Greg,” he said, extending his hand.

“I know. We missed you last year.”

“That’s flattering,” he said. Her robe had fallen open a small amount more.

“Well, I’ll see you at dinner.” She continued down the corridor to her room.

Greg walked to the bathroom, went inside, then noticed one of the shower stalls was wet. A pleasant aroma. Shampoo. Herbal.

He was surprised he had forgotten Rebecca’s name, in fact forgotten her completely. There had been other things on his mind, of course. But he remembered now her excitement over *Jane Eyre*, how her eyes sparkled when she spoke, and how she hurriedly shoveled food into her mouth during dinner, as if eating were a ridiculous absurdity when there was literature to discuss.

When he went down to the cafeteria, she wasn’t there. He ended up sitting with an elderly Canadian man.

“There you are,” said a voice behind him. “Mind if I join you?”

Greg turned to offer a seat to Rebecca. She placed her tray down beside his. “Are you feeling better?” Greg asked.

“Much, thank you. There’s music tonight, I hear.”

The elderly man continued explaining his theory on the Gondal saga, but Greg found it difficult to pay attention. The man excused himself.

“He’s a character,” Rebecca remarked after the old man had left.

Greg nodded.

“I don’t know how I can take them all sometimes,” she said. “The Society’s so... well... geriatric.”

Greg laughed.

“That’s why I’m glad you’re here,” she said. “Someone at least close to my own age.”

“Are you implying I’m older than you?”

“I don’t know. How old are you? Or are you old enough not to tell anymore?”

“Certainly not,” he said. “So long as you’re not.”

“No. No. Not at all.”

“And you are?”

“I’ll write it down,” she said, reaching for a napkin.

“Then I’ll write mine down, too.”

“If you show me yours, I’ll show you mine.”

“Something like that,” he said with a laugh. They wrote down numbers and exchanged napkins.

“Thirty-two? I would have guessed you were my age.”

He opened her napkin. “You are not sixteen,” he said.

“Well, I feel sixteen. Doesn’t that count?”

They stood next to each other at the opening toast as the President of the Society gave a long-winded ode to the enduring power of the Brontës. Greg kept glancing over at Rebecca as the speech droned on. She caught him gazing at her and smiled.

Afterward, they sat together as an ensemble performed period music. Greg noticed Rebecca closed her eyes as they played, taking in the sounds of the instruments. He wondered what was going on in her mind as she listened.

When the concert ended, everyone began to file out of the room.

“Where are people going?” Greg asked.

“Apparently, they’ve opened up the college bar for the conference,” Rebecca said. “There’s nothing more pathetic than a bunch of gray-haired Brontë fans plastered out of their minds.”

“I take it you’re not going.”

“No. It seems a shame to turn in early, though. I slept on the plane, so I’m wide awake.”

“Up for something different?”

“What do you mean by different?”

“Find out,” he said.

She smiled. “Okay.”

Greg wasn’t sure where he was taking her as he led Rebecca to the edge of campus. Then he remembered passing the place. “How are your shoes?”

“Fine,” she said. “Are we going far?”

“Not far, but... you’ll see.”

Music poured out the door as someone stumbled to join smokers around the entrance.

“What kind of place is this?”

“It’s a swing-dance club.”

“I don’t,” she said. “I don’t swing dance.”

“I’ll teach you.”

“But I can’t,” she said. “I’ve never done anything like it.”

“And you never will, if you don’t try. You don’t have to. But if you never try, you’ll never know if you like it, will you?”

She hesitated.

“Give it one dance. If you don’t like it, we’ll leave.”

He led her inside and onto the dance floor. The place was packed. She glanced around, then turned to Greg just in time to see him give her a gracious bow. She laughed and took his hand.

“Balance your weight against mine,” he said. “When I pull out, you pull out. When I push in, you push in. There. Like that.”

They stayed for much longer than just one dance. It amazed Greg how quickly Rebecca caught on. It had taken him forever to learn. As a particularly vigorous number came to a close, Rebecca started to cheer and clap her hands. “I’m thirsty! Let’s get some water.”

She reached out and grabbed Greg by the hand and led him through the crowd. That’s when he noticed the band around her finger. He hadn’t seen it before. Had she not been wearing it? No. She must have been. Perhaps he hadn’t wanted to see it.

It wasn’t necessarily a wedding ring. It could have been something else. Lots of unmarried women wear all sorts of rings. But a vague memory from two years ago came creeping back into his head.

They ended up getting a couple of drinks then sitting down at a table by the wall. “I haven’t had this much fun in years,” she said.

“Me neither.”

“Scott never does anything like this.”

“Scott?”

“My husband.”

There was his answer.

“He’s an engineer. Very smart. Sweet. But can’t dance to save his life.”

“That’s a shame. You’re a fabulous dancer.”

“I am not! I just have fun. That’s all.”

“That’s what makes you so good at it,” he said.

“I don’t get much practice, though.”

“Does Scott like the Brontë’s?”

“All he reads is science fiction. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. I read science fiction, too. But there are some things... some things I love so much... that he’ll never understand. You know what I mean?”

“Hmm,” said Greg.

“What about you?” she said. “Weren’t you engaged or something?”

“Was,” he said.

“What happened?”

“Things... didn’t turn out the way I thought they would.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she said.

Greg sat in silence and finished his drink. A new song began to play.

“That music,” she said. “I know it. This piece.”

“Glenn Miller. Serenade in Blue.”

“Let’s dance,” she said. And they did.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Rebecca woke up feeling ill. Her period was late again. Perhaps she would head to the drugstore during the first lecture. Probably nothing to worry about.

She skipped breakfast, hoping she would feel better after a bit more time in bed, then got up and showered in time for the first lecture. It was on the French Revolution and how the Brontës had reacted to it in their writing. She had really come to get a good seat for the second lecture. The second one was on *Jane Eyre*.

