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**2026**



**Tulane Review**  
**A Literary Magazine**

The *Tulane Review* is a literary and art journal published by the Tulane Literary Society. Submissions are judged in an anonymous selection process, and final choices are made by the respective editors.

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“Where are we going?”  
“I don’t know man, but we’ve got to go.”

Jack Kerouac



# The Editors

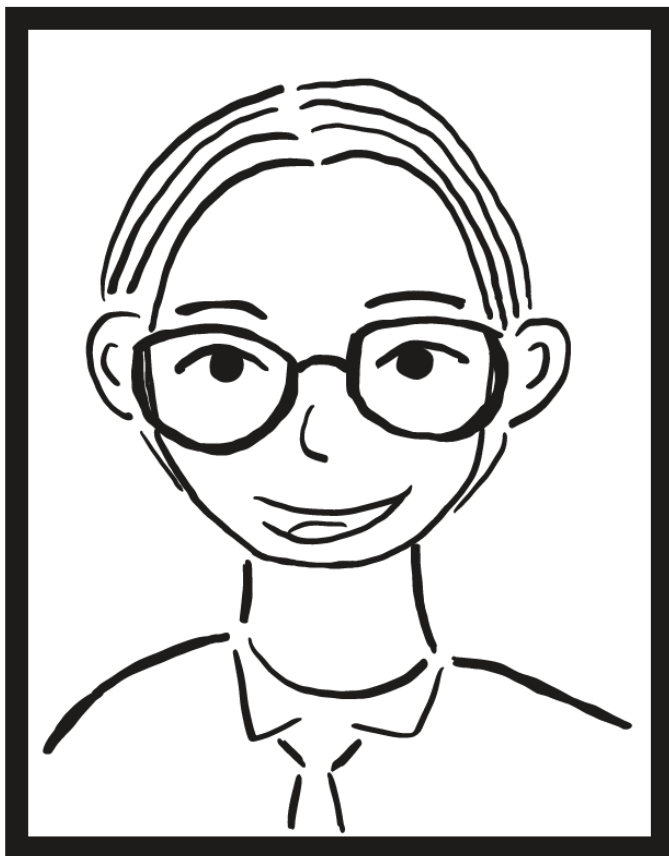
## Editor-in-Chief



OLIVIA SEGURA

Olivia Segura is a senior studying English and Political Economy from New York City. As the Editor-in-Chief, she has enjoyed collaborating with fellow editors and crafting a publication full of diverse and unique works. In her free time, she enjoys writing creative nonfiction, improv comedy, and exploring New Orleans.

## Art Editor



**ALI SAUNDERS**

Ali Saunders is a writer and photographer currently studying English at Tulane. She is from Harvard, Massachusetts and is a Javelin thrower on the Track & Field team at Tulane. Saunders is passionate about film and documentary photography, writing, and documentation. As the Art Editor of the *Tulane Review*, she gets to use her passions and work with fellow editors to create a beautiful curation of work.

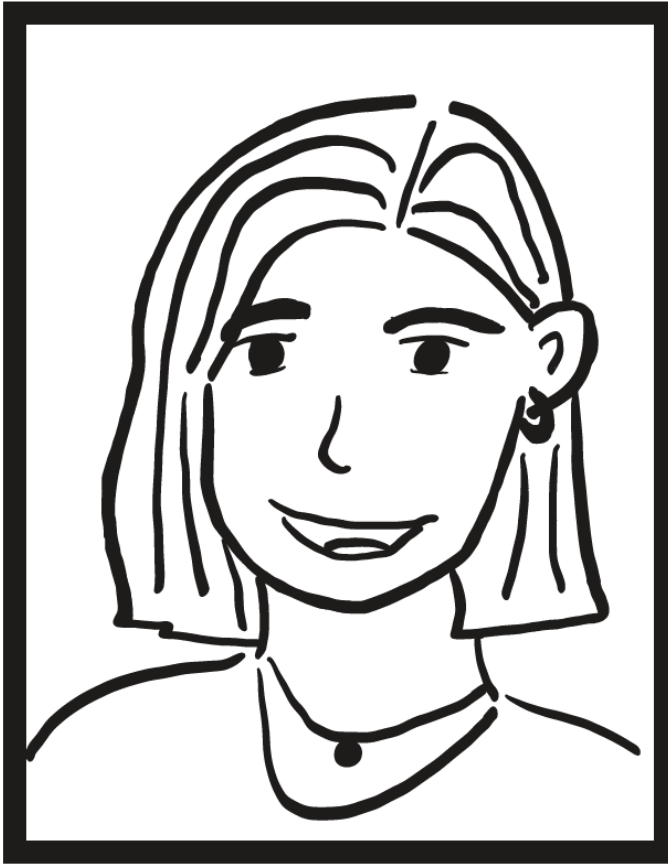
## Poetry Editor



**TOBY DAVIES**

Toby Davies is a freshman at Tulane, pursuing a double-major in Anthropology and English, with a concentration in Creative Writing. They feel incredibly lucky to be part of a team that gets to read works from people from all over the world every day. In their free time, they do karate, play roller derby, and collect coins.

## Prose Editor



**OLIVIA McCABE**

Olivia McCabe is currently pursuing her master's in English at Tulane University. As Prose Editor, she loves reading and crafting short-form stories and enjoys helping shape each issue's collection of voices.

## Assistant Prose Editor



**CHARLOTTE COLLINS**

Charlotte Collins is a sophomore at Tulane, pursuing a degree in Economics and English with minors in French and Design. As Assistant Prose Editor, she is honored to be surrounded by a team of creative thinkers and immersed in worlds of unending curiosity.

## Publicity Chair



LIZZIE LURIE

Lizzie Lurie is a freshman at Tulane, pursuing a degree in English. She aspires for a career in TV as a writer. As Publicity Chair of the *Tulane Review*, she has been grateful for the opportunity to have coworkers with such great grammar.

## Design Editor



**JASON MULVIHILL**

Jason Mulvihill is currently pursuing a master's in English at Tulane. As Design Editor of the *Tulane Review*, he enjoys approaching the arrangement of each issue like a music album. He is very grateful to be working with this year's team. Outside of the *Tulane Review*, he writes for *The Tulane Hullabaloo* and coaches middle school debate.



# Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

This collection is the result of the hard work of a small group of dedicated students working together to create something dynamic, interesting, and resonant for your eyes, heart, and mind. This was both my first (and now last) year working on the *Tulane Review*. I came into this role seemingly by luck of the draw, and I am so fortunate to have been entrusted with the honor of being Editor-in-Chief of this wonderful review. Working with the most incredible people who love reading and talking about it as much as I do has made our so-called “work” a lot of fun. The *Tulane Review* provides the opportunity for emerging student writers and established authors alike to make their stories and voices heard—and our team of editors is so grateful to provide a stage for such talented writers and artists.

The Literary Society has been producing this review since 1968, publishing works of prose and poetry, and later art, by creatives from all walks of life. I am absolutely astonished and deeply proud of the overwhelming amount of moving work submitted this year, as we received over 1,000 submissions in prose, poetry, and art-work. In this edition, we are excited to feature original work from authors and artists from 21 states, in addition to Japan and Ireland.

I owe a big thank you to our contributors, who made this edition possible. Please see more information about all of them in the back! And of course, this review would not be what it is today without the hard work of our team. I can't imagine anyone else I would rather do this with. Thank you, Jason Mulvihill, Olivia McCabe, Toby Davies, Lizzie Lurie, Charlotte Collins, and Ali Saunders.

I hope reading these pieces takes you somewhere new and special, and that you enjoy reading them as much as I do.

Best,  
Olivia

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Tulane Review  
A Literary Magazine



# Reticence

CHASE HARKER

We all know the way the dead  
Will weigh their anchors when  
Hurricanes are ravaging roots—

How fishermen will reel in  
Their lines when bras or rubber boots  
Are caught upon their hooks—

How women will wind up  
Their leaky buckets from wells  
When their water tables have dried—

How children will release  
Their kites when hard gusts draw  
Beads of blood from their palms—

There is no need to speak of it.



*Stage Fright*



Ayla Hamilton

# Lesson Seven

DM ANDERSON

You were ten minutes late when you pulled up to the farmhouse in a brand-new DeLorean. I was there to teach you how the business worked.

I was on the porch swing with a glass of sweet tea, rocking with my eyes closed against the mid-June heat. The wind had been up all afternoon, carrying red dust across the pasture and on toward Dallas, twenty-five miles south.

“Where’s the old lady?” you shouted from the car.

No hello. No introduction. Just that.

I had heard about you already; office talk travels faster than mail, but I sat up anyway and set my tea down on the railing.

“Her name is—”

“I know her name, Buck. Dorothy Collins.” You held up a packet of papers and a blank check already signed by my partner, Roger. “You think I’d show up with these and not know who I’m buying from?”

I looked at my watch.

“Lesson number one,” I said. “If you’re not early, you’re late.”

You leaned back in the driver’s seat and grinned.

“She’s not even here. How could I be late?”

“She was,” I said, “right there beside me a minute ago. Until she heard your car coming down the road.”

Gravel carries sound a long way out here. Even half-deaf folks can hear a DeLorean coming.

“So, she stepped inside,” I said. “Freshening up your tea.”

You climbed out and dropped into one of the wicker chairs like you already owned it. Your eyes moved across the yard the way buyers’ eyes do—measuring, subtracting, deciding what something might be worth once the past had been cleared away.

“Weeds,” you said. “Nothing but weeds.” You pointed at a dried-up stock tank. “Look at this place. At all the rusted farm junk. And this house... shit, it needed paint ten years ago.”

You looked back at me. “Hell of a property, Buck.”

The wind moved through the yard again, lifting dust off the road and carrying it across the pasture.

You weren’t wrong. The land had been drying out for years. The soil had split open in places, long cracks running through it like lightning bolts. I had seen plenty of places like it. And I had taken plenty of them.

I sat there with the glass sweating in my hand and wondered, and not for the first time, what exactly that made me.

“The bossman says you’re retiring, Buck,” you said. “Says you’re the best closer in the business and I might learn something from you.” You leaned back in the chair and looked me over again. “But I don’t see it. That Sears suit? That beat-up truck in the yard? Where’s the pride, mister best closer?”

I let that one pass a moment.

“For your information,” I said, “this farm once grew the best cotton in the county. Folks here worked hard and did all right for themselves—until the dirt wore out. Then the rains quit. Then they came all at once. Then her husband died. No children to take over.”

I nodded toward the fields.

“Now the widow’s land rich and cotton poor.”

You shrugged. “Circle of life, Buck. Her loss is our gain.”

I felt my jaw tighten, but kept my voice even.

“Lesson Two,” I said. “Never judge a book by its cover. This cheap suit and that old truck? Covers.”

You rolled your eyes.

“Lesson Three: too much flash spoils the photograph. That DeLorean of yours. The Armani jacket. None of it helps in a place like this. The seller has to feel like you belong in the same room.”

The wind pushed at the screen door.

“Lesson Four,” I said. “Always put the poor mouth on yourself. Let the seller think you’re struggling too. Deals go smoother that way.”

I might have said more, something about Guadalcanal and the difference between a war and a real estate seminar, but just then the screen door opened, and Dorothy Collins stepped out onto the porch.

She held a glass of tea in one hand and guided a walker with the other. The door banged softly behind her.

“You must be Donny,” she said. Her toothless smile reached her eyes. “Roger told me you’d be helping Buck today. Such a pleasure.”

“Actually,” I said, “this is Donny’s first rodeo. I’m just the clown in the barrel, helping him along. Last week before retirement.”

She looked at you for a long moment.

A small smile settled at the corner of her mouth—the kind you see on someone who has lived long enough to recognize species like us.

“So young,” she said. “And so handsome. Roger tells me you’ve just finished at SMU. Congratulations, Donny.”

You straightened a little at that. For a second, the hard edge slipped, and you looked almost boyish, the way men do when someone reminds them of their grandmother.

Then you caught yourself, and the mask came back.

All business again.

Dorothy didn’t seem to notice. Or if she did, she was too polite to say so.

“Well then,” she said, turning toward the door. “Come on inside.”

She led us through the house and into a kitchen cooled by an old swamp unit humming in the window.

I’ve always believed a person’s walls will tell you more than their words.

People with Jackson Pollock prints tend to ask full price. People with black-velvet Elvis, Jesus, a portrait of John Kennedy, and a photograph of a dead husband usually come around quicker.

Dorothy’s walls told me everything I needed to know.

You must have seen it too. You stopped in front of a photograph.

"Who's the handsome fellow there?" you asked.

"That," she said, "is John Kennedy."

You shook your head.

"No, ma'am. I mean the gentleman in the photo next to Jesus."

She placed a hand over her heart.

"Why, that's my Earl," she said softly. "God rest him."

I watched you nod and smile the way a man does when he's figured something out.

Lesson Five: Kindness opens doors. And sometimes it closes deals.

And, of course, there's Lesson Six: Act like you care. And you did.

"You have a beautiful garden out back, Mrs. Collins," you said, peering through the window. "Are those Red Cherokees?"

Her face brightened.

"Why, yes, they are. You do know your roses, Donny."

"I grew up in Tyler," you said. "We take roses pretty seriously there. Would you mind if we went out and looked at them?"

She seemed pleased by the idea.

From the kitchen window, I watched the two of you walk into the yard. You bent over the bushes with her, touching the blooms lightly, listening as she spoke. You nodded, smiled, and asked questions. You were smooth that afternoon. Slick as oil. Later, I learned what she told you out there.

"...and over there's the tire swing Earl put up for our firstborn," she said. "All the children loved that swing."

She pointed toward the shallow hollow beyond the garden.

"That low spot used to hold water. Our pond and stock tank. The children fished there. Swam too. When they got older, they'd skinny dip with their friends." She laughed softly. "I never scolded them. Hard to scold your children for doing things you once did yourself."

Then she gestured to the patch of ground near the roses.

"And right here we had a gazebo. Our daughter was married under it. I can still feel that day if I stand here long enough."

She looked at you.

"Can you imagine it, Donny?"

You closed your eyes and nodded, as though you could see it.

For a moment, she studied your face, then reached out and touched your cheek the way an older woman might touch a grandson.

When you opened your eyes again, you pointed toward the far edge of the yard.

"Are those gravestones under that giant oak?"

"Yes," she said. "The Collins family has been buried there since Earl's great-grandfather settled here in the 1840s."

"And Earl?"

"He's there too," she said. "Next to his parents... and his baby brother... and—"

She paused.

"—and next to our children."

You looked at her.

“All four of them,” she said quietly. “An accident. A few months before Earl passed. They were driving home to celebrate our sixtieth anniversary.” She drew a slow breath. “A tanker truck ran a stoplight.”

From the kitchen window, I watched you bend forward slightly, as if something had struck you in the chest. You took her hands in yours.

And for the first time that afternoon, there was no performance in it.

You just stood there holding on to her hands.

The wind moved through the yard again, lifting the rose leaves.

After a while, you spoke. “Tell you what, Mrs. Collins,” you said. “I’ll make you a top-dollar offer for this place.”

You named a number. “One thousand dollars an acre.”

She looked once more toward the oak and the small cemetery beyond it. “What happens to them?” she asked.

You seemed ready for that question.

“The developer I have in mind plans to keep the house,” you said. “Turn it into a clubhouse for the neighborhood. The pool would go somewhere over there.” You gestured across the yard. “The cemetery stays. We’ll fence it in, in wrought iron. Preserve it.”

She stood there a long moment looking toward the graves.

When she turned back, her eyes were wet. “All right,” she said.

You wrote up the papers at the kitchen table. When you finished, you slid the check across to her.

Six hundred forty thousand dollars.

Roger had told you two hundred an acre. You’d paid more than triple that. In 1983, that was real money.

Later, we sat in my truck at the end of her driveway.

Dust moved across the road, and the wind rocked the cottonwood branches over the fence. I didn’t say anything for a while. Truth was, I expected Roger to fire you the moment you stepped through the office door.

“Looks like you’ll be selling that fancy DeLorean,” I said finally. “After Roger hears what you paid.”

You leaned back against the seat. “Maybe,” you said. “But Roger still gets the land he’s been chasing. The developer I lined up will pay him two thousand an acre.”

You stared out through the windshield. “The old bastard will double his money.”

You were quiet for a moment after that. Then you said, almost to yourself, “Truth is, Buck, I think I’m done after this deal. I don’t believe I could do this job the rest of my life.”

You opened the door and stepped out.

“Where the hell are you going?” I called.

You didn’t turn around. “One more signature,” you said. “Something I forgot.”

You walked back toward the house.

Without it, you told me later, the contract wouldn’t hold.

From the truck, I watched you disappear through the screen door. What happened next, you told me that evening.

Turns out, Dorothy wasn't inside. You found her at the cemetery, standing beside Earl's grave with her head bowed. You waited until she finished praying. While you waited, you walked slowly among the markers, reading the names. That's when something began to bother you.

When she turned back toward the house, you stopped her.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Collins," you said, holding out the paper. "I forgot one last form. Without it, the agreement we made isn't binding."

She studied your face.

For a moment, neither of you spoke.

Then you said what you'd been turning over in your mind.

"Mrs. Collins... earlier, you said your children were buried here."

You looked back toward the stones beneath the oak.

"Other than Earl, the newest marker I see is dated 1952."

You met her eyes again.

"There aren't any children buried here." The wind moved through the trees.

"Was that story you told me... true?"

After a while, she stopped crying. When she spoke again, her voice was steady.

"There never were any children," she said. "I couldn't have them. Earl and I tried for years." She looked toward the graves beneath the oak. "So I made them up."

The rest came out slowly.

She had no savings. No pension waiting. No children to take her in. The stories had been something she invented on the spot when she saw how young you were, how eager to listen.

"I'd heard things about you men," she said. "About what happens to folks when land agents come calling." She wiped her face with the back of her hand. "In this world, you either eat or get eaten. I wasn't about to end up at the bottom of the food chain."

She gave a small shrug.

"Besides," she said, almost shyly, "I've always wanted teeth again. And a new little pickup truck. And maybe a winter or two on the beach in Mazatlán."

The wind stirred the oak leaves above the graves.

"Cabana boys bringing me margaritas," she added with a faint smile.

You stood there a moment, looking at her. Then you handed her the paper.

"Well played, Mrs. Collins," you said quietly. "Just sign here, and the money's yours."

She signed.

When you came back to the truck, you told me everything.

I laughed so hard I had to lean against the steering wheel.

"Roger can never hear about this," I said.

You nodded.

Neither of us had any intention of telling him.

Let Dorothy Collins have her teeth and her shiny new pickup and her margaritas.

She'd earned them.

Later that afternoon, we sat in a roadside bar drinking beer you insisted on paying for.

The day was still hot. Outside, cicadas buzzed in the trees, their noise thick as the heat itself.

After a while, I said, "So tell me something. Did you learn anything from an old closer like me?"

You rolled the bottle between your hands, watching the foam slide down the glass.

"Sure, I did," you said. "Your lessons are solid."

You looked past me, toward the highway, though I wasn't sure you were really seeing it.

"But there's one lesson you forgot."

"Oh?" I said. "And what lesson is that?"

You took a long drink before answering. Then you set the bottle down and smiled.

"Never underestimate old ladies."

I raised my beer.

"Hear, hear," I said.

# Broken Pottery

DAVID ROMANDA

After her heart was broken,  
she took this broken pottery class.  
Each student picked out a tea cup  
from a bin of new cups. Then the students  
smashed their tea cups into pieces  
and carefully glued them back together  
with gold glue. It was a fun class, and now  
she has a funky souvenir. Her heart is still broken.

# Adultery

HEATHER WRIGHT

I know she is wrong.  
I do nothing but watch  
her move in a lace dress  
bonnie blue across the counter  
—mourning nothing.

How does the whiskey  
not purse her lips?  
She's like déjà vu, except  
this time, he leaves the café  
and I learn to grind my teeth.

# packages

GEORGE SHUSTER

a sorry we missed you  
 slip on the pavement out-  
 side the UPS facility between  
 Washing  
 ton and Green  
 wich, then, also grounded,  
 a metal spring  
 with an extension arm, like  
 the choke spring on the lawn  
 mower, these are things I see  
 walking, head

down outside the city  
 the cat chases  
 the plastic spring toys until  
 they all end up under the fridge

and the cold this winter bites  
 whether I am in New York  
 or not but it bites harder  
 away from the insulation  
 of these buildings;

sorry we miss you, as  
 the packages are delivered and  
 pile up on the bench where  
 she puts my things when I'm away,  
 hope springs eternal like  
 the blood from my arm

when, alone, I am tested  
 for cancer, and, still alone,  
 wait past the canceled train  
 for the next one to take me  
 from one city I don't live in  
 to another one just as cold;

I may slip, or slip up, or fall  
 down like the tree in the forest  
 with no congregation, no one  
 but the cat  
 chasing the spring  
 with an extension arm,  
 declawed



*Oil Painting of an Illustrative Mushroom*

Donald Patten

# Waiting for Vanna

CHRISTOPHER WOODS

Late, getting on closing time, I tell Milly, the girl in the cubicle next to mine, that I have no plans for the weekend. No dates for three months, in fact, and not by choice. And Milly, always kind and funny too, says she'd like to try the no-date lifestyle herself. Her husband, Leonard, a big brute of a man, is her curse, she says, and the smile on her face droops a little.

Leonard's no blessing, I know. Just out on parole again, he's already hanging with his boys, planning some crime. Always little stupid stuff – hubcaps, church collection boxes. He's a squirt in the crime department. Poor Milly suffers a lot. I feel for her. And I wonder if I am better off than her because I don't have anyone in my life. You know?

That's when I look out the window and see those awful red clouds drifting by our building again. And I lose my breath for an instant, like I've been punched in the stomach. Blood clouds, we call them. They come drifting from battlefields and explosions and disasters of every kind, all over the world. The clouds deliver the bad news from everywhere to here, outside our office.

I think these clouds are from China, I say to Milly. She watching them now too. No harm in that. Besides, we're almost finished for the day. We've each finished two boxes of fancy address labels for a fishery in Minnesota. Yesterday it was for a dog kennel in Missouri. Tomorrow we have three boxes for a convent all the way in California. Business is good. Seems like everyone needs labels these days. I think it makes them feel secure to see where they are. In print, you know. I like my job, and I don't mind saying, I wish I could hand deliver the labels to all those places where they're going. Wouldn't that be something?

Milly thinks these clouds might be from India. Don't you think they smell like curry, she says. Well, I don't smell anything, and besides our windows are sealed shut. But I say I think I can smell curry too. It's just a little lie. Doesn't much matter where the blood clouds come from. Least I don't think so. It's really about sadness. That's what matters.

Milly says that tonight there's a special edition of WHEEL OF FORTUNE. The show is going to be from Hawaii. Vanna will probably wear a lei, or two or three, and Milly's face lights up just thinking about it. She loves Vanna. No, she adores her. I say, everyone loves Vanna. I know I do. She's always so lovely in her gowns. Always so graceful when she turns the letters. She glides so softly across the stage. She floats on the air, maybe.

I think she could have been a ballerina, but Milly likes to say than Vanna has the best job in the world. She always smiles, like she's never known a minute of sadness. Though we know Vanna has had tragedies in her life. Her true love, her fiancée, died in a plane crash. But I know, though I would never tell even Milly, that the fiancé's plane ran into a red cloud. Such a tragedy. And there have been others. But she picks herself up, lifts herself you understand. That's where the floating comes in, I do believe. It's magic, if you want to know the truth. Milly feels the same way. We talk about it, the floating. How we wish we could. Above everything and everyone. Closer to God, maybe. Vanna knows.

Milly asks if I want to come to her place to watch the Hawaii show. Leonard has a meeting with the boys and won't come home till late, if then. So I say sure. Milly wants to order a pizza. The place by her house has a special pizza, "The Waikiki," with pineapples and those really cute tiny umbrellas, and Milly thinks it will be perfect for the evening. Milly's brilliant like that.

I can't wait to see Vanna! We get our purses and coats and leave the office at five on the dot. We'll get to Milly's just in time to sit back, maybe have a glass or two of wine, kick off our shoes, and then we'll be in Hawaii!

You want to know the best part? It will be night time. Even if I look out the window at Milly's place, I won't have to see the blood clouds. Oh, they might be there, probably will be, but I'll pretend they're not. And I'll ask Milly to turn up the volume full blast on the television so we won't be able to hear the clouds when they bump against the building and scrape across the windows.

# Libby

CHARLOTTE WALDO

For as long as I can remember, I have been hot. Not in body temperature—though that is usually also the case—and not in physical appearance—though I would like for that to be the case—but inside. I feel this cactus-scorch prickling just beneath my skin, pebbling out like goosebumps, and there is no remedy.

I hate wearing pants. They make the heat worse, even when it's cold outside, and always somehow make my legs look chubbier than they actually are. Mostly, though, they restrict me. When I wear pants, I feel something about me being reigned in, condensed into a sealed airtight bag where the heat still ricochets off of them and bounces against the cellophane like a swarm of gnats.

I was already hot when my computer at work buzzed with a pop-up notification. *JUST ISSUED: Heat Wave*, it informed me. It was then replaced by a pop-up ad for Chili's.

“Heat wave? Are you kidding me?” Megan said from her desk. She shoved her spinning office chair back dramatically. “Do you have an extra pair of shorts in your car?” She teased. Megan, like most people at my big corporate job in Kansas City that I hated, wore pants to work. They were the wide-legged flowy kind that would really only look good when paired with a tank top, but we weren't allowed to wear those, so she settled for a high-neck white tee and a cardigan.

“Maybe. I'll check at lunch,” I replied. I didn't look up from my computer, pretended to be fascinated by quarterly reports on the profitability of different modes of natural gas transport; really, I was browsing the ELLE homepage, analyzing what could last and what would just be a microtrend and how my life would have been if I had followed design instead of ending up in an HR office.

“Okay. I'm about to take my lunch break, so I might swing by my house and grab some. We can circle back to those reports after lunch,” said Megan. Corporate was full of these little buzzwords, I'd learned over the past year. Swing by and circle back and low-hanging fruit and going forward. All spewing from our mouths like the words that clickity-clacked from our keyboards into databases.

I switched tabs and willed myself to narrow in on a few key figures to bring up and pretend like I'd researched during my meeting this afternoon, then called it for lunch once the boredom became an energy that twinged in my fingertips and caused me to nervously rattle them against the standing desk. It really was so hot.

I waited until I was just about to leave the building to clock out, not wanting to miss one of those precious thirty minutes that I could spend however I wanted. A dull cloud of heat had settled over the parking lot, bouncing off the blacktop and barreling against my bare legs. I opened my car door. The seat was probably hot enough to fry an egg.

Inside my car, the heat was a melting sort of heat, the kind that pins you in place and forces you to take a moment to bask in the warmth. I felt like a lizard on a sunny rock. I gave myself a few minutes to soak in it before turning on the engine, putting the AC on high, and pulling out of the parking lot. I could bask in heat; I couldn't move in it.

There was traffic near the office, but the further I got down the road, the clearer it became. Buildings got further apart and stoplights got more spaced out, and a mirage twinkled between two yellow lines on the heat of the road. The air above it grew hazy and weepy, like you could smoke a sausage on it.

The bookstore lights were dim and the walls echoed a dry cold across the shelves. It was silent, but not in an offputting way; you could tell that everyone inside was lost in thought, contemplating something deeper than *moving forward with this operation or getting the ball rolling*.

It was my favorite bookshop because all of the books were together. They didn't discriminate by genre, leaving the classics in the back near the bathrooms and the romance near the magazine section. The books were sorted alphabetically, so I could scan the spines myself to find out what I was in the mood for. Pages brushed against fingertips in the silence. Classical music was absorbed in the dense pages lining the shelves. The shuffling sound of me sliding books off the shelf. Once I had read the back cover and first two pages of every novel that caught my eye, I stepped up the sliding ladder to look higher, towards the tops of the shelves that were so often overlooked.

From atop the ladder, the bookstore warmed. Heat rises. It was a fervent type of heat, the kind that burned my cheeks and gave me so much energy that I wanted to leap down the ladder and run all the way home under the even hotter heat. Among the books, I felt like one of them, something born of an idea and raised of an impossibility, something to be dissected and analyzed for every layer there was. I felt like a book in that way that I felt *too much*. I was the type of book, I decided, that students would only *pretend* to read in school because it was too wordy, what if the curtains really are just blue? The curtains are never just blue for me.

Thirty minutes later, I was hot again, under-my-skin and this time in the conference room with the rest of the HR team. I picked up one of the courtesy water bottles from the middle of the table and began fidgeting with the cap and pressing the cold bottle to my wrists. There was a good type of heat, the type that rose and crept up ladders in bookstores, and this was not it. I was bored and I was tired and what does HR even do?

Had I been born forty years earlier, I would have been home with a baby, rocking the fruit of my affection down for a nap and placing it on cold sheets before dozing in a rocking chair. Perhaps a few years from then I would be leaving my distinctly female job for the day, a teacher or a nurse or an underpaid waitress. I would come home to a female nanny caring for my small child, four or five now—I am sure that it is a son—and read books to him until his father gets home to eat pot roast for supper and watch the evening news while I fold laundry.

This fantasy lied somewhere between my fashion week dreams and my corporate reality, and was a place I often went to when I could hardly imagine a world where I am valued, if not by my husband then by a child who loves me so much he wants to watch me even while I'm taking a shit. If, perhaps, my husband does not love me, then there was a love there once, and at the very least there was emotion in his absence. He wasn't a cursor clicking a million times over before I started typing in the spreadsheet. He wasn't a computer that got dark when I let my mind wander off-task.

Perhaps it was anti-feminist of me to think this way, daydreaming about a husband and a son while sitting in a corporate meeting that women fifty years ago would burn their bras just to sit in on. "She doesn't understand her privilege," they would tsk. Perhaps they are right; I shouldn't want the very thing that women once ran from. And did I really want it? No. It was preferable to the office, seemed like a closer daydream and a safer place to land than the stage where I saw myself in my mind. We were hot either way, the mothers and I. But they would be hot from their own art, a crescent roll or perhaps a raspberry tart from the oven, and I would be hot from the office's fluorescent lights. Let me be hot from the glowing spotlights of the runway; let the letters of the Hollywood sign burn me to ashes.

That evening, I drove home to the house that I share with my boyfriend Cade and picked up a cooked rotisserie chicken from the Kroger on the way home. We live in a little bricked-in neighborhood where all of the houses look similar but not the same, like brothers but not twins. My drive home is a hot one that has been glazed in a familiar shade of brown. Wheat stalks lazily brushing each other in the breeze. Dead grass even in the summer. Rusted billboards telling me that Jesus is King! and Injured? Know your RIGHTS! Heat refracted through my windshield and warmed my skin like toast. I pulled into Cade and I's brown house in our brown neighborhood.

Inside, it was hot. Cade likes to turn the fans off when we're not home, so I could tell he just got home from his job at the logistics center for a trucking company. We both went to college, Cade and me, with dreams bigger than what the world had to offer. He was a bright baseball star hoping his scholarship could carry him to law school; I was a film and fashion merchandising major who gave into the corporate hustle. Together, we half-filled our fridge and took weekend trips to hotels but not resorts and talked of getting married once we could find a few weeks to take off from work.

“Hey, Libby,” he whispered. He helped me take my work cardigan off and kissed my head. My name is Olivia, but I wanted them to call me Libby when I was an actress or a model or a fashion designer. If I was a singer, I would have gone by Liv instead. But now Cade was the only one who called me Libby.

“How was work?” he asked.

I pulled away and took the grocery bag of chicken to the kitchen counter. “Hot. I’m hot.”

“I’ll turn the fan on,” said Cade.

The thing about Cade was, I loved him but I knew that I could love him more if things were different. When I was this hot all the time, the two of us ate rotisserie chicken from the grocery store on the couch and watched *Wheel of Fortune* until we were too tired. I longed for a world where I came home from a photoshoot to Cade, sweaty from an afternoon baseball practice but cooling off from the fans in our LA apartment. Together, we would cook chilled tomato soup and chicken-pot pie and watermelon lemonade, only hot when we opened the oven door too quickly.

Still, Cade shoveled the chicken into his mouth even when it was too hot and tried to guess a three-word phrase meaning “to inflate.” Perhaps he would love me more, too, if things were different. I am a little afraid of how much I might love him if he were better than this.

When the clock hit nine, Cade rinsed his plate in the sink and went to shower while the leather of the couch grew cool from the icy breeze of the fan. I soaked into it and changed the channel. Cade and I didn’t have any streaming services, so we were stuck with whatever they still showed on cable TV, and tonight, that meant a Western starring an actress that I had seen before but could not name.