Afterward, they broke for lunch. She looked around for a friendly face and spotted Greg walking around with his tray. “Over here!” she said. He gave her a curious look, then joined her at a table.

"I had a really great time last night," she said.

"Me too."

"Did you go to the lectures this morning?"

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

He seemed reticent at first, but after he started speaking about the lectures and the Brontës, and particularly *Jane Eyre*, all that dropped away.

"So I have to ask you," she said. "This is really embarrassing, but I have to know."

"Yes?"

"It's kind of personal, but..."

"Go on."

"*Jane Eyre*... or *Wuthering Heights*?"

"*Jane Eyre*," he said.

"Yes!" she shrieked. "There are so many damned Emily freaks here. I don't care what the critics say. It's just a better novel."

"Here's one for you," he said. "*Agnes Grey*... or *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*?"

"*Agnes Grey*," she said.

"No!" he shouted.

"What do you mean? *Agnes Grey* is so much better."

"Oh, please!"

"Well, sorry," she said. "I like it."

"Fine, fine. You're allowed. But tell me... *Shirley*... or *Villette*?"

"Hands down," she said. "*Villette*."

"Thank you."



“Let’s see,” she said. “This one’s more for women, but... Rochester or Heathcliff?”

Greg smiled. “I don’t think I’m qualified to answer that one. You?”

“Rochester.”

“Why?”

“There’s something more... upstanding. Decent. Rochester’s capable of anything, the most heinous crimes, and yet... deep down, you know, when push comes to shove, he’ll do the right thing.”

“Rochester it is then,” he said.

They met again at dinner, and she asked him if the dance club was open that night.

“What, you want to go again?”

“It was such fun,” she said. “And I was just starting to get the hang of it. I’ll forget it all if I don’t go again.”

“You sure you want to do this?”

“Or do what? Get drunk with a bunch of retired school teachers at the bar?”

“I’ll have to change.”

“That’s okay,” she said. “I’ll wait.”

She stood outside his room as he got ready. The door opened, and she looked at him and laughed.

“What?”

“That tie.”

“Too much?”

“It’s perfect,” she said. “Come on. Let’s go.”

Dancing with Greg was amazing. Through her hands, she could feel the weight of his entire body—the entire body through just his hands. Why couldn’t Scott dance like this? Why couldn’t Scott dance at all?

Sure, it had been late. But that didn't mean anything. It was probably nothing. Still, she should go to the drugstore tomorrow. Just in case.

"I'm not ready for this," she thought. "I want to dance. God, why haven't I danced more in my life?" She thought of Scott and how quickly he retreated from the dance floor at their wedding. Then, the strangest thing happened. The image of Bertha came into her mind. Bertha Mason, the madwoman from *Jane Eyre*. Now why had she thought of that? Why would Scott make her think of Bertha Mason?

She felt the strength in Greg's arms as they danced. Yet for all his strength, he was so graceful. There was a beauty in his movement. Not only did this strong, intelligent man talk with her about the books she enjoyed more than anything else, but even his movements seemed to be perfection, if not perfection to the world, perfection to her.

They paused for a couple of drinks. "We should start thinking about getting back," he said.

"No," she said. "Not yet. Just a little longer."

She loved Scott. He was a good man. He would never do anything to hurt her. He was so gentle. So kind.

"Just a little longer," she said. "Please."

\*\*\*

The next day, Greg didn't pay much attention to the morning lectures. He kept glancing around, looking for Rebecca. He didn't know whether he wanted to see her or not, but when she wasn't there, it was like an emptiness opened up inside his stomach.

At lunch, there was still no Rebecca. He sat with the Canadian man he had spoken with earlier, but he kept expecting to turn around and find Rebecca right there behind him.

In the afternoon there was a panel discussion on 19th-century publishing issues. He saw Rebecca walk in late and sneak to the back row. He turned around, and she gave him a little wave.

Rebecca walked up to him after the discussion. "Hey there," she said.

"We missed you this morning."

"I wasn't feeling too hot. Slept in late, then went to the drug store."

"It do the trick?"

"I didn't actually take anything," she said. "Just knowing it's there can help, though."

"Join you for dinner then?"

Eating the warmed-over cafeteria food, they spoke in short sentences and paused for long sips of water. Rebecca poked at her meatloaf with a fork.

"I don't know if I'm coming back next year," she said.

"Really?"

"I always have fun, but... there are so many people here... widows and widowers... older people whose children have grown... I don't always feel like I belong."

"If that's the case, I don't belong, either."

"You're different," she said. "Very different. Besides, if... never mind."

He gazed at her dark hair as it hung down over her face. "Would you..." he began. "You don't have to, but... do you want to...?"

She looked up at him. "Yes?"

"Would you like to go dancing tonight?"

"Of course," she said.

That night, as he was clearing away their drinks, Rebecca ran off without a word. She reappeared after a moment. “Where’d you go?” he asked.

“I made a request,” she said.

Greg listened as the music began. Serenade in Blue.

“Let’s dance,” she said.

That night, as he was alone in bed, it occurred to Greg that he was committing a sin. Which one was it? It had been so long since he had even thought of such things. Perhaps he should have paid more attention in Sunday School. Was it eight? Nine? Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.

Her husband—Scott, was it? He was a good man. From what Greg could tell, anyway. Was it a crime not to know Acton from Ellis? Was it a crime not to dance?

He found himself fantasizing about what would happen if Scott died in a tragic accident. Rebecca would be distraught. She would show up at the next Brontë conference, inconsolable. He would be there. She would cry on his shoulder.

But the more he thought about it, the more stupid he realized it all was. Rebecca was married, and that was that.

He couldn’t stop thinking about the tender curve of her face. The contour of her breasts.

\*\*\*

The next morning Rebecca was ill again and went to the bathroom and vomited. She returned to her room and looked at the bag from the drug store still sitting on the dresser. She had been hoping—praying—that she wouldn’t have to use it. She found it comical how much she now longed

to have her period, something she had hated since a teenager. But it hadn't come. She would have to take the test.

"These things don't work, anyway," she thought while opening the box. No matter what the result, she would go to the doctor after she got back, just to be sure. Yes. Even if it came out positive, that didn't mean anything.

The wait was excruciating. She wasn't ready. She didn't know when she would be ready, but it wasn't now. She was just beginning to live herself.

She hated Scott. His goofy smile and his blank stares and his childish love for Marion Zimmer Bradley. (How could he fucking read her?) No. She loved Scott. She knew she did. But when she swore to be his forever, she hadn't realized just how long that really was.

If they had a child together, it would bind them, no matter what. Even if they separated, even if they divorced, they would still have the child. Scott would always be a part of her life.

And she wanted Scott. She wanted him right now, holding her hand as she waited. She just didn't want this. Not now. Not when she had just met....

What was the use of it all? The week would go the same way no matter what the test said. She would thank Greg for a lovely time, she would say good-bye, she would go back home and....

It was time. She looked at the result of the test. Positive. "This should be the happiest day of my life," she thought and cried bitterly.

It took some time to regain her composure and go downstairs for lunch. There was Greg, waving at her with a big smile. She didn't want to see him—not now. But she knew she would have to.

“Are you okay?” he said.

“Sure,” she said. “I’m fine.”

“You missed a great lecture on the history of Haworth.”

She was silent.

“This afternoon is the Society’s business meeting. It’ll probably be boring.”

She ate for a moment without speaking, then looked up at him.

“Let’s not go,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“Forget the business meeting. I’m never coming to another one of these again. Let’s go dancing. Let’s go to the park. Let’s do anything but sit and sit and sit. I’m tired of sitting.”

They left their lunches half-eaten and found a patch of grass where nothing had yet been built. They both laid down on the soft ground. It was a beautiful day, and the sun poured onto them from a cloudless sky.

“Are you really not coming back?”

“I can’t,” she said.

“Why not?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Can I do anything?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “Read to me.”

“What do you want me to read?”

“Anything,” she said. “Anything at all. Just... don’t stop.”

He took out a copy of *Jane Eyre* and opened it up. He picked a spot and began reading from the opening of the chapter.

“Some time in the afternoon I raised my head, and looking round and seeing the western sun gilding the sign of its decline on the wall, I asked, ‘What am I to do?’”

He stopped and looked at Rebecca. She continued to gaze up at the sky. He continued to read.

“But the answer my mind gave—’Leave Thornfield at once’—was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears. I said I could not bear such words now.”

Rebecca began to cry.

“That I am not Edward Rochester’s bride is the least part of my woe,’ I alleged: ‘that I have wakened out of most glorious dreams, and found them all void and vain, is a horror I could bear and master....”

“Stop,” she said faintly.

“...but that I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it.”

“Stop,” she said. They sat in silence for a moment. She did not try to hide her tears. “Stop.”

He put the book down next to her. “Rebecca,” he said, “there’s something I have to tell you.”

“No.”

“There’s something I have to tell you. I won’t be coming back next year either. I can’t. If I came back... it would only make me think of... of...”

“Don’t,” she said.

“Rebecca,” he said, “I have to tell you... what you mean to me. Seeing you here again, talking with you, dancing with you, just being here on the grass—”

“Don’t say it,” she said.

“Rebecca, I—”

“Don’t say it!” She hurled the book at him and fled.

\*\*\*

The following morning, they ate at opposite ends of the dining hall. They passed each other on their way back to their rooms but did not acknowledge one another.

Greg knew he had been wrong. What he had said, in and of itself, was harmless, but he knew better than that. He had crossed an invisible boundary, and there was no going back. He wasn't sure if she really would not return to the Brontë conference, but he knew that he never could.

The President of the Society gave a farewell speech to close the conference, and the attendees went upstairs to gather their bags. Greg approached her from behind as she was leaving. "Rebecca," he said. She turned around. "Rebecca," he said, "I'm sorry."

She stood there, staring at him blankly as people filed past. He wanted some reaction, any reaction, but her face was like granite. Finally, she spoke. "Me, too."

"Are you taking the bus to the airport?"

"Yes," she said.

"Can I—can I join you?"

She nodded.

They sat next to each other the whole way on the bus. Neither spoke. They arrived at the terminal and discovered their gates were near each other, but Rebecca's flight left an hour earlier than his.

"I have to go to my gate," she said. She did not move.

"Can I keep you company?" he asked.

She nodded. "Please."

\*\*\*



No one knows what Greg thought as he stood with her at the gate, just as no one knows what was going on in Rebecca's mind as she waited for her plane. But the attendant was there at the counter, and she saw what happened.

A youngish couple, attractive, but ordinary, stood staring at the gate. They watched as passengers disembarked, and they continued to wait as the aircraft was cleaned and refueled. At last, the attendant announced pre-boarding would begin for first-class passengers, medallion members, and any travelers with special needs. They waited.

Official boarding began with passengers in group one. They waited. The attendant invited passengers from groups one and two to board the aircraft. They waited. The attendant invited groups one through three to board the aircraft. "That's mine," said the woman. They did not move.

"Now boarding all groups, all passengers," announced the attendant. They did not move. The attendant noticed the couple standing there, clutching at their carry-on bags. "Is this your flight?" she said. The woman nodded. Still, she did not move. "It'll be leaving in a couple minutes," the attendant said. The woman nodded.

A new song started to play in the piped-in music the airport provided. The attendant didn't recognize it at all, but she watched as the woman looked to the man. He smiled faintly, then bowed. He took her hands, and the two began to dance. Passengers hurried by. Announcements blared over the loudspeaker. Still, the couple did not let go. They continued to dance.