In the movie, she is a Texan who turns seventeen and runs off with her best friend to chase the allure of the cowboy lifestyle. In the movie, they are perpetually riding their paint palominos into a dizzy, neverending sunset, because when you are a teenager all of your most important memories are under the sunset. In the movie, they meet a pair of cowboys and fall in love but end up riding off without them once they realize it’s time for them to giddy-up back home. Time for them to finish school or have children or move to a sienna-colored neighborhood or take the highway all the way to Kansas City or respond to an email or sit through an HR meeting about corporate reports. The West holds no more dreams for them.

Cade opened the bathroom door, and steam from his shower billowed out. The living room filled with dry heat.



*Oil Painting of an Illustrative Mushroom*

Donald Patten

# Echo

ACE BOGGESS

From my place on the hill,  
I hear fire engines crying havoc,  
echoing in all directions  
as though the entire city is ablaze.

I sniff for smoke, breathe  
grass & pollen, give back  
the burn of a sneeze.  
Could be a small structure fire,

one abandoned building  
in the poverty center,  
or a single crew of volunteers  
checking out the pulled alarm

at a nursing home.  
Maybe someone began frying  
porkchops on the stove,  
forgot, & left to run an errand.

The echo damns  
as though bombs have fallen.  
I look across a glittering  
landscape of lights &

find no single red one flashing,  
the only fire I see  
the one I hold between two fingers,  
summoning no echo,

alarming no one  
aside from physicians  
who've told me time after time  
that I should quit.

# At Sandra's

LEE VARON

On Battery Street  
I visit your old place

next to All Saints Way.  
No name on the mailbox.

No buzzer to ring. No hot tea to sip.  
No Italian wedding cookies.

No powdered sugar to lick  
from our fingers.

It was you who showed me that miracles  
are acts of the imagination.

The priest who lit the candle  
inside the sepulcher

was doing God's work.  
You always knew what your chances were

but plastered your suitcase with decals  
and headed for Rome anyhow,

brushing past death's shoulder.  
Between the nausea of chemo

you stopped to dash off a postcard:  
*I want you to know*

*Rome is as splendid  
as you always told me it was.*

# Poem Beginning With a Line by Amy Hempel

NOAH BERLATSKY

To shop for yourself requires you to know yourself  
which is why I am sitting here staring  
for hours at my Amazon cart.

When I was young and free before the Amazon cart  
I bought a biker jacket  
because my best friend had a biker jacket and we  
would walk the streets of London together with me  
pretending to be as cool as him, and  
everyone probably thinking we were gay  
which I was pretty sure I was not  
though it was hard to tell from inside the biker jacket.

I think I was probably not gay but neurodivergent  
which is why I could not maintain eye contact  
with my Amazon cart  
or the Vienna fingers, a vanilla cookie with cream  
filling with which I am obsessed. I do not  
buy it often because I can't stop eating them  
and so make myself sick.

That is not who I want to be,  
two hundred forty pounds of Vienna fingers tied up in  
a biker jacket. I do not buy that this  
is all I am, on the toilet with the Pepto Bismol.  
I need to buy more of that.

# THE SUMMER I TURNED 19

EMILY R. DANIEL

and felt something like freedom, I took a job selling books door-to-door in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. I remember not missing my parents but also not knowing why I always felt so lost. I'd taken the job because I was vulnerable to promises of future success if I could endure the long hours of lonely *it's a numbers game* pursuit, my knuckles rapping the doors of people who, not once, wanted me to be there. My housemates, fellow far-from-home college students, and I started each day at Duffy's Diner. We did what we were told: pancakes, then pump-up dancing in the parking lot before heading to our territories, peddling study guides to families using sales tactics playing on the worry that, as parents, their priorities were all wrong. Pool or trampoline in the backyard? God forbid there was evidence they'd spent their money on frivolity over the kids' education. I calculated the many ways to escape that wouldn't require me to admit that I wanted to quit. The AC in my '95 Ford Escort was long gone and my daily lunch of car-warmed PB&J became something my body couldn't take. I needed a doctor to tell me I couldn't go on like this. It was still summer back home. I returned to my childhood bed, out the money for the starter kit with too few sales to make those sweltering weeks worthwhile. To make up for it, I worked for a bestselling author whom I had previously admired with a reverence reserved for the holy. She believed in me until I was close enough to tremble in her shadow like everyone else. The summer I turned bookseller then cowering assistant, I filed away as a personal failing—the preface for dropping out of college the following fall, the same year Kanye's *College Dropout* played on every stereo and my friends drove me home singing

*stackin' money 'til  
it get sky high say we don't  
care what people say*

# The Cane

KENNETH KAPP

Herbert Shelton retired shortly after his 68th birthday, telling his friends that he had been there and done that. "I'm quitting while I'm ahead. Now all I have to do is to keep walking." He had read that daily walks were one of the factors contributing to long life. He told his manager at work, "Easy-peasy, I'll meet lots of people when I'm out walking, make new friends." He was known as a loner and never had more than a cup of coffee with any of his coworkers.

There were several parks within five miles of his house. Now that he was retired, Herbert had time to explore them all and was surprised at how few people were out walking during the week. Most of them were walking dogs; many of the women were paired up. A few men were power walkers, swinging their arms, hardly candidates for a friendly chat. But Herbert enjoyed the fresh air. He varied the time he would visit the parks, noticing that there were slightly more people in the late afternoon, again mostly with dogs.

On weekends there were more couples, but the younger ones didn't have time to chat with an r man, and the elderly couples were usually hanging on to each other as if they were climbing Mt. Everest. After three months and what seemed like a dozen marathons of walking, Herbert decided that Woodland Park was his favorite. It had several ravines descending to a large lake and enough crisscrossing paths that he could vary his choices for what seemed to him unlimited routes. Additionally, the lake provided pleasant views from that side of the park. He had all but forgotten about making a new friend.

He took a short vacation from his walks over winter and then resumed them in the spring, slowly increasing the length. By late March he had regained his old stamina and pace. He toyed with the idea of getting walking sticks but decided carrying a water bottle was enough, and even that wasn't really necessary as there were water fountains scattered throughout the park.

In 2025, St. Patrick's Day fell on Sunday. Herbert guessed that Woodland Park – by this time he felt he had a proprietary interest – would be deserted, people opting to stand and watch the parade downtown. He ate a light breakfast and smiled as he finished his coffee, thinking he could weave across the path from side to side if he wished, pretending he had started celebrating early or was still carrying on from the previous night.

There was a strong breeze coming off the lake and when the path veered away from the overlook, Herbert spread his arms, pretending to be a tern, and flew around a blind corner, almost running into an older man out for a walk.

“Woe there, young fellow. Old coots are not in season for another month.” He laughed and held up his cane. “Mend thy ways lest you run afoul of Mighty McCloshing.”

“Sorry, sorry, sorry! It was such a pleasant morning and with the breeze coming up the bluff, I got carried away. ‘*T’wasn’t the Irish*’ if you’re worrying. I stayed in last night and only had coffee this morning. Speaking of which, I’d be delighted to buy you breakfast by way of apologies and forgo the other 997 sorry’s that are part of the plea for one thousand pardons.”

It was the older man’s turn to laugh. “I think a royal escort to the bench by the overlook would be sufficient. That’s where I usually sit on a Sunday morning.”

Herbert said he’d be delighted and returned with the old man to the overlook, where the only sounds came from a small squadron of terns circling overhead. Before sitting down, his companion turned to Herbert and said, “My name is Mark. And now you best be going. May the road rise up to meet you.”

Herbert understood. “Well, Mark, many thanks for helping a young man along on his journey.”

Out of sight, out of mind. Almost. Herbert couldn’t believe how little free time he had even though he was retired. To be sure, he slept more but there always seemed to be TO DO’s that weren’t there when he had a full-time job. There were his walks and now a yoga class for seniors that met twice a week. Saturday he was especially busy and took only a short walk in his neighborhood. Taking off his walking shoes when he got home, he thought about Mark, trying to recall the time they’d met last week. *Be fun to say Hi; he seems like a nice guy – wonder if he keeps regular hours on his bench.*

But Sunday’s walk and Mark slipped Herbert’s mind, and it was only while he was brushing his teeth before bed that he remembered wanting to meet him. He nodded at his reflection in the bathroom mirror: midmorning, I think I was out in Woodland around eleven. I can loop past the overlook twice.

The weather cooperated the next morning. Herbert took a couple of sips from his water bottle before returning it to the cup holder in the console of his car. He checked the time: 10:20.

It was 10:35 when he came to the overlook. No Mark. And again, when he circled back at 11:10. *Hmm, I guess there are some retired people who don’t have to keep to a fixed schedule! Maybe next week or I could get lucky midweek.*

The following Sunday Herbert found Mark on his bench on his way back to the parking lot. He stole a glance at his watch: 11:44. He stopped but kept walking in place, not wishing to cool down too quickly.

“Hey, Mark! Long time no see. Hope you’re doing well.”

“When you’re my age, every day vertical is a good day. I’m doing well enough. However, now it’s time chasing after me and not me running after minutes. In the old days, they gave you a gold-plated watch so you could count the minutes you have left.” He smiled. “When I retired, I put my wristwatch at the back of my underwear drawer. And there it shall rest for the remainder of my days. And so, how’s by you?”

“Thanks. I keep moving.”

“And that’s a good thing too. But for old men, the vista’s enough. That and hearing the tapping of good Mighty McCloshing.” He tapped his cane on the concrete pad under the bench. “And now, you best be going lest you chill.”

Herbert laughed. “Yes, the rising road awaits. You take care. Perhaps next time I can share the vista.”

Mark raised his cane in salute.

Later that week, on Thursday afternoon, Herbert looped past what he now thought of as Mark’s bench. There was the old man, leaning forward, his chin resting on his hands that were locked on the top of his cane. Herbert continued walking and, immediately before the path turned away from the bench, waved over his back. *Maybe next time I’ll stop.*

Two Sundays went by before Herbert met Mark again. He was walking towards his bench. Herbert slowed, then backpedaled, and asked, “Perhaps I can share the view on my way back in?”

“By all means. I should be here. Now you go, have a nice walk.”

It was more of a command than a request. Always wanting to please, Herbert continued his walk. Mark’s bench was empty when he circled back twenty minutes later.

Another week went by and when Herbert came to the overlook and found Mark ensconced on his bench, he preemptively sat down, joking, “The extremely rare Mark at home and at rest.” Now if I only had a camera, I could snap an award-winning picture for *The National Geographic*. Just kidding. How have you been? And then I’ll be off again.”

Mark’s eyes twinkled. “The roads have fallen and I’ve caught the bounty as it rolls in. Thank you, Herbert. I’ve been fine and I see you’re looking fit as ever thanks to all your walking.” He raised his cane by way of salute.

As Herbert pushed off, he noticed there were notches down one side of the cane and what appeared to be initials opposite. “Yes, I best be going.” And then he lied. “I’ve a meeting in an hour and need to shower first.”

There were days in the coming weeks when Herbert was unable to walk in Woodland Park. The leaves had fallen and he had not seen Mark again. Herbert thought that he could be sick or out of town visiting family. He wasn't sure how, but somehow, he knew that Mark had never married.

The following Sunday the weather was pleasant, and Herbert decided to spend most of Sunday morning on Mark's bench. He brought a book and a thermos of hot coffee and only realized it was noon when the church bells pealed. He stood and stretched, searching the neighboring benches for his friend, hoping that Mark had stayed away, not wishing to disturb him. No Mark. Herbert was worried and felt stymied.

The days were getting shorter with winter coming. Herbert continued to take his Sunday walks and varied the times he came to the park an hour each side of 10 AM without any sign of Mark. Twice he stopped and questioned an infrequent stroller, describing Mark, an old man with a cane. No one recalled seeing him, even over the summer months.

Temperatures dropped below freezing. Herbert stayed in on the worst of days. His daughter invited him to spend Thanksgiving with her and her husband in St. Paul. When his spirits hadn't lifted by the time she served the pumpkin pie, she joked, "Dad, why are you so sad; did you lose your best friend, or would you have preferred pecan pie?"

"No, Sweetie, I love pumpkin pie, especially at Thanksgiving. It's just that I haven't seen Mark since mid-August and have no idea if he's OK." He had told his daughter months before all about Mark.

"Can't you call him?"

"The old coot never gave me his phone number nor his last name when I offered mine. Said he preferred friends to be on a first-name basis. I've never seen him talk to anyone else in the park. Bugger all if I know how to find him."

"Well, maybe he went to Florida for the winter."

"I doubt it. And besides, he disappeared in August."

"Well, maybe it's some temporary thing and he's recuperating. Hopefully, he'll be back in the spring, and you can take him to brunch and catch up."

"Yeh, I hope so."

~ \* ~

At the end of June, Mark was once again sitting on his bench. His hands were grasping the cane. There was a fresh notch near the bottom and on the opposite side were the initials: H. S. None of the other walkers noticed that Herbert was no longer visiting Woodland Park.



*Obfuscation\_Third*

Robb Kunz

# Aretha at the House of Blues

SHARON HOFFMANN

It was hot.  
Sweltering.  
Standing room only.

The air conditioning was turned off as per Aretha's standard protocol in any venue and the vents were taped closed and the few people who had seats at the little tables had other people hovering over their shoulders like thunderclouds and they were hot and mad about it and the sweating people who hovered over their shoulders were rubbing shoulders against other sweating people standing and they were hot and mad about it and they had been standing so long that they had started to sway unsteadily as if they were three-thirds drunk when they'd had only had two expensive watered-down drinks and they thought they were beginning to hallucinate and they were hot and mad about it and Aretha was an hour and 45 minutes late and they were hot and mad about it.

And then Aretha began to sing,  
sweat beading her edges,  
sweat beading her upper lip,  
sweat beading her bosom.

*Take me to heart*, she sang,  
like the do-right woman she was.  
*You make me feel*,  
*I say a little prayer*,  
and, somewhat ironically,  
*I knew you were waiting*.

It was so hot  
people didn't know if they were in hell or heaven  
but Aretha was singing,  
Aretha was singing.  
And they were hot  
but they were not mad about it.

# STINK BUG

SOPHIA JUDGE

I am standing naked in my apartment bedroom  
face to face with a stink bug perched on the bottom  
slat of my window shade so I call you  
and I tell you that I don't think stink bugs  
were around when we were kids, that I think  
I would have remembered having to kill so many  
of the tiny things that they would mean a bit more  
to me now, like roly-polies or daddy-long-legs,  
and if they had been around we would have given  
them a friendlier name. You remembered to call  
me back two days later to tell me that  
you looked it up, they are invasive species  
who snuck in here sometime in the 2010s and  
that this isn't just another gap in my memory.