"You have to get on now," said the attendant. They ignored her. "Ma'am," she said, "you have to get on the plane." They danced. "Ma'am, that was the *final* call. The final call."

Both were weeping now as they embraced, clutching one another in their arms.

“You have to get on the plane,” the attendant commanded. “I’m sorry, but you *must* get on the plane.”

They released each other. The woman picked up her bags and—tears on her face—turned away and walked down the ramp to her flight. □

# *Chicago – 1966*

MICHAEL WALLS

I remember you well. Sidewalks were slush,  
snow piled along the edges. We were young.  
We met the night I first heard Nowhere Man.  
When Zorba the Greek played on the juke box,  
you grabbed my hand, tried to teach me  
a traditional Greek dance. We walked down to  
Rush Street, then you took me home—tentative  
crunches up steps, gritty with salt, that led to  
your front door. We sat on your floor and  
talked. I watched how you twisted your hair  
into coils that hung a few seconds, then fell  
to your shoulders, felt tendons on your neck,  
tight as E strings, while you told me about  
a boyfriend who went to Viet Nam, who came  
home and beat you up. Later, tenderness, kisses,  
caresses came with the wine. In the morning  
your hand shook as you poured the coffee, told  
me I couldn't see you again. Your boyfriend  
was getting out of the army and coming home.

## *Another Gen-X Icon Dead*

ACE BOGGESS

Why are we the waning crowd,  
grayest cloud, shattered vase  
that once held crocuses & hope?

We went to school, ambitious to learn  
so much that by our graduation  
already had fallen out of fashion.

We strolled beaches collecting syringes.  
We poured whiskey down one rat hole  
after another. We sighed too often.

See again how little understood  
we were & are, even to ourselves,  
except in our music which defines us

like no age since the Beatles first  
smoked weed. Our music promised us  
we could be better, swore we'd fail,

each of us a new Meursault  
stuck in the glue trap of meaninglessness.  
Our music recognized us

for our weaknesses. It lived in us, &  
now we've lost  
one more piece of it.

Where do songs go when they die?  
Must be a graveyard for broken notes;  
heaven, too; rebirth.

# *Mastery*

KEN VICTOR

And the experience of the failed  
work is a prod to practice: think of  
  
the arpeggio unraveling in mid-flight  
or the clay collapsing on the wheel  
  
when water isn't right. And what is  
one's craft half-perfected if not  
  
watering's sorrow: how the bud  
of the amateur never quite opens,  
  
the discipline of the dilettante  
evaporates, even the passion-filled  
  
may not last their apprenticing  
if the demands of the finished work  
  
dry their resolve. Craft's possibility  
is waiting to be cared into its form  
  
despite how what first emerges can  
mock your most resolute intention,

your work beaten again with the ache  
of *almost*, the slap of starting over.

Begin again at the beginning, baby-step  
virtuoso. Surely, you think, *this time...*

like the pianist mastering Liszt, each  
note a world, linked world to world,

a universe, a galaxy and a single-  
minded mortal watering creation.

## *Constructing Border Quilts*

MARTHA BRENCKLE

*The Migrant Quilt Project believes in art and activism. The quilt-makers sew quilts out of migrants' discarded clothes found in the desert and embroider them with the names of migrants who died while attempting the journey. Angela Martinez, 2018*

looking for justice with thread, pins, needle  
and scissors, cutting shirts and dungarees abandoned  
out of necessity for the weight of the journey  
sharp mountains, miles of windy desert  
the owners needing to carry water and food  
more than excess clothing and empty *bordados*

the quilt pieced still looks like clothing  
so one can read these quilts as covering  
the brown limbs of individuals walking  
so one can protest the erasure of people who wore them  
lament their lives and thirsty feet funneled to America

who walked from poverty  
who walked away from injustice  
who walked from certain death  
to possible death



their full names embroidered  
or *desconocido* on material  
torn and stained with blood

a little girl's pink dress carefully mended  
stitched next to her mother's ripped blouse

a woman leaving her shoes behind and running

## *The Lariat*

MARC PIETRZYKOWSKI

I want to wash the hands that guide me home  
and smell the soap and the soil together.

The breeze through the open window will dry us  
the sun through the open window thick as butter—

I want to know salt and how it lives on the tongue,  
dissolving into sensation, is it joy, or regret?

Probably both, after all, bodies are much the same,  
flesh pushing against flesh until the soul

collapses like a circus tent, kisses the earth,  
whispering as it falls: *someday I will lose myself*

*completely*. Until then, being lassoed to the world  
is not so awful, as long as there are mouths to kiss,

hands to hold, flame to join with flame.

# Home Visit

JESSE MARDIAN

4782 Menson Avenue was a small place with a dead lawn. Past the brittle grass where toys lay scattered, the house stood with peeling pink paint and a roof missing several clay shingles. Jennifer checked the address in her notebook, entered through a creaking gate, and walked to the door. In the patio's shade, she straightened her skirt and picked lint off her shoulder. She knocked and waited. Principal Henley's words echoed in her head: *Everything begins with the home visit.*

A young woman with a baby on her hip opened the door. Jennifer noticed stains on her aqua-green scrubs and bags under her eyes.

"Good morning. You must be Mrs. Vilch."

"Ms. Vilch," the woman corrected. "And you are?" She shifted her baby to the opposite hip. Somewhere came the smell of vomit.

"Jennifer Politano, or Ms. Politano," she said. "We spoke on the phone, I'm--"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, the new teacher, that's right. Come on in." She left the door ajar and turned into a dark hallway.

Jennifer followed her through the entryway into a well-lit kitchenette. At the center stood a wooden table with the remains of breakfast. The stench of bile was replaced by the sweet aroma of maple syrup, and Jennifer, as politely as she could, commented on the loveliness of the home.