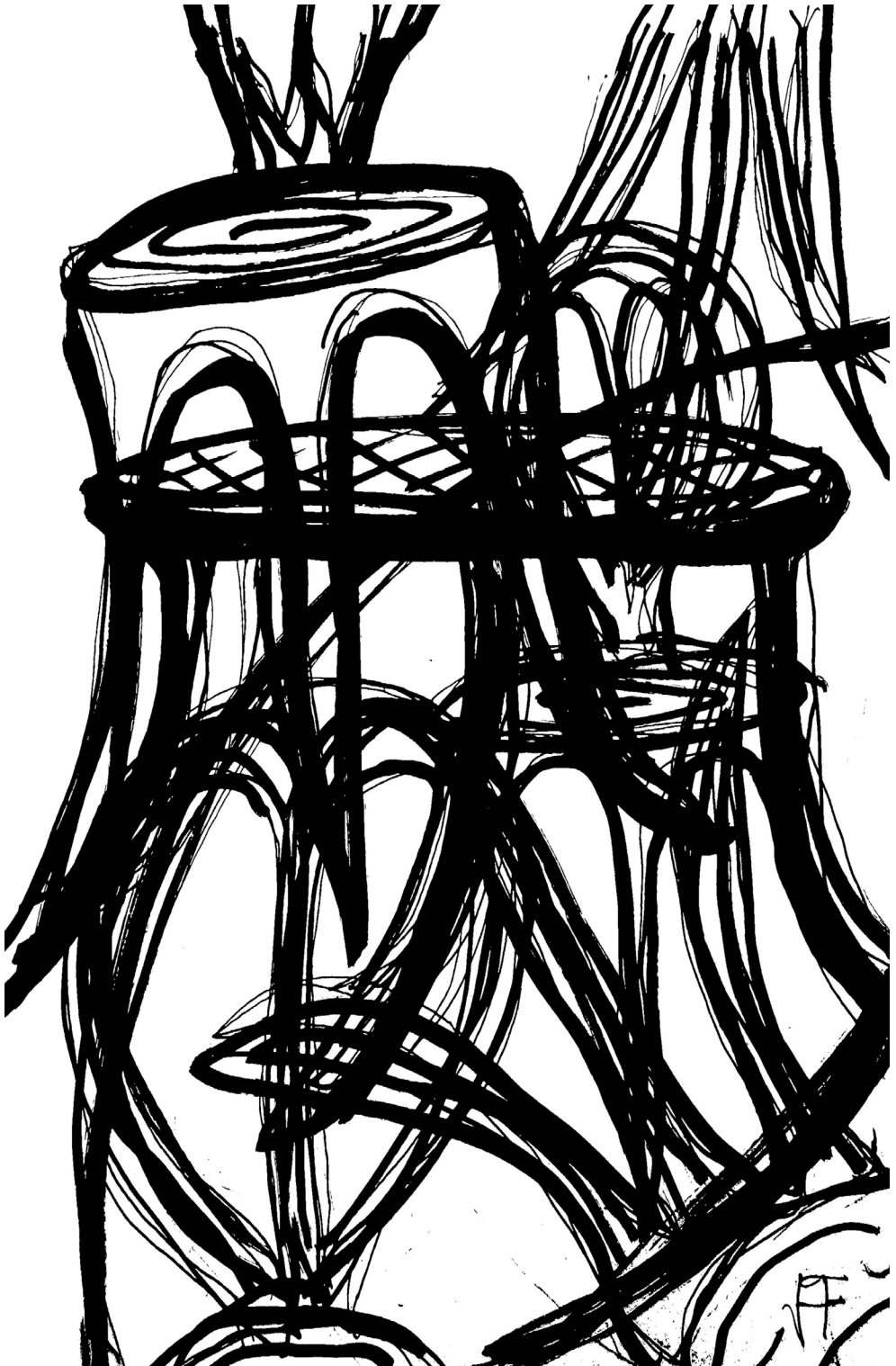
# Gold star

DANIEL MASK

Yesterday out of the blue  
when we were bent  
over fucking each other  
you blurted out—  
how pleased my father  
would have been,  
what a pity he's dead.  
your mother too,  
how proud they'd be.

I said, if my parents  
were alive,  
they would be drunk—  
already wrapped  
around a telephone pole.  
I missed the point.  
My new friend was right—  
my parents would be proud,  
crying even.

Who do we write poems  
for if not our parents.  
Why must drunk  
mothers and fathers  
be long dead in the grave  
before we run home  
with a gold star  
in our hands  
that make up  
for all the trouble  
they caused.



*Table and Chair*

Allen Forrest

# Poisoned Roots

LAUREL ASHCOM

Rufus Oakwood, the one and only son of his father, Lord Tyson Oakwood, is at this moment committing treason. For when nobles think about crime, they do not think of murder. They imagine what Rufus is doing right now: feeding the poor with the ample supplies from the castle kitchens. Theft from a nobleman being a greater crime in their eyes than allowing their subjects to starve.

Could Rufus have simply bought food for the poor in the market with his abundant wealth? Perhaps. This method, however, has the added benefit of taking away the inevitable waste produced by the gluttonous men and women stumbling around the stone fortress at his back.

A small girl no older than three or four toddles over to him, reaching for the bread and cheese he has laid out on a makeshift table. This alley provides cover from patrolling city guards and gives him protection from the wind blowing harshly through the city. He gives the little girl an extra loaf of bread and a cloth full of ham to bring back to her mother. She trips as the broken sole of her shoe catches on the cobblestones. He should see if he can find some children's clothes where the maids do the washing.

Pulling the threadbare cloak he borrowed from under his table, he leaves the remainder of the food out for anyone else to take, climbing up the shorter wall to his right and taking the roof systems back to the castle. His room in the house occupied by his family is on the third story in the back, making the climb especially hard in the cold air. He sits on his window sill for a moment, staring at the darkened city falling below him. Whenever he sits here and looks, he always feels as though someone else watches him back.

~ ~ ~  
“Al?...Al?...Alvin?...Alvinus Macedonius!”

Alvinus doesn't turn his gaze away from the red-haired noble sitting in the window across the way. Mort sighs loudly behind Alvinus, taking both his shoulders and attempting to shake him. Unfortunately for Mort, he is a gangly teenager, while Alvinus is all muscle and spite packed into a very sturdy package. His friend scoots to the edge of the roof and squints towards the castle and the lord who has captured Alvinus's attention so effortlessly.

“So are we robbing him or....?”

He shushes Mort with a wave of his hand, holding the spyglass to his eye once again. “He's been stealing from the castle for weeks. Food, medicine, clothes. I still can't figure out how.”

Mort runs a hand through his black hair, then scratches the beginnings of stubble on his cheek. “I would assume a lord can just take whatever he wants. Ya know, privilege and all that. If we're not robbing him, why are ya watching him so much?”

“Because we’re not robbing him, he’s going to help *us* rob *them*.”

~ ~ ~

Rufus goes to the washerhouse where the nobility have their clothes cleaned. The women there giggle as he flirts with them, offering to take their finished washings back to their lords and ladies houses. He takes as much as he believes will not be missed, then takes a basketful of bread, salt, sugar, and vegetables. One of the older women in the city had told him a few weeks before that in a month’s time they would only require the seeds and they could begin to grow food for themselves.

When he makes it to the alley, it is quiet. Usually people spot him coming and spread the word. Nevertheless, he spreads out what he brought, sectioning the sugar and salt into smaller bottles to hand out. He takes one of the bread rolls, ripping off a piece with his teeth.

“I don’t believe it’s good form to eat the food you’ve brought for others.”

He squints into the darkness in front of him. A squeaky voice accompanies the first, “You’d think he had enough to eat from that big-ass castle.”

Two figures step out from the shadows, one a lanky teen boy with greasy black hair and clothes that are too big for him, the other a taller, slightly older man with closely cropped black hair. The taller one has a strong face, with a jaw so sharp it could cut glass. His gaze is steady as he meets Rufus’s eyes.

So far, the people who have come to collect food from Rufus are kind and simply in need of some kindness in return. However, he is not naive enough to believe there are no tougher sorts. The men do not have any visible weapons on them, but they could both easily be concealing a knife somewhere. Still, he chooses to be optimistic about their intentions. He feels as though he knows one of them.

Rufus sits back down on the cold stone, crossing his legs and sorting through the vegetables he took. “What would you like? The fruits and vegetables are fresh and the bread was made only this morning.”

They approach slowly, the lanky one staying by the wall as the clear leader sits across from Rufus on the ground. He does not seem bothered by the cold surface at all.

“I am Rufus,” he says. “Would you care to grant me your names?”

The man’s lips turn up slightly at his formal speech. “I am Alvinus, the squirrel over there is Mort.”

Rufus tilts his head. “Why would you be named ‘death?’”

“You know the old tongue?” Alvinus’s brow raises.

“Of course,” Rufus responds, “The Oakwoods, my family, have been the Maesters to the king since the conception of this kingdom.”

“Ain’t a Maester a musician? They play fiddles?” Mort scratches his chin, “Or do they do money stuff.”

Rufus’s eyes crinkle, “You are thinking of a Bard. A Maester is a knowledge keeper. We know the history, religion, and legends of this kingdom and those of the North. Of course, the old tongue would be the first thing taught to me as a child.” He pauses, remembering the mysterious nature of their arrival. “May I ask why you are here if not for the food I offer?”

Alvinus looks at the spread between them, noting the small jars in which Rufus had divided the salt and sugar. “Why do you risk yourself like this? Why steal from your own family and king for strangers?”

Rufus sits back, running a contemplative hand over his trowsers. “I suppose it was my mother’s influence. She always told me that kindness is not a rare jewel given only to family or friends, but like water it is natural and abundant.”

“So you do it out of kindness?”

“I do it because it is right. And because it hurts nobody—everything I take is what will never be missed. It is sad that they wish to throw it to the pigs when there is always enough to share.”

“Yes, a shame.” Alvinus leans over the table, his lower body tensing as he holds himself closer to Rufus. “Lord Oakwood, how would you feel about another set of hands on your nightly adventures?”

~ ~ ~

Two more hands was an understatement. The next night Rufus showed Alvinus the way over the wall and ended up watching as the man hooked up a pulley and zipline, allowing them to clip in several baskets and bags of goods and simply watch them disappear into unknown hands, invisibly distributing them throughout the city.

And they did it again. And again. With so much help, Rufus was no longer spending hours out in the city, waiting and handing out food. Instead, he was done in under an hour and spent the rest of it simply watching. One night, Alvinus dragged him to a celebration, pulling him into a crowd of revelers to dance. Hands wandering places they never had before. He stumbled back to his house far past when the sun had risen.

Now they simply sit and watch. The sun hangs low in the sky, tinging the clouds pink and orange as a gentle breeze hints at Spring.

“Do you think when the Goddesses created us They realized what we might do to Their world?”

Alvinus runs a hand through the red strands of Rufus’s hair, his deep voice soothing. “I think They wished the very best for us, but even They cannot see every possibility.”

“Do you think They regret our creation?”

Rufus turns his head as Alvinus pulls away, cupping his jaw. “No.” They join for a short, fierce kiss. That seems to be how it is with them, Rufus can only ever spare a few hours to spend with the man he loves, but it is no less epic.

He turns his gaze to the castle, “What would it take to allow one to live without worry. How long do we have to take things, to be the only lifeline to these people? Do they not deserve to live without need of aid?”

Alvinus presses a kiss to the lord’s jaw, “You’re speaking all fancy. What brought this on?” He presses his calloused hand into Rufus’s waist, pulling him closer.

The young lord squares his shoulders, “There is a set of jewels in the castle that I believe could fund nearly the entire city for years to come. At the very least we could use it to get more resources from the North.”

“You wish to rob the King?”

“No, of course not. Lord Holborn’s wife has a necklace that she has refused to wear after the first time. I have seen it laying discarded in a pile of treasures she will not ever touch again.”

“It’s too much of a risk for you to take it alone and it would take weeks for me to plan something like this.” Alvinus claims, “I think it’s best we consider something else.”

Rufus shakes his head, standing and pointing towards the castle. “We can do it tonight. There is a big party and everyone will be distracted. I can slip away and bring you the jewels if you can make it past the guards. When the Holborns return to their rooms in the castle, they will be too drunk to even notice, and you shall be gone by then.”

The sky begins to darken as the sun gives a final farewell, and Alvinus doesn’t see the fading light as any kind of good sign. “I can get past the guards, but you still shouldn’t take the necklace on your own.”

“Vini,” Rufus lays a hand on his cheek, running his fingers through the cropped black hair. “I will raise less suspicion and notice. All you need to do is meet me by the side gate to the gardens.”

Alvinus groans, dropping his head onto the lord's chest. "You know I can't refuse you when you call me Vini."

~ ~ ~

Crickets chirp as Rufus walks through the garden, avoiding the gravel path as much as possible. The flowers bloom tonight, turning their blank faces towards him as frost glistens off of their petals. He focuses on the breath curling out of his mouth, his fingers clenching and unclenching for warmth too far to reach now.

The idea of breaking into the personal chambers of a lord and lady isn't the intimidating part for Rufus. It is taking the stolen jewelry in his breast pocket and exiting the castle to where Alvinus waits for him without raising any suspicion.

No sounds follow Rufus as he finally reaches the gate. He pats his pocket for the mild reassurance that the jewels still sit just inside. When the door opens on a surprisingly silent hinge, Alvinus is already on the other side. He leans against the wall with a foot propped against it casually.

"You okay?" The question comes across as more of a tease than concern, only enhanced as a smile pulls at Vini's lips.

Rufus rolls his eyes, stepping through the gate and pulling the jewels from his pocket. "How are these?"

Alvinus takes them and holds them up to the moonlight. His face is serious, but then he shrugs, tossing them back. "How should I know? I don't live in a palace surrounded by jewels."

The young lord huffs, pushing them back into his partner's hands. "Just take them."

Alvinus pushes them back, "Say please." He leans in, taking his sweet time coming close enough for Rufus to kiss.

"Please," he whispers.

Alvinus smiles, then a hand yanks Rufus away by his jacket collar, two guards rushing Vini and slamming him down onto the cobbled path.

~ ~ ~

When Alvinus imagined the castle dungeons, the only two images that pop up were a sooty, refuse-painted cell with hard surfaces and unimaginable cold, or a warm cell that looked more like a standard guest room than a prison. Neither of those are true.

The cell has a bed and a bucket. It's cold, but there is still a blanket laid out for him and a not-so-damp corner of the cell to curl up in. Who knew that the founders of the city cared to afford their prisoners basic amenities?

Alvinus stretches out on the bed, counting his options. He could pick the lock, but then he'd have to go through the pesky business of fighting off a guard while he is hungry and has a bump on the head.

"I told you I wish to speak to him." Rufus's voice floats down the hallway of deserted cells, pitched in anger.

"Let him through, lad, on my orders."

He doesn't recognize the accompanying voice, or the heavy steps that follow in the path of Rufus's soft ones. When an old man with a round belly and colorful wool attire comes to stand before his cell, Alvinus ignores him, instead looking towards Rufus. The young lord's red hair is a fuzzy mess, raked through endlessly by hands that have turned sallow. Goddesses, it's only been a few hours.

"Are you alright?" Rufus slides a hand through the bars separating them, only for it to be quickly yanked back.

"Are you insane?" the fat man asks, face turning into a tomato. "Don't show concern for this criminal, son. He has caused more than enough damage."

Rufus glares, "He has a name, father."

"Then I shall learn it for the gallows." Alvinus has to give the older Lord Oakwood credit for his dispassion, especially when he delivers the threat to his son with such clear intent.

"Do I get a say?" He asks, raising his hand in sarcastic greeting. "Surely you nobles allow a man counsel."

The older lord turns to him as though he'd only just appeared. The only answer given is a sneer, then he's turning back to Rufus, Alvinus forgotten once again.

"You will tell the King that you were under duress when the guards found you with those jewels. He has no wish to lose a member of our noble house."

"Perhaps his concern should be for his subjects and why one of them had to steal in the first place," Rufus fires back.

"Enough! This is the right course, son. Once it is done, you will move on and be all the better for it."

~ ~ ~

Two hours of pacing in his room still hasn't made Rufus believe his father's words. How can there be a better world without Vini? He knows his father, knows the king. There is no easy way out for them, no solution where one of them doesn't have to take the fall.

So Rufus will, but not before getting Alvinus to safety.

Since they are hardly ever used, the dungeons are only guarded by one man. Rufus thanks all of the Goddesses that this one man is asleep at his post.

When he finds Alvinus's cell, the man is on the floor doing pushups.

"I told you before, I only put on a show for one person and that is-oh-" Alvinus pauses halfway up, meeting Rufus's gaze, "-well hello."

Rufus pulls out the keys he took from the guard and gets to work unlocking the cell. Alvinus pulls on his shirt, then takes the offered hand from Rufus, following the young lord out.

The farthest they get is a narrow stone corridor that would pop them right out into the gardens and to freedom, if it had not been for Rufus's father blocking the door. He watches carefully as his son steps between him and the prisoner he is attempting to free.

"My son." He shakes his head, disappointment clear on his face. "Running off with a criminal."

Rufus steps forward to obscure Alvinus further. "We would not have to run if you would only listen." He holds his hands out in a gesture of placation. "Father please. You may place the blame on our heads, but let us go."

"I am sorry," the lord says. Four guards armed with crossbows enter the corridor from a door opposite the lord. "You are my only son, but I cannot let you go. If you cannot leave this thief on your own, then I shall have to force you apart."

One of the guards reaches for Rufus's arm, pulling him back as the other three raise their crossbows towards Alvinus. The thief raises his hands, a half smile curling his lips.

"You will come to understand in time why this needs to happen," the lord says to his son.

Rufus stares at his father, body rigid. "Yes, father."

He throws his elbow back into the face of the guard holding him, making the man stumble back into the wall and clutch his nose with both hands. The remaining guards release their crossbolts, but Alvinus drops to the ground, letting them sail over his head. One imbeds itself in a wooden door at the end of the corridor. The other two hit the stone walls, bouncing off them until one gets tangled in an iron chandelier and the other skids to the floor.

The guards take no heed to the dangers of firing more bolts in such an enclosed space. Their only goal is to take Alvinus. He engages two guards in hand to hand combat as the third scrambles to reload his crossbow. Rufus's father pulls him away from the scuffle, both hands clamped on his son's shoulders.

Despite his knowledge of Alvinus's skills, Rufus still feels dread coil in his gut as the guards manage to get ahold of an arm each and the one with the crossbow manages to finally reload it. Rufus pulls against his father as the man raises the bolt to Alvinus, leveling it at his heart as the thief struggles against the men holding him.

Rufus rips at the clasps of his jacket, slipping out of it and his father's grasp and lunging for the crossbow. He pushes it aside just as the guard pulls the trigger, sending the bolt wide. It makes a loud echo as it bounces off of the wall and ricochets past him.

A thump follows a sharp exhale behind Rufus. He slowly turns, finding his father clutching his stomach where the bolt is embedded to the black fletchings. A ringing fills his ears as feeling leaves his body in a rush. Alvinus lunges past the guards, grabbing his hand and pulls him towards the door. Rufus stands rooted, staring at his father's shallow breaths. The blood pooling on the grey stones.

A sharper jerk moves him past the body, into a shock of cold air that only further aids the ice encasing his body, leaving a tingling numbness.

He doesn't see the beauty of the garden, or even note how they get from there to the streets of the city. Any noise is drowned out by the memory of the sound of his father hitting the floor.

"Rufus." A name under water. A sound too far to hear. The name of a dead man.

"Rufus." Alvinus shakes his shoulders aggressively, fighting the urge to shove the young lord against the wall of the alley he's pulled them into. "Rufus, please. It was an accident. Rufus, you need to get a hold of yourself."

Rufus allows himself to focus on Vini's face; the eyes filled with too much, the hard mouth that smiles as little as possible.

“He wanted to kill you.” The thief nods carefully as the lord continues, “He was not going to stop.”

Alvinus pulls Rufus carefully to his chest. “That doesn’t mean you can’t be sad. But that is an emotion for later. Right now, we must hide.”

“Where?”

“My home.”

Rufus has never been to Alvinus’s home. He doesn’t even know which part of the city he’s from.

“The mistress of the house will give you shelter and safety from the castle and the king. They will never know Rufus Oakwood has fled there.”

Rufus shakes his head, walking further down the damp alleyway to sit on a slightly rotted wooden crate. “I cannot be Rufus Oakwood any longer. Not after I...”

Alvinus understands more than he cares to admit. “Then what will I call you?”

“Aiken. To remember my roots, but be separate from them.”

“Aiken.” Alvinus rolls the name around a little, sitting beside the crate. “Is there a last name?”

“Do orphans usually have them?”

“I guess not. I certainly don’t.”

Aiken’s eyes crinkle in the corners, his lips turning up into the bare image of a smile.

Alvinus reaches out a hand, “Just Aiken then.”

The man no longer a lord shakes the offered hand. “Just Aiken, and just Alvinus.”



Bianca  
N.D.M.

*From the Hills Above Glen-Car*

Bianca NDM

# *At the Cage Keeper Institute*

NOEL SLOBODA

They start everyone with kittens  
yearning for connection—  
caged, surveilled, untouched.

Those among us who cannot sleep  
with all the mewling  
will be assigned snails

to study natural indifference.  
Still, some of us novices  
never will be good

enough to be entrusted  
with taking care of  
other people.

# Konteka Black Bear Resort

## CAL LAFOUNTAIN

In the town of White Pine, MI, the people hung on longer than the industry, so now the whole town fills a single parking lot. That means the library, hospital, post office, and funeral home joined as one. Total population 474, if you believe the 2010 census.

The town's only restaurant bubbles across the street. To save space and continue the compressed theme, a bowling alley extends from the bar as a jubilant afterthought. With everything so close, you can eat and drink and buzz the scoreboard with its rad lightning long into the night.

In the library, my father and I flung the bottoms of our shirts to clear the heat, like two misplaced ghosts of the Lower Peninsula, bellies sweating pasty sugars. The librarian eyed us, and some kid clicked around Windows '98. The catalog filled a single room with donated books, overtaking what free space remained for the modest collection.

Approximately 474 books for approximately 474 people.

What's special about this restaurant called Konteka is how the townsfolk handle the leftovers. Because a population of fat black bears is what they have, it's what they use. Using what you have: that's one way to own the climb of American commerce.

Thick-paneled windows line the dining space. Visible in the backyard, scraps of walleye, squishy casseroles, and fried Wisco curds brew a peppery odor in piles. And that odor attracts the big bad black bears, who are so very Michigan that they use their paws and claws like they are big bad machines made for mining. The persistent beasts swallowed the remains.

If at the snowmobile-accessible Konteka Lodge in White Pine, MI, they feed leftovers to black bears, does that make them bad? Or just interested listeners of the cosmic absurdities piping through a thin but distant firmament? They are far North, in the Upper Peninsula, remember.

A few bites in, I can tell I won't finish the whole pork chop. The fractured wishbone gives me a weird look, then Norma Jean takes my plate with a weirder look.

The strange, isolated nature of this place uncoils its commercial origins. Copper Range Company operated several copper mines in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The company monopolized the region through rich copper stores, marking the area as one of both beauty and fortune, dating back to early American exploration.

The company, though momentous, crumbled under ambitions aimed at odd, failed technological experiments. The most notable, a costly transport system called Dasheveyor, sank their remaining funds.

Copper Range Company ceded its position in the region in 1989 when Metall Mining Company entered. Metall attempted to regain the mine's profitability, but after failed efforts, it closed the mines for good in 1995. I was five.

For over twenty years, the region remained a stilted artifact of its glorified past. These fabulous squares grow in the bowling alleys and libraries of a country strayed from profit.

Now it's better than normal. When the commercial dies, the spirit rises.

We ate and watched the bears, but that managed to stand as the least significant part of this venture. Rather, I remembered how bizarre the world renders in its infinite iterations; in servicing pedestrian joy, a standard the good people who live and work in White Pine, MI rightfully expect. It's just a genuine American gem, that town.

# Pound 40, Goffman Love<sup>1</sup>

BENJAMIN GOLUBOFF

Pound could see right away  
that his opponent, a reedy little Jew,  
was not who he said he was,  
was not the deputy assistant  
to the Director of Recreation  
here at St. Elizabeth's.  
Yes, Pound saw through everything,  
knew it was all mesh and lace,  
all seeming and *personae*,  
pasteboard masks behind which,  
both in the Hospital  
and in the wider world,  
the principles and agents  
of USURA were latent.

The Jew, who had a weak backhand  
and a sissified underhand serve,  
was either a fellow inmate  
motivated by an Oedipal compulsion  
to impersonate one of their keepers,  
or else, something far more  
deeply interfused, the Jew was cat's paw  
or *condottore* for the Elders,  
the silent engineers of the flood.

At the madhouse  
in his professional capacity  
as a sociological researcher,  
Goffman was gathering  
material for this third book,  
*Asylums*, and knew  
exactly who Pound was  
and knew but did not care  
that interacting with the old fascist  
on these terms  
violated at least three  
of the principles of the A.S.A.'s  
Fieldworkers' Code of Conduct.  
But a combination of scholarly curiosity  
with a certain cussedness  
in Goffman's character  
made the sociologist play on.

The match took place in 1955  
 as Goffman was developing  
 the arguments that mental illness  
 – or much of what went by that name –  
 was a social convention enforced,  
 sometimes with disastrous consequences,  
 upon those dissenting from majority  
 social behaviors, performing the self in ways  
 that an emerging professional cohort,  
 arrogating power and prestige to themselves,  
 could redefine as pathology.

Stamina was Goffman's  
 only virtue as a tennis player.  
 The sociologist could run and run.  
 And Pound kept him running.  
 70 in 1955, Pound was still fit and strong.  
 He had gained weight in the hospital  
 and recouped some of the muscle tone  
 he'd lost in the tiger cage at Pisa.  
 The poet brought to bear  
 a game seasoned in long rivalries  
 with Hemingway and Wyndham Lewis,  
 and nurtured in the cut-throat  
 neighborhood leagues  
 of Paris and Rapallo.  
 Also, as an insane person,  
 Pound saw tennis as a Manichaeian struggle  
 between titanic forces of darkness and light  
 and committed himself to every match  
 as if it were exactly that.

And while you couldn't say  
 the poet played a dirty game,  
 exactly, he did enjoy  
 putting his opponents off their rhythm  
 by barking asides and expostulations,  
 apposite references to voices  
 in the great traditions  
 as a sort of real-time  
 on-the-court  
 pastiche or bricolage:

“Down down it comes like glistering Phaeton,”  
 Pound shouted as he watched  
 the descent of a ball Goffman  
 had lobbed desperately  
 as he scrambled to get back into position.  
 Pound rushed the net  
 intoning something that sounded  
 guttural and German to Goffman,

but which an opponent with training other than the sociologist's might have recognized as a phrase from Unferth's challenge to Beowulf in the original Old English.

Pound's strategy of disruptions  
– the barked imprecations  
(*O tempora, O mores!*) –  
worked on Goffman as the poet intended.  
The researcher lobbed and volleyed,  
scrambled across his backcourt,  
but could not take control of the game  
and repel the old fascist's withering offense.  
In short, Pound trounced Goffman,  
shutting out the sociologist in straight sets.

When Goffman, defeated, came to the net  
for a sportsmanlike handshake,  
Pound declined to take his hand,  
focused on his opponent a glare  
that felt like an oven's blast of heat,  
and said:

*With usura the line grows thick.  
With usura is no clear demarcation  
and no man can find site for his dwelling.*

Then Pound stalked back to the wards  
with little cartoon thunderclouds  
menacing his old grey head.

At first Goffman laughed,  
then he got angry,  
then he had an abrupt seizure  
of the double-consciousness  
that troubles the members  
of marginalized populations  
and that had touched the sociologist  
only a handful of times before.  
But over the next months  
the match with Pound  
led to a silent crisis  
in Goffman's research:  
sleepless nights  
and feverish revisions.

*Asylums* would appear in 1961.  
Along with the writing of R.D. Laing  
and Thomas Szasz,  
with *Bell Jar* and *Cuckoo's Nest*,  
it would force a temporary pause

in the relentless advance  
of the therapeutic armies.  
But Goffman felt he had released  
the book in bad faith.  
He had lost confidence in his thesis  
that madness is a social convention  
now that he had stood across  
the net from Ezra Pound.

1. It is a matter of fact that in 1955 Erving Goffman once played tennis with Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's hospital. The outcome of the match and the behavior of the players as given here are invented. Yves Winkin, *From Erving to Goffman: A Work in Performance?* Translated by Yves Winkin and Wendy Leeds Hurwitz, Bethlehem, PA: mediastudies.press, 2025, p. 14

# Birds Blue Birds

MRITYUNJAY MOHAN

a bird perches on the windowsill pecks at glass stained glass blue a body emerges from between the breasts of the waves bloated blue-hued bone-dust *a wrinkle forms beneath each eye when i speak like it knows of my words before i utter them* a procession of walking bodies a vigil held for the dead a crowd of birds fall from the blue sky bruised a rotten plum clutched in the beak of one *when i speak words still in the garden of my mind each one a buried body beneath the soft turned earth* in the bodies of the fallen birds secrets unfurl like words each one carrying a small life on its back to set toward rising sun in another plane *the monsoon air aches in the hollow of my throat lets a cough continue for three months under the crimson sun* a man sits on his boat and sets sail across the sea in search of fish *i find a seashell buried between my toes worming its way into my flesh* the bloated dead body in the sea double triple until the sea is closed off to the public after sunset *a fish lost of life swims across my shadow on the coarse sand* the boat is overturned the man is a bloated piece of history floating under blue wavering skin a decayed bird clings to the sky *my voice sinks beneath my tongue unable to rise despite sweet words* as if the sun could prevent their death on the windowsill a bird sits pecks at the stained glass searches its reflection finds the face of its fallen companion staring back instead



*Dance Don't Dance*

Catherine McGuire

# Ode to My Girlfriends

LIZ PURVIS

*after Arielle Hebert, after CD Wright*

Me and my friends know this: the observable universe  
is only as vast as the four of us hunched over a scarred table  
in a rented kitchen, wine dark as bruised plums  
sloshing in stemless glasses, agonizing over line breaks  
at midnight, trading dreams like library books—  
borrowed, dog-eared, overdue. We were crafty then,  
not with glue or string but language—  
pulling intricate nets from thin air, hoping to catch  
what shimmered just beyond reach.

All we really wanted was each other—the permission  
to say grief, to write the word river & mean it.

In the library, we claimed whole tables for ourselves,  
stacked with books rising like fortresses, their weight  
too heavy to carry alone. We said: this poem will save me,  
& for once we were not lying. We were crafty in the ways  
that we held each other upright, sketching  
impossible futures on the backs of receipts,  
our lives still slender rivers threading toward unseen oceans.  
I'd take those years again—late walks  
down brick paths slick with rain, lunches packed  
in our bookbags, our futures all still full with possibilities.

Once, we bought a balloon for no reason except to let it go.  
Bright cerulean against a clouded sky, it lifted  
past rooftops, & we named it after ourselves,  
the last thing we thought could keep us tethered.

Sisters made by poems & survival—years later, our orbits  
still intersect each other, our laughter a kind of gravity,  
group texts our twenty-first century map  
towards each other's hands. I want to say it plain: beloveds,  
you are the path I keep choosing, the unexpected gift  
of my twenties, the reason I know the universe, observable  
or not, is stitched together with the love of strong women.

Friendship, I've learned, is its own astronomy:  
distance collapsing when we need it to,  
gravity tender yet relentless, pulling us homeward—  
observable, infinite, ours.



*Neutral Conditions*

Sebastian "zeb" Restrepo

# The Sakura Lie

PRADEEP R. VARADWAJ

Screen-glow afternoon—  
scholarship ink dries blood-warm,  
roots breathe under glass.

Corridor fluoresce;  
petal-smiles lacquered in place,  
heartbeats badge-clipped still.

Contracts blossom pink;  
valentines stamped corporate red,  
stems severed in files.

Lantern-beer dusk ferments;  
laughter sours foreign names,  
salt clings to petals.

Glass doors hush the air;  
ID constellations blink,  
names thin into codes.

Copy-room wind hums;  
whispers steep in paper cups,  
hands warm over fear.

Office hours dim;  
consonants stand on trial,  
tongues rented in bloom.

Security lenses  
flower black along the halls—  
truth lowers its gaze.

Forms bloom, stamped and sealed;  
foreign grace pruned bonsai-tight,  
roots bruise underground.

Proof stacked blade-thin waits;  
“Where is the footage?” they ask—  
dust swallows the light.

Night train windows drift;  
faces oil the passing rails,  
petals bruise in glass.

Neon hearts flicker;  
discount love behind plexiglass,  
red refuses heat.

Midnight lab humming;  
one laugh snaps its spine silent,  
no witness takes root.

Winter in the ribs;  
sap climbs the cracked bone slowly,  
stone learns how to split.

# *Snow in the South*

SYDNEY HOLZMAN

A familiar frost coats each unexpected face,  
a northern gift the southern sun disdains;  
losing myself in a frigid embrace  
as tires spin wild across forgotten lanes.

A mug of cocoa steams against the cold,  
held tight by mittens pulled from cedar drawers,  
paired with the bloom of jackets in colors bold,  
while laughter rings off crisp icy floors.

In Audubon, the park transforms complete:  
small figurines slip and glide on crystal ways  
their stumbles sing with rhythm bittersweet,  
a fleeting song that marks precious days.

For in this snow, our joy refuses flight  
in my second home made brighter by the white.

# *Fruit on the river*

EMELIA DELAPORTE

I tried my first persimmon today  
firm, dusty and orange —  
because someone on the internet  
told me  
they were ready early this year

It chokes my throat —  
powder clinging inside my mouth —  
I lean, to wash my mouth with river water  
and fall in

Determined

I will find a sweet one  
I find my footing and  
grab another

The powder coats my tongue  
I pretend it is ripe,  
pass it to my partner

Laughter,  
then an unsettling guilt

Because someone at a different elevation  
told me  
if someone feeds you a persimmon before it is ready  
they are not your friend

# Us Who Survive

AARON PETTY

When my wife and I moved in July of 2015 we knew very little about our new hometown. The schools were good, the houses nice, and it was convenient to where we worked. But we didn't really know anyone. Kids still walk to school here but, unlike when I was a kid, parents are required to walk with them (or else drive them) through the end of third grade. So, there's a lot of waiting around on the blacktop for the bell to ring in the morning and again in the afternoon. And my oldest daughter started kindergarten that fall, so we had years of this left to go.