"Yup, a real castle," Ms. Vilch said, picking up a piece of waffle, biting into it, then tossing it back onto the plate. "Coffee?" she asked with her mouth full.

“No thank you,” she said. Principal Henley’s voice entered her head: *Never decline anything, it’s rude.* “Actually, a small cup would be nice.”

As Ms. Vilch poured her coffee, little details of the room caught Jennifer’s eye—discolored wallpaper here, crumbs on the floor there, torn coupons scattered about the counter like an upturned puzzle—and while a story began to formulate in her mind, another warning from her boss emerged: *Careful to check your privilege at the door, it is not your job to make assumptions or judgements.*

“They’re really robbing the cradle, aren’t they?”

“I’m sorry?”

“No reason to be sorry. You just look young for a teacher.”

She was right. Jennifer had just earned her credential, accepting a job offer after an interview and a sample lesson. Yet, it had been a long road to get to this house—exams, observations, student teaching without pay, immunizations, background checks—and now she was here, attempting to pass another hurdle.

“What an adorable baby,” Jennifer said. She took a sip and set her coffee down, and without really wanting to be asked, “May I hold her?”

“Please, my back is killing me..”

Jennifer took the baby and bounced her lightly. Ms. Vilch sat down and began tying her hair into a knot. Grease seemed to shimmer from her forehead. For a moment, nothing was said. Jennifer began to wonder about the girl. *Engage the conversation, but don’t be too pushy,* rang Principal Henley’s words.

“So what is this?” Ms. Vilch asked.

“I’m sorry?”

“Jesus, you are sorry a lot.”

Ms. Vilch sighed like a woman who had been up all night emptying bed pans. And she likely had been, Jennifer mused.

Ms. Vilch went on, “You know, this, you being here, the school’s never had teachers come here before. There’s some catch I’m sure. Is it money? Does the school need money?”

“No, not at all, nothing like that, I assure you.”

In fact, these visits were only mandatory for new faculty, meant to build relationships before the start of the school year. Jennifer tried to remember if any teachers had come to her house as a child.

“Just call me Giselle. It’s too hot and early to be polite.”

For a moment, Jennifer nearly forgot about the baby in her arms, who had a swamp of saliva at the corners of her mouth. She wiped the baby’s face without thinking. “Alright, Giselle then.”

Outside the kitchen window she could see the surrounding neighborhood. Few trees sprouted along the sidewalks, and in the distance, beyond the sprawl of the smog-smothered skyscrapers, a mirage of mountain ranges stood in ghostly heat waves. Somewhere among all that mess of buildings was Franklin Academy.

“So what’s the deal? Is this some new Trump initiative? Sending schoolteachers to homes to spy on parents?”

“What? No, of course not. That’s insane.”

“Speaking of insane, what happened to Ms. Jones? Heard she cracked or something, couldn’t handle the pressure of a 2nd grade class.”

The old teacher. *If asked about Ms. Jones, tell them she moved on to another school.*

Giselle’s large, vein-streaked eyes looked Jennifer up and down. Speechless, Jennifer shifted the baby to her other arm.

“Gets heavy, huh? Let me take her.”

Jennifer handed back the baby. She thought about her last meeting with Principal Henley. He had sat behind his desk, broad-shouldered yet hunched like a man who had carried too much weight over the years. He had proven himself in the classroom, received accolades, and now was the leader of Franklin Academy. He would probably be superintendent one day. She supposed she respected him, but only because she was supposed to.

“Look, the only reason I am here is to meet you and your daughter, go over any questions you have, and make an action plan so little Carly is given all the support she needs.”

“And why would she need support?”

Jennifer paused, retracing her words, and saw how they could be misconstrued.

“Well, all children have individualized needs, Ms. Vil–Giselle.”

“Are you saying my Carly’s dumb?”

The air in the sunshine-lit kitchen seemed as thick as syrup, and Jennifer could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks. The baby began to cry and the sweet maple smell was overtaken by the odor of a soiled diaper. A patter of feet entered the kitchen, and Jennifer looked up to find a little girl standing in the archway.

Dressed in pink pajamas with printed unicorns, Carly stood holding a naked Barbie doll with tangled hair. Jennifer could see the stains of syrup on her cheeks, and she found this comforting in some way. For a seven-year-old, Carly was tall. Lanky and thin, she stood with perfectly trimmed bangs the color of coffee.

“Wow, mama, she is beautiful,” Carly said, walking into the kitchen, holding the doll by her hair. She joined them at the table, wide-eyed

and seemingly unabashed about having a stranger in her home. Jennifer noticed the Barbie was missing an arm.

“What happened to your doll there?” Jennifer asked.

“Surgery,” Carly replied. “Are you my new teacher? The old one was kinda crazy, yelled a lot, rolled her eyes, acted like she was the smartest lady in the world. Are you like her? I hope not. Hey, nice shoes you got!”

Carly was under the table, examining Jennifer’s shoes when Ms. Vilch peeked into her baby’s diaper and, finding the source of odor, hastily carried her off into another room.

“Wait—” Jennifer chirped.

“Be back in a minute!” Ms. Vilch called from down the hall.

Jennifer felt a pinch at her ankles.

“Who is Lou Bootoon?” the girl said, running her finger along the words printed on the insole.

“Huh? Who? Wait. Carly, can I talk to you for a minute? I’d really like to get to know you.”

The girl handed the shoe back and grabbed Jennifer by the hand. “Come,” she said, “come see my room.”

Out of the kitchen, through the mildewed hallway, and past a room where Jennifer could see Ms. Vilch changing the baby’s diaper, they arrived at a door decorated with stickers. The girl pushed it open, revealing a small bedroom with a bed on one side and a crib on the other. Toys and stuffed animals lay scattered across the carpet, a coloring book with scribbles was on the bed, and clothes were thrown about, some in little mounds pushed against the wall.