She made a friend quickly. Another girl, with a birthday in early September two days before hers, who she knew both from school and from Sunday school. They weren't with each other constantly—mine played soccer, the other softball—but beyond that they were nearly always together. Our house, her house, or at some event where they were both invited.

This girl's parents were a couple years older than us, but just barely, and very much still in the same phase of life. She was an only child. School grounds seem to inspire a need—even among parents—to stand around in groups, so naturally we gravitated toward the people we knew from the dozens of pick-ups and drop-offs and other events we all found ourselves attending. We learned their names, then their jobs, then families—the dad had a sister who lived down the street from us.

We heard all their stories. How the mom fought with her sister on her sister's wedding day. How the mom was worried the guys her father worked with would treat the now-husband poorly, but they turned out to love him. About their high school escapades and their lives before each other. We saw their niece and nephew graduate and go to college and chatted with their parents when they visited. We were each other's emergency contacts for everything. We took our kids to their friend's games, and we would sit and watch too.

The first year or two, there was just her 40th birthday party and then a Fourth of July barbeque—both huge affairs with friends, neighbors and family. The last summer we saw them almost every week, sometimes more. Typically, it was just our group of four, or sometimes we would pair off. Twice she drove with my wife up to our cabin six hours away. At home, there was usually a mid-week hangout on the porch with beers and sometimes pizza. Most weekends I would go over Saturday mornings to watch the F1 race on tape delay and one of his friends would do themed drinks to match the race location. These weren't kid-centric activities. The girls might be there, or might not, and it didn't really matter. Once, when his daughter came down to watch the race for a bit, he

referred to me as an uncle. And when we started doing holiday dinners together, we were treated as family. No one had ever promised anything, but it also seemed like we didn't need to.

But kids' friend groups shift like quicksand in middle school. These kids were no different. In the spring of eighth grade, our daughters had a falling out. One felt weighted down and hurt. The other lonely and abandoned. I assumed the kids would work it out themselves—or not, but either way it wasn't something I could resolve. Forcing the issue seemed not only wrong, but counterproductive. And I didn't think there was much riding on it anyway. That turned out to be a view that was not shared. The four of us had concert tickets; they cancelled on us. We reached out; nothing. Where months earlier we shared a holiday dinner as aunt and uncle—alongside an actual aunt and uncle—we were in an instant no longer anyone. To me, a decade of friendship came to a crashing halt. But to them, facilitating a betrayal—real or perceived—is not something a friend does.

It didn't fail, though. It reached the end of a life that had been contingent on our children's continued friendship, or at least on their drifting apart gradually rather than abruptly and with hurt on both sides. The friendship was real—that's why its ending hurt—but real friendships are not necessarily unconditional. Few relationships of any kind are. This one was conditioned on the stability of another relationship we were not participants in, which made its footing more precarious than I understood at the time. There was nothing I could have done to prevent it from ending. The difficulty was not the conditionality itself, but our different understandings of its terms.

Almost exactly one year before the move, I spent nine weeks at a training course in Alabama. Most of my classmates were younger, unattached, and just starting their careers. All were passing through on their way to somewhere else. I was older, married, with three children under three, and preoccupied with the strain this detour was placing on my family. I was not looking for a connection.

It started with coffee. I was refilling my mug between classes when someone poked me between the shoulder blades. "Hey." It was a woman I'd seen in class before but never spoken to. Years later I asked her why she'd singled me out. "I was looking for a friend," she said. "And you seemed like less of an asshole than the others." We started running together. Then talking. Then, gradually, sharing things that suggested something more serious than a passing acquaintance. Before the course ended, I told her—more directly than was typical for me—that I didn't want this to be one of those friendships that existed only to bridge the loneliness of a transient couple of months.

It had no business lasting the way it did. I wasn't in the market for friends; I had too much on my plate as it was. We were different ages, in different stages of life, and different genders, all of which made the fact of the connection feel improbable and the likelihood that we could maintain it feel naïve.

Years went by when we didn't see each other at all. We were always in different time zones and for three and a half years on different continents. Occasionally, we could meet in person for an hour or two, but only if we were both smart and lucky—we managed a lunch during a serendipitous layover in Frankfurt, and a dinner when I was in Washington for a job interview. But, given the usual distance, most of our contact was asynchronous. WhatsApp became our preferred method of communication. Occasionally, when schedules allowed—and more often when time zones aligned—we could get in a phone call. Sometimes we talked about nothing. Other times about the things people usually reserve for those they trust—failure, longing, apprehension, unfulfilled dreams.

But what surprised me, over time, was not just the depth of the friendship, but its persistence. It did not advance quickly. It did not announce itself as important. It simply continued, even when nothing in our lives required it to and everything else in our lives stacked the odds against it. It just was. It might be tempting to say that the friendship that lasted did so because it was deeper, or more honest, or somehow better made. I don't think that's true. The friendship that ended had been sincere. It was more than convenience and its loss hurt precisely because it had *not* been superficial.

But for that friendship, we were operating under different sets of assumptions. I had thought the adult friendship had transcended its original purpose of facilitating friendship for the kids. But they were still anchored to that purpose or at least saw the way in which the kids' friendship ended as unforgivable. We were serious with one another but not about the same thing. So when the children fell out, the adult friendship encountered a cost it was not prepared to absorb. Ending it was not an act of cruelty; it was an act of coherence. Continuing would have required redefining the relationship as something independent, and that redefinition was never on the table. Not for them.

This friendship, in contrast, was inconvenient from the start. There was no structure carrying it forward. Each continuation required some small, explicit decision from both of us.

One friendship borrowed seriousness from circumstance. The other created circumstance out of seriousness.

Not every friendship is built to hold moments like this, and the ones that are don't announce themselves in advance. Most arrive quietly, in ordinary circumstances, and do the work they were meant to do before slipping away without drama or blame. There is no use to rescuing those friendships from their endings or discrediting them for honoring their own limits. What I hold onto instead is a clearer sense of what I am being asked for when a friendship persists after convenience has passed—or when it was never convenient at all; when it continues without structure, without guaranteed momentum, and sometimes without reassurance. Those friendships do not demand intensity or constant presence. They ask only to be chosen, in small and unremarkable ways, time and again.

# Doctor in the House

JOE BISICCHIA

*That framed degree,  
maybe it's only a facsimile  
of your birth certificate.*

After all, you heal the sick  
with bowls of chicken feathers  
made from old torn sweaters.

You rearrange Mom's knuckles  
with her favorite hand cream and  
you love how your fingers now feel.

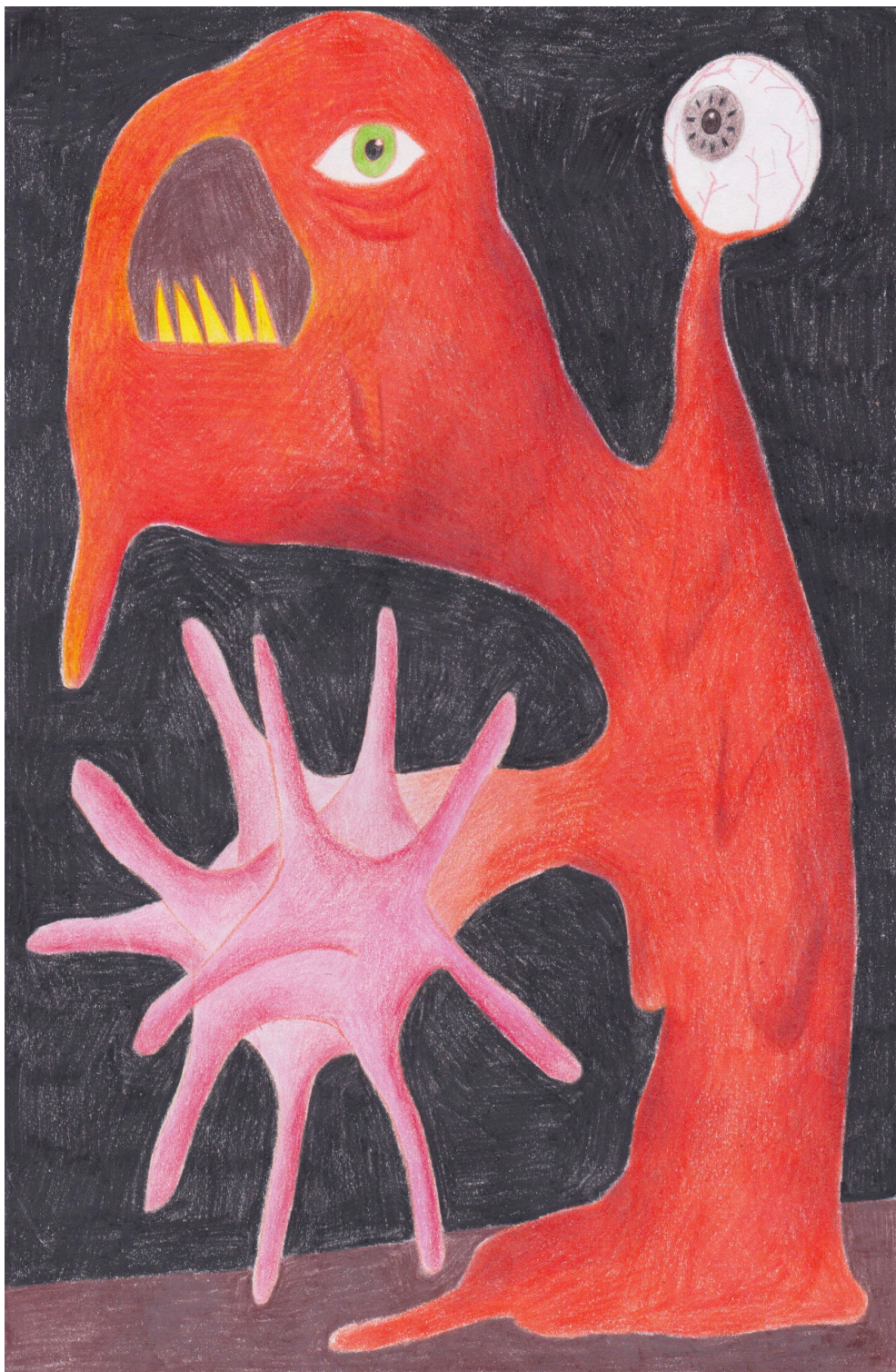
You tap on Dad's chest.  
Phooey to that TV football heartbreak.  
Somehow you bring his heart back.

You reposition Grandma's nose.  
Lots of tickles.  
It's so fun how she giggles.

And then, you take out a stool, and listen.  
Then give the advice so very much needed  
to your teddy bear Jules.

Yes,  
you have long been ready for this,  
now, this medical school's mission.

*And every day you're still at it  
learning.  
Even now, 33 years a physician.*



*Neutral Conditions*

Sebastian "zeb" Restrepo

# Yellow Lego Block

DAVID ROMANDA

She moved out eight months ago and took  
her children with her. And now it's your turn to leave—  
moving in with a woman with no children.

You've got a couple weeks to pack and you're taking  
your sweet time. Today you decide to box up your winter  
and summer clothes. And you've found a rhythm—you decide  
to move the dresser to vacuum where you haven't vacuumed  
in ages. There you find a single yellow Lego block.

You pick it up, dust it off, and realize you miss the children—have been  
missing the children. You put the yellow Lego block in your pocket.

# A Kind of Apparition

WILLIAM LYCHACK

We drifted apart without saying goodbye. Crawford and I started up the hill, Brownie and Tommy staying back in the turnaround, where his father would park his truck at night, oil spots on the tar. Brownie steered his brother toward the side of the house, the young boy calling for the dog, that thin voice almost singing for Barkley.

Mrs. Brownell stood on the front steps. The fire station horn went off behind us—three long tones echoing high and then low across everything. The town calling its young ones home, calling gently but firmly, high and then low, saying, “Come home...”

“Come home...”

“Come home...”

Seemed just enough daylight for us to get back to where we belonged, the driveways and trees collecting the dark now, clots of night in the branches. Crawford and I passed the Tanko house up the street, both of us glimpsing crow-haired Jenny in a window. A quiet yearning for lighted rooms, for the promise of Jenny’s neat and organized life, for the warm clean colors of those walls. We took one last look down to Brownie, but he and his brother were gone, the front steps empty, the house sitting as if at the bottom of a lake.

Even gone from view, Brownie would still have to manage the events of the day. We’d found a gun in the woods. We’d fired it at the pond. We’d shot at the river with it. Brownie would carry the gun, hidden in his coat, into the house. He’d want to keep his brother protected from the pistol. He’d be thinking where to hide the thing. The drop ceiling in the basement, the crawlspace behind the bathtub—these would be on his mind, along with his father coming home any minute.

But that was behind us now.

At the turn to Church Street, Crawford and I caught that first rattle of diesel, Brownie’s father coming home. We should have crouched behind some parked car to hide from him. Me and Crawford caught in the headlights, the man slowing as he pulled up to us, saying, “Crawfman! Billy Buck! What’s the word, guys?”

No word—at least none came to us in time—and he gave us that sympathetic grin. It made us feel we were out of the running, me and Crawford completely over our heads in it all.

Couldn't even say hello normal. No helping a pair of kids like us. He waved us along home.

We could have done the rest of the walk in our sleep—past St. Mary's, past the barbershop, the clapboard tenements with their porches, wind chimes in someone's tree, our mothers waiting at home. We knew they'd be more than worrying by now, their fear coming first as anger, then ending in a kind of over-kindness, an urgent pressing for us to share more than we could share.

Our mothers prying about our friends at school, our feelings, our days.

As we got to the row houses where Crawford lived, he slowed and asked if I was okay.

He said his mom was waiting.

He said he could walk me only as far as his house.

"That's fine," I said.

Crawford no longer a kid to me right here. He already seemed like the man he'd become, and I almost stopped breathing: his skin darker now, his hair tighter, his face lined and taut and handsome. I put out my hand to shake. It was awkward and solemn, the two of us making some pledge, it seemed, some promise. I held the rail and watched him go. I called his name. He stopped and turned. I wanted to hear his voice.

"See you tomorrow," I said.

"See you," he said.

He had a growth spurt right in front of my eyes, Crawford taller and broader as he walked away. Tomorrow he'd be bigger still. Soon he'd stand straighter, his voice deeper, his face all seriousness. He'd be all muscle and athlete, playing basketball, running track, beautiful.

And there went the last of little-kid Crawdad: an only child, always eager for friends, because who else did he have at home? Not long from this moment, he'd have girlfriends and part-time jobs and plans for the Service. But, for now, I watched him open the door to the downstairs lobby, give that final wave near the mailboxes, and then climb the stairs. It seemed he was being lifted away.

A mist was falling through the lights, and I stood in the street and stared up at the windows. The drizzle turned to rain, and I stayed. I let the feel of the cold and dark creep slowly into me. I put my mittens on. I tried to calm myself. I wanted him lucky and happy. I wanted him to remember how he shot the gun. I

wanted him sitting to a warm big meal with his mother. Crawford untroubled, untouched by anything from this day, his mother singing with her record albums long into the night.

She had a beautiful voice. She had wanted to be a professional singer; Crawford had told me this once. She met his father and things turned out different than she planned. That was how things worked sometimes. Now she had swing shifts at American Optical, which meant every three weeks Crawford and his mother would be on the same schedule. That must have been a week they looked forward to.

Otherwise, it must have been hard to keep track—the weeks he'd be alone for dinner and bedtime, and the weeks he'd have to fall asleep in an empty apartment. Every creak and noise must have woken him during those times, Crawford alone, the night dark and quiet. If he was lucky, his mother would arrive in time to see him off to school.

I'd forget I was still standing out there in the rain, and then I'd see a move of curtains upstairs, his shape dark behind the glass. My friend looking down to me, his face darkness, no features, the light behind him, and me outside with the rain coming steady now, this kid on the street staring up as if lovesick.

Once upon a time there was a boy heading home in the rain. It was late, almost dark, cars passing on the street with their headlights on, the cemetery with its sea bottom of stones, the big hunchback willows moving as if under water, the trees and chapel in the distance meaning he was almost there. And the Chevelle in the driveway, the lights in the windows of the house, his mother pacing the kitchen.