Carly leapt onto her bed, knocking the coloring book to floor. She sang, “One little monkey jumping on the bed, one fell off and bumped her head!”

Jennifer imaged thirty Carlys doing the same thing on the desks of her classroom.

“Carly, how about you come here and tell me what it is you like to do in school.”

The girl leapt from the bed and grabbed Jennifer’s hand. “Come, come meet Goldie.”

On a dresser where clothes hung out like tongues, a bowl of water stood. Inside, a fish swam back and forth, trapped by walls of glass. Carly reached and took the bowl in her hands. The water ebbed and flowed, nearly spilling from the top as she held it up to Jennifer.

“This is Goldie,” she said. “Dadda won him at the carnival for me, throwing baseballs into a clown’s mouth.”

“And where is your dad?” Jennifer heard herself ask. *Remember you are there to build relationships, not be an inquisitor*, Principal Henley’s words echoed.

The girl thought for a second and said, “He is probably with Uncle Bernie, drinking brewskees. They like to watch sports and yell. Sometimes Uncle Bern comes here. He brings me Hot Wheels cars, but cars are for boys.”

“So, what do you like to read, Carly?” The questions came out forced, and Jennifer knew it. She saw several books on a small shelf and pulled one out. “Maybe you could read me one?”

The girl scrunched her face as if she had been offered a bowl of vegetables.

“Come on, it will be fun,” Jennifer said. She sat cross-legged in the center of the room, opening the book on her lap. “Look, I’ll start.” She pressed her finger to the page and read. Soon, Carly was by her side,



reading along and laughing. Jennifer smiled, and a certain serenity came over her. It was moments like these, so small and fleeting, that inspired her to be a teacher.

When the last line was read, Carly jumped to her feet and grabbed another book called *When the Wind Wept*. Jennifer could see it was a book all about personification. And alliteration, she supposed.

“When the wind wept, the sun smiled, and the clouds crowded close together,” Carly read. On the page, the natural elements all had faces. The sun was a man, of course. The wind was a woman, her long blowing hair drawn with almost transparent lines. Yelling erupted from the other room.

“Dadda’s home,” Carly said without looking up from the book. “Whenever wind was weeping, the sun shined so...”

Jennifer heard a man’s voice boom, “This is my house!” And over the baby’s cries came Giselle shushing, “Don’t embarrass us, the teacher’s here.”

*It’s not your job to judge them*, Jennifer could hear Principal Henley say again.

“Wind wailed when rain roared...”

“Listen, Carly, I should go check on your mother.”

“But then tree trapped rain and wind whirred...”

The arguing ended with the sharp slam of a door.

Jennifer stood, peered out the bedroom window, and witnessed a man staggering away. Before reaching the gate he kicked a toy doll and it flew out of the yard. All the while, Carly read as if nothing was happening at all.

“Just keep reading, Carly,” Jennifer said, heading for the door.

“You’ll come back, right?”

“Of course I will.”

She followed the baby’s cries into another bedroom down the hallway. There, at the far end of the room, Giselle embraced the baby, cooing calm words into her ear. Jennifer stood in the doorway, realizing she didn’t know what to do or say.

“What you looking at?” Giselle said. The room was dark and her face was in shadows.

“I wanted to make sure everything’s okay.”

“Of course you do,” she said. “Big, smart teacher comes here, so high, so mighty. You want to fix us? You think because you went to school that you know everything?”

Jennifer stammered. “I just wanted to help—”

Giselle let out a raucous laugh. “Help? Yeah, you can help yourself out of here and never come back, how’s that sound, you bitch? How dare you.”

The baby’s shrieking continued as Ms. Vilch held her tightly, bobbing side to side. Stepping back, Jennifer stood at the threshold between rooms. Down the hall, she could hear Carly reading *When the Wind Wept*, and in front of her, Giselle clutched her youngest, dancing a kind of sad waltz in the darkness. There was also the front door, sunbeams shining through its tiny rectangular windows like headlights. Jennifer listened for Principal Henley, but he said nothing. And although she didn’t fully understand it yet, and would face it many times in the years ahead, Jennifer had entered a gray territory, a place where the teacher must helplessly stand aside.

The door closed behind her and she was outside again with the unrelenting heat. When she neared the gate, Jennifer looked over her

shoulder. The blinds rattled behind the living room window, and she thought she could see Carly's eyes peering through the slits. Jennifer raised her hand to wave, but the blinds stilled and she was left with her palm in the air, fingers extended, as if pressing against a wall of glass. □

## Contributors

**JAMES ARMSTRONG**'s stories have appeared in *The Long Story*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Concho River Review*, and other publications. His plays have been published in various collections, including *The Best American Short Plays: 2012-2013*. You can keep up with him at [www.armstrongwrites.com](http://www.armstrongwrites.com).

**ACE BOGGESS** is author of four books of poetry, most recently *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018) and *Ultra Deep Field* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2017), and the novel *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

**MARTHA BRENCKLE** is a Professor at the University of Central Florida where she teaches First-year Writing and Rhetorical Theory. She writes poetry and fiction and has published most recently in *The Sea Letter*, *Clockhouse Review*, and *Broken Bridge Review*. In 2000, she won the Central Florida United Arts Award for Poetry. Martha is a former performance poet and has performed her monologues on lesbian life across the US. *Street Angels* (2006) is her first published novel and was nominated for a Lambda Award and a Triangle Award and was a Finalist for *Fence Magazine*'s Best GLBT Novel Award.

**TINA CANE** is the founder/director of *Writers-in-the-Schools*, Rhode Island. She is the author of *Dear Elena: Letters for Elena Ferrante*, *Once More With Feeling*, and the forthcoming collection, *Body of Work*. She currently serves as the Poet Laureate of Rhode Island, where she lives with her

husband and their three children.