She always expected the worst. Her father died when she was five. A snowstorm, a quiet morning: herself a girl coloring in the living room in Bayside with her sister, the front door banging open, winter air gushing in so fast, the arrival of the doctor, the urgency in her mother's eyes, the snow tracked down the hall to the bedroom, that ultimate hush and stillness of the house.

Snow blanketed Bayside, and they kept a sad fidelity to the man's absence. They lost the woodworking shop on Orchard Street. They lost the brick house. They left behind the table and chairs, the breakfront, the mantle, the dollhouse, the toys. They moved down in the world to Greenpoint. They visited him in Calvary Cemetery. Their mother talked to him through the grass.

With that same expectation of loss, her heart was in her throat every time until the boy got home. And he would have to hear about it, have to endure listening to her, his mother loud with worry and fear. It would come out as anger—her relief at him coming in safe at last—but she could never be angry for long. It wasn't in the budget. He was all she had.

She told him this, and it was something he could wield against her. It made him less the good son, and more like himself somehow. More the person he felt he would need to be in order to survive.

Staring at those windows in the darkness, he knew what awaited him. The dark moved with a thickness as he stood by the cemetery gates. And the boy could put off going home for a while more. He pressed against the granite stones of the wall to lessen the rain, that lonely cold crawling into him, the boy shivering. No one would see him here.

Yet there he was, lingering for days, for nights, for his entire life like this, the boy alone in the rain, afraid to go home, afraid to stay out, twelve years old and trying to find what he was feeling. Maybe he would spend his life trying to name that vague dread.

Dread was cold to him. It was wet and sore and tired behind the eyes, skin sensitive to the touch. A scoured feel inside, his stomach acidic and clenched. Dread would procrastinate him toward Cumberland Farms. It wandered him into the warmth through the sliding doors, the girl behind the counter barely lifting her eyes from her magazine as he passed.

The racks of cigarettes, spools of lottery tickets, hum of fluorescent lights overhead, wet-cardboard smell of coffee, dread being the dollar in a boy's pocket for a candy bar. Dread being the bullet there, too, that small lump he could touch when he needed proof. Tell the truth, and maybe he'd not have to remember anything.

Dread was him drifting along the glass of the dairy freezer, along the shelves of snack cakes, this wisp of a kid with a Slim Jim in his hand, snaking it up the sleeve of his jacket, and then floating back out into the rain, the boy in no hurry as he walked away, guilty as sin.

Cargill Falls, Conn., and the house was unbreathably warm for a boy coming home, that thick taste of sautéed onions on the stove, his mother taking one look and telling him to get out of those wet clothes. She'd have dinner ready as soon as he was in his pajamas.

A good son would have told her why he was late. A good mother would have asked the right question. Even if it were a lie, they would have found ways to make one another's lives easier. He would have washed the dishes after supper. He would have stayed with her in the kitchen. He would have offered to help her soak her feet, pouring fresh warm water in the basin, sprinkling more Epsom salt.

A bad son ate in front of the television, pretending not to wait for the phone to ring, not to think of them riding in the truck, Brownie and his father looking

through town for the dog, both of them hoping she'd be every next shadow they saw. A bad friend would be nowhere to be found. A bad person would run out the clock, his friend at the dam, at the falls, at the whole empty night.

And when the phone did ring, he jumped to answer as fast as he could. It was his aunt calling from Staten Island. He barely said hello, bringing the receiver to the kitchen to his mother. She cupped the mouthpiece and whispered for him to get a towel for her.

With a dishcloth he got down and dried her hammertoes like they were wounds. He could feel the pain in those feet draw down some rope in his stomach, like the rope of a bell, those deep cut-marks from her shoes, her ankles swollen from standing all day.

He tried to will her off the phone—how expensive the long distance was, how tired she must have been after work—like he could bend time with his mind. Even with him hovering near her like this, even with her shooing him away, they could talk for hours. His throat sore, the boy drifted away to his room and listened from down the hall, her voice murmuring along with the television. In the hush he knew they were talking about the palm reader again.

They had gone together last Christmas. He'd heard the story; he'd been with them. An old man at a table held them gently by the fingers and told the sisters how their father died when they were young, how one still had a scar on her thigh from that day, from a glass box of crayons that broke in the commotion of doctors and neighbors. He told how each of their marriages had ended (or were ending).

Enough of what he said had come true to scare them—they had the cassette as proof—and the man explained how unlucky they were going to be with love and money, and how each had a major misfortune coming, one dying from some variety of hemorrhage very soon, and the other having all her teeth extracted before her next birthday. Not a hopeful man, which only made them fear and believe him more.

It was much too late when his mother got off the phone and came to find him in his room, the boy sitting at his desk as if practicing being at school. She told him it was time for bed and continued down the hall to the bathroom. He followed by sound alone, her weight on that creak of linoleum, his mother rooting through the drawers at the vanity, his mother standing quiet. Was she looking into the mirror? Was she sitting on the toilet?

"Everything okay?" she asked from his doorway again.

He pretended to be busy with his papers, as if he hadn't noticed she was there.

"Anything you want to tell me?"

He shook his head and said he was fine.

She stood framed in the light, and he felt her eyes on him as she leaned against the door, his mother waiting for him to turn. She moved closer and opened her hand and asked what this was?

It took him a moment—copper gleam in her palm—so interesting to see this bullet cupped there. Could have been a coin or pebble, a little nugget arriving, some remnant of a dream.

“It was in your pocket,” she said.

“I know,” he told her.

“Where’d you get it?”

“We found it.”

“You and Steven?”

He nodded.

“You mind if I keep it?” she asked.

“No,” he said. “I don’t care.”

She stared at him and put it in her pocket.

He had learned the power of quiet by now, and the boy watched as she handed him a folded square of paper, a tiny packet sealed neatly on itself, saying she found this in his pants, too. He didn’t have to look. It would be from Michelle, paper lavender and slightly damp, note folded in the elaborate way girls sent letters in school. His mother watched as he tossed it to the desk, like it couldn’t be less important. She tried to be warm, tried to be friendly, but he didn’t let this happen. She said lights off in five minutes and went back down the hall.

He followed with his ears as she went to her bedroom and stood in front of the dresser. He listened as she opened the jewelry box, where she kept her rings and bracelets, necklaces, newspaper clippings, report cards from school, and now a bullet. She’d go to the living room from there. He stared at the rain tapping on the window. He could hear her in the kitchen. There would be no call from Brownie that night, no phone ringing.

When he knew his mother was settled, he reached for the note on his desk. The lettering on the outside had bled from the wet of the woods and leaves—FOR BILL ONLY, with a heart around it—and he carefully unfolded the paper, that slight smell of bubble gum (real or imagined), Michelle’s handwriting all

oft and cute with loops and circles and hearts. The note arrived like a message from another life:

*Hi Billy Joe!*

*What's up? Nothing much here! So, which side of the coin did it turn out? To be a sweetheart or not to be a sweetheart? (I hope it was sweetheart!) After fourth period when we go to homeroom are you going to wait to see me?*

*Why were you trying to hide in Study Hall? You don't like me staring at you? My father and mother might take me out to dinner tonight, but I'm not sure. Are you and your mother getting along better? I hope so, because she might ground you and then I will never see you again. I can't see the clock, but I think it's almost time for the bell to ring. Catch ya later.*

*XOXO, Mich Marie*

Such an innocent time, he'd think later, seeing this note, remembering how it rained all night, the boy (himself in another life) lying in bed feeling for movements of his mother in the rooms of the house. She left the light from the hall on for him—the boy sometimes scared in the dark—and he felt the house tremble, faint threads connecting to wherever she moved, the television mumbling underneath everything.

He wasn't a good sleeper that night, though he must have fallen in and out. He'd lie still and try to feel for any movement in the house—always a hope, always a fear—and half of him wanted to be haunted, visited, possessed, that quiet lingering heavy over him, the feel of someone at the window. Even a branch scratching against the aluminum siding. That would have been better than empty darkness.

He switched on the light and enacted his little mousehood ways. All his life he'd do this, scuttle around the room all hours, his collections to rearrange and touch into order. What a kid, gentle and self-contained, taking care of these things—the bottle caps, the antique nails, the pull-tabs, the books on the shelves, the boxes under the bed—his job to make all these misfit things feel welcome.

At some point he went back to bed. He woke again to the darkness, the static of rain, the guilt for that day—him and Brownie, and then Crawford, and then Barkley somewhere out in the night. He lay there, straining to hear his mother.

She'd be in her bedroom (where her breaths would roll in as waves to the shore) or in her chair in the living room (where she often fell asleep on her way to bed) or in the kitchen (where she'd be a night owl at the table). The fear was that she wasn't here anymore. The worry was always that he would be alone. He got up to find her.

The television was on, volume low, and she slept on the couch. He leaned close to make sure she was breathing. Always a relief, her chest moving, her breaths deep and quiet, her duster half-open. He laid an afghan over her, as gentle as possible.

Then he went into the bathroom. He stood at the toilet and peed. He took the aftershave from the shelf. It had been his father's—bright blue liquid—and he unscrewed the cap to get that sharp medicine smell. He set the cap on the shelf and angled the aftershave where he knew his mother would see it, where she might think it odd to be there, as if this object had moved on its own, as if it had stepped off that footprint of dust for some reason.

He swore on his life he was nowhere near this place. He promised on his father's grave it wasn't him gliding past her in the living room. No way would it be him edging into the kitchen to unbury an old bottle of whiskey from under the sink. How would a bottle find its way out from among those cleaners and chemicals?

It was half-full of rusty liquid—the yellow Fleischmann's label turned out for all to see—his father's bottle at the front of the cabinet meaning what?

The clock, the stove, the table and chairs, they alone would witness what kind of force in the shape of a boy had come to this place to accomplish this. Later they'd catch her looking twice at the bottle. The hutch and cups on the shelf watching. The light on the ceiling above her suddenly. She'd be spooked in the stillness. The faucet would drip, slow and steady, pecking at her, trying to get through. The sink trying to say someone had been here.

Down the hall, the jewelry box opened and closed. Two skinny fingers stirred the bullet among the coins and earrings. A newspaper clipping was touched and set back down.

*WILLIAM STEVEN LYCHECK [sic]—of Holton Road, North Franklin, died Sunday evening unexpectedly. He was born in North Franklin, July 1, 1925, son of the late William and Rosie (Palamar) Lycheck. He had been a resident of Cargill Falls for many years and made his home in North Franklin for the past six years. He operated a window cleaning service in Cargill Falls. He was a veteran of World War Two, served in the Pacific in the Marine Corps 1943–46. Surviving are one son, William J. of Cargill Falls; one brother, Daniel J. of North Franklin; two sisters, several nieces and nephews. Visitation hours from 6 to 9 p.m., July 29, and 9 to 10:30 a.m., July 30 at Leffler Funeral Home, 30 North Main St., Jewett City. Graveside memorial services St. Mary's Cemetery in Baltic, at 11 a.m. (Reception at the Ukrainian National Home, located by the Little League Fields).*

The lid of the box was about to be carefully closed—and from out of nowhere some new photo, an old black-and-white snapshot, a man half-naked in a kitchen. It arrived like a splash of water, and he was abruptly awake.

Not once had he imagined his father silly and fun. Not once did he brush up against the man laughing, that bristle of chin, that swamp of breath. Never once did he think of his father as drunk or playful. Never having a good time.

It was a loud picture, the man roaring up like a walrus, arm out of frame. Imperfect but happy. Those gone cabinets, the countertops, the clutter, the bottle, electric cord, socks, calendar—this poor excuse of a father finding his way to a jewelry box, the bastard (his mother's word), this glorious jerk standing so triumphant atop it all.

He stared. The house held its breath. A bottle a little forward on a shelf. A blue aftershave set where it hadn't been. A bullet turned oddly enough to catch the light. No one said what it meant. The rain went on, and then the rain eventually passed.

# Self-Portrait

JIE COHEN

Hermaphroditus from the South China  
Sea, in the marsh and muck—undulates, spits

seeds into the mangroves, seeds into the  
deep uteri of mango trees, drooling

seed after oral amusement, crunching  
on sugar apple seeds without dying.

Hermaphroditus rising from their bog,  
Frogs hop from their heaving breasts and testes.

Rhizophora Artemis in the wet,  
spits slime and listens to amphibian

chorus girls croaking songs of salted home—  
they wrap diegetic noise 'round too-broad

shoulders. Hermaphroditus in the glass  
mirror of a precious pond, sees my self.



*Bathroom, Mirror, and Sink*

Allen Forrest

# Rotgut

CHAZ LILLY

Sweetheart was some inbred mix of pug and pit, built wrong in every direction. Her snout pressed flat against her skull and mangled teeth jutted from a small, sagging chin. After thirteen years on earth, her grey eyes were coated by a film that dripped and ran down her snout. Wider than she was tall, her gait teetered from one stump leg to the other. She spent her days rummaging the floor like an industrial machine hellbent on eating the house: she hunted wayward crumbs tucked in the kitchen's crevices, and after her hunt, exhausted from this small exertion, erupted into a giant snore, a dreadful deep sound of a too tight airway begging for oxygen, a pinched vacuum. On her left side, a tick bite, improperly cared for, swelled to the size of a golf ball and grew small pimples of skin – the ball dangled freely at her side, swaying and bouncing off her belly. And, as if her body were confused by its own formation, the tail curled into the air like a question mark. Now, at Christmas supper, this miracle of creation snuck under the table and parked its snout directly in my crotch begging for fried turkey. The slimy eyes demanded their share.

“Git,” I whispered to the dog and gave her a little kick in the chest. A portrait of Jesus hung on the dining room wall watched from above. I scanned the table to see if Mark, Mandy or Aunt May noticed my little sin.

Rotgut groaned in my stomach, hot and sour, and I shifted my weight like the ache might spill out of me.

Sweetheart belonged to Aunt May – my mother's sister – who was in worse shape than the dog. Her son Mark, my cousin and drinking buddy, let me sleep on his couch while I was home for the holidays.

At nearly forty years old, I'd managed a life that looked stable enough from the outside. I taught composition at a small community college in Atlanta, spent my days dissecting thesis statements, preaching the tenets of the five-paragraph essay. Nights, I pretended to write a novel: I'd been circling the same book for years, moving sentences around without moving anything forward. Nothing was falling apart exactly, but nothing was coming together either. That's when the peach caught my attention.

Like most nights, I was drinking beer and writing at my desk, an old table scattered with notes and sketches, trash, leftovers, coffee cups full of cigarette butts, when my focus drifted to a day-old peach I'd abandoned. The fruit had browned: warm hues of orange and reds decomposed under the glow of a lamp, which gave the slow decay a spotlight. I lifted the fruit and held its soft skin in my hands; I pushed my fingers into its flesh. The peach pushed back with its

sickness. It pushed against my fingers and the rot spread to the soft pulp of my arm and chest down to muscle and ligament and through the spaghetti of nerve endings. The peach pit had withered to a cracked kernel of black ridges, ready to split at all its fault lines. A certain ache grew in my belly like I'd swallowed its dead seed, absorbed it into my core, planted the kernel in the tunnels of my intestines. I watched the peach brown, and, paralyzed, sat fixed at my desk for days until the fruit had fully decomposed. I could only call the feeling that overcame me *rotgut*.

All that from a damn peach.

I figured the North Georgia mountains might do me some good, that distance might dislodge whatever had settled in me. Mark agreed to take me in for the holidays. He owned a tech repair shop in our small town; anyone who needed their cell phone screen mended, computer rebooted, or TV brought back to life, came to him. He tinkered on these devices, soldering small electric wires and replacing microchips alone under the fluorescent buzz of his workbench. Alone, eight to five, studying tiny circuits, hunched over the lifeless reply of dead batteries and black screens.

Most mornings, Mark showered for an hour, it seemed, until he emerged red as a beet. He'd grumble a bit until two cups of black coffee jumpstarted his brain. By coffee time, I'd folded my blankets on the couch and smoked two or three cigarettes on the back porch. Mark's wife, Mandy, would meet me on the porch wrapped in a quilt at sunrise. A mess of stray cats lived under the porch, and she brought them feed, let them climb all over her until they started biting or clawing or fighting with each other over breakfast. Mandy said that since their daughter had left for college the cats were her new babies. Mark went to work and Mandy and I sat there on the porch until an old lady needed a haircut; then, Mandy would disappear into her she-shed outfitted with a sink, scissors and a chair. Mostly, I was occupied or unoccupied on the porch, smoking, studying the Blue Ridge mountains lifting and falling, wrapped in fog and smoke.