**LAWRENCE F. FARRAR** is a former Foreign Service officer with multiple postings in Japan, Europe and Washington, DC. Including an earlier appearance in the *Bryant Literary Review*, his stories have appeared more than sixty times in literary magazines. His work often involves a protagonist encountering the customs and morals of a foreign society.

**CATE GABLE** has an M.F.A. in poetry from Pacific Lutheran University; an M.A. from the University of Washington; and a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania where she graduated *magna cum laude*. Gable won first place in San Francisco's Bay Guardian poetry contest; she has a chapbook of poetry and commentary on Stein/Toklas, entitled "Chère Alice: Three Lives," (Publications Studio) launched as part of a University of California, Bancroft Library exhibit, "A Place at the Table." Among other recent publications, her poem "Kilauea" was selected for Aloha Shorts Radio in Hawaii. Gable lives in Nahcotta, Washington; Oracle, Arizona; and Paris, France.

**ERIC GREINKE** has new work in: *The Broad River Review*, *Coe Review*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Lake Effect*, *Loch Raven Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Over The Transom*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Poetry Pacific (Canada)*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Trajectory*, and *Rosebud*. His most recent books are: *Shorelines* (Adastra Press, 2018) and *Invisible Wings* (Presa Press, 2019). His book *For The Living Dead - New & Selected Poems* (Presa Press, Simon Pulse, 2014) was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He is a Contributing Writer for the *Schuylkill Valley Journal*. He lives in an old stone cottage by a lake in Western Michigan. [www.ericgreinke.com](http://www.ericgreinke.com)

DAVID JAMES has published nine books, and more than thirty of his one-act plays have been produced. He teaches at Oakland Community College.

SUSAN JOHNSON received her M.F.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she currently teaches writing. Poems of hers have recently appeared in *North American Review*, *The Meadow*, *San Pedro River Review*, *SLAB*, *Off The Coast*, and others. She lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and her commentaries can be heard on NEPR.

JOHN P. KRISTOFKO has had poetry and short stories appear in about two hundred publications, including: *Folio*, *Rattle*, *Cimarron Review*, *Slant*, *Fourth River*, *Chiron Review*, and *Bryant Literary Review*. He has published three chapbooks, most recently *The Timekeeper's Garden* (The Orchard Street Press, orchpress.com). He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize five times.

JOHN KRUMBERGER has previously published a volume of poems entitled *The Language of Rain and Wind* (Backwaters Press in 2008), and a chapbook, *In a Jar Somewhere*, through Black Dirt Press in 1999. His latest volume collection *Because Autumn* was published by Main Street Rag Press in 2016. He works as a psychologist in private practice in St. Paul and lives with his wife in Minneapolis.

ELAINE LITTLE served as an Army interrogator in Afghanistan, and as a broadcast journalist in Cuba and Bosnia. She's currently working on a novel about the mobilization of a group of Army Reservists and feels the wartime experience, particularly from the female soldier's perspective, has yet to be satisfactorily explored.

**RUSS ALLISON LOAR** was a musician and songwriter for many years, then returned to college, earning a journalism degree from Cal State University at Long Beach. He became a newspaper reporter and columnist, writing for the *Los Angeles Times* during his last years in journalism. He then taught newswriting at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, California, and completed graduate work in American literature at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. He has always written poetry and short prose, and his photographs are used on websites throughout the world.

**GEORGE LONGENECKER**'s recent poems have been published in *Common Ground Review*, *Evening Street Review* and *America*. He's had book reviews in *Rain Taxi* and a short story in *The Main Street Rag*. His book *Star Route* was published by Main Street Rag in 2018. He says about his poem in the *Bryant Literary Review*: "I was working for Advanced Placement-College Board for a week in Salt Lake City, and each morning as I left the hotel, would pass homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk. The disparity between tourists, commuters and the downtrodden was too much to bear."

**JESSE MARDIAN** earned his M.F.A. degree at San José State University. His recent works have been featured in *The Surfer's Journal*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *The Rumpus*, and *Three: An Anthology of Flash Nonfiction*. Currently, he is working as an educator in Los Angeles, California.

**PETER MUNRO** is a fisheries scientist who works in the Bering Sea, the Gulf of Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, and Seattle. Munro's poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *the Beloit Poetry Journal*, *the Iowa Review*, *the Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Passages North*, *The Cortland*

*Review, The Valparaiso Poetry Review, the Comstock Review, Rattle, The Literary Review, Carolina Quarterly, Prime Number, Poetry Northwest, and elsewhere. Listen to more poems at [www.munropoetry.com](http://www.munropoetry.com).*

JACOB NELSON graduated with his M.A. in English from the University of Rhode Island, where he served as the Associate Editor for Poetry of *The Ocean State Review*, the university's literary arts journal. He completed his undergraduate work at Saint Louis University. His work has previously appeared in *California Quarterly*. Nelson lives with his family in Rhode Island and teaches high school English.

JIMMIE PENNINGTON is a writer and self-taught artist from the Appalachians of Kentucky. His poetry has appeared in *Pegasus, Kudzu, White Ash, The Crucible, Stray Light, Promise Magazine* and others. His full length poetry collection, *My Kentucky: Poems Of Earth And Home*, was published by New Plains Press in December 2018. His novel is scheduled for release at the end of 2019.

EMILY MADAPUSI PERA is a writer based in Providence, Rhode Island. Her poems and stories have been published by *Tuck Magazine, Litro, Dissident Voice, Storgy Magazine, A3 Review, and Scout & Birdie*, among others. You can follow her at [www.actinkindness.com](http://www.actinkindness.com).

MARC PIETRZYKOWSKI lives and works and writes in Niagara County, NY. He has published various and sundry poems, stories, and essays, as well as ten books of poetry and three novels. His most recent book of poems, *sanctum*, and SciFi novel, *Burnout!*, were released in November 2018. You can visit Marc virtually at [www.marcpski.com](http://www.marcpski.com).



LISA RUSSO is a senior at Bryant University pursuing a degree in Applied Economics and a minor in Finance. She is President/Editorial Director of the Bryant Chapter of *Spoon University*, an online platform for building foodie communities across university campuses nationwide. Her favorite food is cinnamon rolls.

TERRY SANVILLE lives in San Luis Obispo, California, with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor), and two plump cats (his in-house critics). Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted by more than 280 literary and popular journals, magazines, and anthologies. Terry is also an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist.

NOEL SLOBODA is the author of the poetry collections *Shell Games* (2008) and *Our Rarer Monsters* (2013) as well as several chapbooks. He has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein. Sloboda teaches at Penn State York.

ALLEN STROUS is the author of *Tired* (The Backwaters Press) and one of the authors of *The Fifth Voice* (Toadlily Press). His poems have appeared in *The Cortland Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and others.

MARK TAKSA's poems are appearing in *Cardinal Sins*, *Pinyon*, and *Isthmus*. He is the author of ten chapbooks, of which *The Invention of Love* (March Street Press), *Love Among The Antiquarians* (Pudding House), and *The Torah At The End Of The Train* (first place in the *Poetica* chapbook contest) are the most recent.

J. TARWOOD has been a dishwasher, a community organizer, a medical archivist, a documentary film producer, an oral historian, and a teacher. Although currently working in China, much of his life has been spent in

East Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. He has published four books, *The Cats in Zanzibar*, *Grand Detour*, *And For The Mouth A Flower*, and *What The Waking See*, and his poems have appeared in magazines ranging from *American Poetry Review* to *Visions*. He has always been an unlikely man in unlikely places.

**WILLIAM TORPHY**'s short stories have appeared in *The Fictional Café*, *ImageOutWrite* Volumes 5 & 6, *Main Street Rag*, *Miracle Monocle*, *Sun Star Review* and *Chelsea Station*, the story for which was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He works as an art curator in the San Francisco area.

**KEN VICTOR** has been published in various journals in both Canada and the U.S., including *The Antigonish Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *Vallum*. His first collection of poetry, *We Were Like Everyone Else*, will be forthcoming from Cormorant Books in 2019. He has an M.A. in Creative Writing from Syracuse University where he studied with Philip Booth, Hayden Carruth, Stephen Dobyns, and Tess Gallagher. Originally from Boston, he now makes his home in the hills of western Quebec.

**MICHAEL WALLS** is a retired labor lawyer who lives in Atlanta and sometimes in a cabin in the North Georgia mountains. His poetry has appeared in a variety of literary journals including *The South Carolina Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE)* and *Atlanta Review*. His chapbook is *The Blues Singer* (The Frank Cat Press, 2003) and his full-length collection is *Stacking Winter Wood* (Kelsay Books/Aldrich Press, 2017).

**CHARLES HARPER WEBB**'s latest collection of poems, *Sidebend World*, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 2018. *A Million*

*MFAs Are Not Enough*, a gathering of Webb's essays on contemporary American poetry, was published in 2016 by Red Hen Press. Recipient of grants from the Whiting and Guggenheim Foundations, Charles teaches Creative Writing at California State University, Long Beach.

**SANDY WEISMAN** is a poet and visual artist. Her poetry has been included in two anthologies and several other journals, including *Salamander*, *Spillway*, *Barrow Street*, *Off the Coast*, and *Muddy River Poetry Review*. She is the owner of 26 Split Rock Cove, a privately owned artist community of studios, artist living space, and workshops overlooking Mussel Ridge Channel in S. Thomaston, Maine.

**JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS** is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize, 2019), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize, 2019), *Disinheritance*, and *Controlled Hallucinations*. A nineteen-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Philip Booth Award, American Literary Review Poetry Contest, Phyllis Smart-Young Prize, The 46er Prize, Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize, Confrontation Poetry Prize, and Laux/Millar Prize. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*. Previous publishing credits include: *The Yale Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Saranac Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Third Coast*, and various anthologies.

**YVONNE** is the first poetry editor of pioneer feminist magazines, *Aphra* and *Ms.* Yvonne has received several awards including NEAs for poetry (1974, 1984) and a Leeway (2003) for fiction (as Yvonne Chism-Peace). Anthologies and annuals featuring her poems include: *Bosque Press #8*, *Quiet Diamonds 2018* (Orchard Street), *161 One-Minute Monologues from*

*Literature* (Smith and Kraus), *This Sporting Life* (Milkweed), *Catholic Girls* (Plume/Penguin), *Tangled Vines* (HBJ), *Celebrations: A New Anthology of Black American Poetry* (Follett), *Pushcart Prize Anthology*, and *We Become New* (Bantam). In-progress is a verse memoir of her '50s/'60s youth; excerpts can be found online at *Collateral*, the *WAIF Project*, and Brain Mill Press's *Voices*.

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI's poetry has received accolades for lyricism, form, spirituality, and social concern. Her collections include *Landings* (Kelsay Books), *Something About* (PEN Oakland Award, Blue Light Press), *Traveling in Reflected Light* (Kenneth Patchen Prize, Pig Iron Press) and five chapbooks. She compiled and edited *Turning a Train of Thought Upside Down: Anthology of Women's Poetry* (Scarlet Tanager Books). Her work has appeared in *Aeolian Harp*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Progressive Magazine*, *Comstock Review*, *Caesura*, and many more. A longtime teacher of writing and a feminist activist, she founded and runs the San Francisco Bay Area Women's Poetry Salon and is Features Editor at [PoetryMagazine.com](http://PoetryMagazine.com).