After work, Mark sank into the couch with a tall glass of bourbon in front of his 72-inch TV: He'd been bingeing a 12-part series on the collapse of the Roman Empire. Mark chugged his whiskey, disassociating with a blank gaze until he fell asleep, sitting straight up on the couch, a firm grip on the whiskey. While the TV detailed political instability perpetuated by Romulus Augustulus and the Crisis of the Third Century, Mandy read her latest erotica novel. She had a whole library of smut. She told me about one book where a guy ejaculated into his breakfast cereal or something. Said I'd love it, the novel. She even ran a book club for other housewives – for the last meeting, inspired by their latest read, they'd all brought their favorite sex toys and discussed the importance of creating your own joy.

When Mark woke from his nap, we'd hit the bar, the three of us, and poke around town. After enough liquor, Mark became loud, shouting above the noise,

and Mandy became flirtatious and danced in the middle of the room; sometimes suitors would come – both men and women – and they'd dance and kiss and twirl. It looked like the joy Mandy was after. Mark, with his ever-growing bald spot and beer belly, watched unbothered and continued his yelling, usually trying to explain to some captive bystander the intricate parts of any and every digital device. At closing time, friends followed us home and Mark's voice grew louder, Mandy lost clothes, and the crowd of bodies pushed against one another, wanting to latch onto the night before it was gone.

Days went on like this until Christmas. Then, we crammed in Mark's Ford Ranger and drove up the mountain to see Aunt May. Mark and I downed half a bottle of bourbon on the way, taking turns and trying not to spill the liquor as he swerved through switchbacks. Mandy lit a joint and we filled the cab with a cloud of smoke. I had a good buzz on an empty stomach and was ready to eat by the time we pulled up to May's small trailer dug into the side of a hill.

That's how I found myself half-drunk, pretty high, with Sweetheart in my crotch.

"Git," I said again, kicking a little harder this time.

"You want some gravy?" Aunt May had azure eyes that lit her hollow eye sockets like a flashlight shooting from a cave. Her eyes hid all the secrets of early onset dementia and opioid abuse, a habit we ignored because May knew her mind was slipping and could hardly bear the darkness that'd eventually swallow every memory. That, and she didn't have anyone left in the family but us. She stayed up on the mountain with Sweetheart, watching the days pass. With her bright eyes and long white hair, skin mottled with veins and sores, she seemed an old haint who'd wandered from the lonesome woods for conversation.

I took the gravy and poured it over my plate.

"I've been doing some thinking," Aunt May said like she had prepared a speech.

"Not at supper, Mom," Mark said through a mouthful of green beans.

"I been thinking about UFOs and Jesus Christ," she said sternly, seriously. "What do you think of all them UFOs?"

Aunt May's question was directed at me. Mark and Mandy turned to listen. I ran my mashed potatoes through a slop of gravy.

"I'd like to believe," I said. "But who knows."

The gravy was watered down, cold.

"The government says they's everywhere, that there is all kinds of aliens," Aunt May was locked on me now. "You reckon they're here?"

“You mean the lizard people or the tiny green ones?” Mark cut in.

“They can shape shift. Some of them.” Aunt May wasn’t joking.

Mandy looked sorry I’d been trapped into this conversation. Mark plopped another serving of green bean casserole down on his plate.

“I saw a guy out front of the Piggly Wiggly the other day that looked a little extraterrestrial,” Mark said.

I cut a piece of my turkey hoping to signal that I was more interested in filling my stomach, which had soured more with the talk of aliens and Sweetheart still begging below. The turkey was leather and stuck to the roof of my mouth. I really had to gnaw at it.

“Do you think we can still believe in Jesus, with the aliens and all?” May asked.

The dog pushed further into my groin and I wondered If aliens had a god, if they died at all and needed an afterlife.

Mandy, thankfully, had an opinion: “They say that maybe all the angels that people saw in the Bible were really UFOs, and shit. Said the angels looked like wheels within wheels and were on fire. Sounds like spacecraft to me.”

Aunt May thought about this one while she buttered a biscuit.

“I think God made a big universe and probably a lot of aliens,” she said. Then, quietly, as if revealing a dark secret she whispered: “I’ve seen one before, a UFO.”

This got a rise out of Mark.

“Shit mom, you ain’t never seen a UFO.” He was on the verge of yelling.

“I have. Before you was born.” May took a big bite of her biscuit and washed it down with milk, her hand shaking from the weight of the full glass. “And don’t shout at me.”

“You don’t know *what* you’ve seen,” Mark replied.

Sweetheart was drooling along my zipper now.

“I saw a bright light come from the mountain and hover over the trees. I thought it must have been Jesus come down from high. But now they’re saying these UFOs are everywhere. Maybe it could have been an angel.”

“Mom, will you please shut up about the UFOs for godssake.” Mark was louder now.

“Don’t shout at me,” May shouted back. “I know damn well I seen it.” She slammed her fork down on the table.

Sweetheart barked into my crotch, and I felt my face turn red. I tore a piece of turkey from my plate and slipped it to the dog, gave her a heavy kick. She swallowed the turkey whole without chewing and disappeared.

“Maybe it *was* Jesus,” Mandy said sweetly.

“It sure as hell wasn’t,” Mark said.

“Damn it, you shouldn’t talk that way,” May yelled into her dinner plate.

I thought maybe I was making the noise at first, a hacking, a deep gargle. I thought the rotgut had seized my body and I was choking there at the table, but everyone turned their heads to the kitchen floor. Sweetheart was being strangled by the piece of turkey.

I can’t say what overcame me, but I flew out of my seat with an urgency I didn’t know still existed in my bones. I don’t know why, maybe because I had slipped her the meat that was now killing her, but I never cared so much to save anything before in my life. Driven by a strange force to help the poor dog, I was on my knees next to Sweetheart before anyone else could stand. I lifted her and pounded my fist carefully against the small of her back. When that didn’t work, I laid into her with a good punch. I panicked when the dog went limp in my arms and Aunt May screamed, puzzled by the whole scene. Mandy was by my side saying something about the Heimlich. I reached my fist high in the air like I was asking for something and let it land hard on Sweetheart’s back. The dog let out an awful sound and pulled air into her lungs then coughed up the turkey, now wet and discolored, onto the kitchen floor. May hobbled over, set her hands on my shoulders.

“It’s out,” I said. “It’s fine.”

Sweetheart hacked again, shook her snout, picked the turkey back up in her underbite and swallowed it down, this time without issue.

I stood: Mark shoveled his green beans, unbothered, and Mandy was crying a little, I think. I announced that I needed a damn cigarette.

Outside, the mountains lifted and rolled, their silhouettes outlined by moonlight. The peaks and pines lifted like a crown pearled by a mosaic of burning stars. I lit a smoke; inside, Mark yelled and May yelled back. I walked to the Ranger and found the bottle of bourbon; the drink warmed my body. I smoked my cigarette down to a stub and studied the sky – a small white light moved steadily across the expanse, circling the earth thousands of miles overhead. For a moment, I wished for it to be anything but a satellite.



*Oil Painting of an Illustrative Mushroom*

Donald Patten



*Tableware*



Peter Grieco



# Contributors

DM ANDERSON is the author of the novels *The Last Good Horse* and *The Cowboys of Haddington Moor*. His short fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in more than twenty literary journals. A graduate of the University of Iowa's Creative Writing Program, he is a recipient of the Faulkner-Wisdom Literary Prize (2021 & 2025) and the Sunspot Solstice Fiction Award, and his work has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize, the Oak Park Hemingway Short Fiction Award, and nominated for a Pushcart Award. He lives in the Texas Hill Country with his wife.

LAUREL ASHCOM is a creative writing student at the University of Galway and has been writing fictional stories for almost ten years. This story is taken from the universe of a novel that Ashcom is working on.

NOAH BERLATSKY is a freelance writer in Chicago. You can find a list of his poetry collections and chapbooks, as well as his writing on politics and culture, at his newsletter: [www.everythingishorrible.net](http://www.everythingishorrible.net).

JOE BISICCHIA writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, he has written five published collections of poetry. He also has composed over three hundred individual works that have been published in over one hundred publications. Joe is director of public affairs for Virtua Health in New Jersey and is a Practicing Excellence certified clinician coach. He earned his BA at La Salle University and is currently on the MFA track at Lindenwood University. To see more of his work, visit [JoeBisicchia.com](http://JoeBisicchia.com).

ACE BOGGESS is author of eight books of poetry, most recently *Tell Us How to Live* (Fernwood Press, 2025) and *My Pandemic / Gratitude List* (Mortus Audax Press, 2025). His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes, watches Criterion films, and tries to stay out of trouble. His first short-story collection, *Always One Mistake*, is forthcoming from Running Wild Press.

JIE COHEN is a mixed, intersex writer. They are a 2026 Tin House Scholar, 2025 LAMBDA Literary fellow, and have received fellowships from *Kenyon Review*, Mount Holyoke College, and others. They were longlisted for the 2024 DISQUIET Prize. Their work has been recognized in *The McNeese Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *The Offing*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Strange Horizons*, *The Ex-Puritan*, *Singapore Unbound*, *POETS.org*, and others. [www.jievenuscohen.com](http://www.jievenuscohen.com).

**EMILY DANIEL** has a chapbook, *Life Line*, which was selected as a winner of the 2020 Celery City Chapbook Prize. Emily is a Best of the Net nominee, and her work can be found in *The Penn Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Waxwing*, *Porter House Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, among others. Emily lives with her family in Kalamazoo, MI where she is an MFA candidate in Poetry at Western Michigan University and Poetry Editor for *Third Coast Magazine*. For more information, visit [www.emilyrdaniel.com](http://www.emilyrdaniel.com).

**EMELIA DELAPORTE** is a recent graduate of Virginia Tech, where she studied English. In her time at the university, she served as editor-in-chief of *Silhouette Literary & Art Magazine*. Her work has been published in the *Silhouette*, the *Shenandoah Avalon* and the *Floyd County Moonshine*. She has work upcoming in *Saw Palm*, *Mantis*, *Strip Mall* and *Nova* magazines. She currently lives, works and creates in Virginia.

**ALLEN FORREST** is a writer (poetry and short stories / published in *Tulane Review*, *Constellations*, *Torrid Literary Journal* and many others). He is also a painter and cartoonist who's work has appeared in many literary publications, winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's *Reed Magazine*, his Bel Red landscape paintings are in the Bellevue College Foundation's art collection. He lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

**BENJAMIN GOLUBOFF** is the author, most recently, of *Moe Asch: A Speculative Life in Verse*, and *Other Poems* (Kelsay Books). Goluboff teaches at Lake Forest College and lives in Chicago. His work is easy to find on the internet.

**PETER GRIECO** is a poet, songwriter, visual artist and scholar based in Buffalo, New York. He has a diverse professional background, having worked as a professor of English and a school bus driver. Grieco's poetry is known for its versatility, often engaging with art, psychology, and structuralist theory. Much of his work is "ekphrastic," meaning it is inspired by or comments on visual art. His 2023 chapbook, *The Blind Man's Meal* (Finishing Line Press), specifically features poems that reimagine museum scenes and address the human condition.

**AYLA HAMILTON** is a filmmaker and photographer from New York's Hudson Valley. Her work explores storytelling through documentary film and expressive photography. She produced the documentary "The Whole Wide City," which premiered at the Woodstock Film Festival. Her photography has been exhibited in galleries and publications across the United States and internationally, including shows at the Schweinfurth Art Center and the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum, and featured in literary and arts journals. Through both film and photography, she is interested in capturing moments of human vulnerability, performance, and connection.

CHASE HARKER is a native of New Bern, North Carolina. Harker's work has previously appeared in *storySouth*, *Mantis*, *Appalachian Review*, *Madison Review*, *Roanoke Review*, and elsewhere.

SHARON HOFFMAN is a writer based in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Publications (past and forthcoming) include *The Hooghly Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives* (Harvard University Press), *Magazine1*, *Paddler Press*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Letters*, *Wild Roof*, *Sho Poetry Journal*, *Blood+Honey*, *Burial*, and other magazines. Awards include fellowships from Atlantic Center for the Arts and Florida's Division of Cultural Affairs, three Pushcart nominations and a nomination for Best Spiritual Literature.

SYDNEY HOLZMAN is a New Orleans-based writer.

SOPHIA JUDGE is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio. She holds a BA in creative writing from the University of Cincinnati and an MFA in Poetry from Miami University. She spends an unreasonable amount of time thinking about line breaks, lake-effect weather, and lightning bugs, among other things. Her poems primarily explore womanhood, memory, sexuality, and the ongoing project of becoming. Sophia's work has previously appeared in *Short Vine Magazine*, the *Banyan Review*, the *Nassau Review*, and *Obindo Magazine*, among others.

KENNETH KAPP lives with his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, writing late into the night in his man-cave. He enjoys chamber music and mysteries. Please visit [www.kmkbooks.com](http://www.kmkbooks.com). He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His stories have appeared in more than one hundred publications worldwide.

ROBB KUNZ hails from Teton Valley, Idaho. He received his MFA in creative writing from the University of Idaho. He currently teaches writing at Utah State University and is the Art and Design Faculty Advisor of *Sink Hollow: An Undergraduate Literary Journal*. His art has been published in *Peatsmoke Journal*, the *NonBinary Review*, and *New Delta Review*. His art is upcoming in *Phoebe*, *Reed Magazine* and *Thin Air Magazine*.

CAL LAFOUNTAIN writes about risk and cultural memory. He cut the cloud at [callafountain.com](http://callafountain.com).

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WILLIAM LYCHACK has work in the *Best American*, the Pushcart Prize, and on "This American Life."

DANIEL MASK has poems published in numerous journals, recently published in *Gyroscope* and *Red Cedar Review*. Daniel writes turning that inward gaze outward, toward the phenomenology of witnessing. He has a Master's degree from the University of Houston and is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer.

CATHERINE MCGUIRE is a writer/artist with a deep concern for our planet's future, with five decades of published poetry, six poetry chapbooks, a full-length poetry book, *Elegy for the 21st Century*, a SF novel, *Lifeline*, and book of short stories, *The Dream Hunt and Other Tales*. Find her at [www.cathymcguire.com](http://www.cathymcguire.com).

MRITYUNJAY MOHAN has work published or forthcoming in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Indianapolis Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Fourteen Hills*. He's a Tin House scholar, Lambda Literary fellow, and a Brooklyn Poets fellow. He was a recipient of the Nella Larsen Memorial Scholarship for the Mendocino Coast Writers' Conference. He has worked as an editor at various literary journals. He's an editor for *ANMLY* magazine, and a reader for *Split/Lip Press*, *Harvard Review*, and *The Masters Review*.

BIANCA NDM is a synesthetic artist whose work explores the vivid intersections of sensation, translating sound, emotion, and texture into immersive color-driven compositions. A dedicated color theorist, she has taught both rendering and color theory at the academic level, shaping emerging artists' understanding of chromatic language. Her work has been exhibited internationally, and she recently licensed a piece to the Indianapolis International Airport to be converted into a large-scale mural. To see more of her work or to commission a piece or to buy a print of her existing work please visit her website. [www.fierceokatu.wixsite.com/the-art-of-bianca-nd](http://www.fierceokatu.wixsite.com/the-art-of-bianca-nd).

DONALD PATTEN is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He creates oil paintings, illustrations, ceramics and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries throughout Maine. To view his online portfolio, visit [@donald.patten](https://www.instagram.com/donald.patten) on Instagram.

AARON PETTY is a writer contributing creative nonfiction to *Tulane Review*.

LIZ PURVIS is a poet, editor, and organizer who received an M.F.A. in Poetry from North Carolina State University and a B.A. in Literature and Creative Writing from Elon University. Her work has appeared in *The Potomac Review*, *Split Rock Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *cahooaloodaling*, and others, and is forthcoming in *Reed Magazine*, *Soundings East*, and *Hellbender Magazine*. She lives, writes, and organizes in Oxford, NC. She can be reached via email at [liz.purvis.writer@gmail.com](mailto:liz.purvis.writer@gmail.com).

**SEBASTIAN (ZEB) RESTREPO** works across drawing, painting, and video performance. He has exhibited throughout the United States, with recent solo exhibitions in Miami. In addition to his studio practice, zeb leads workshops and shares his knowledge with communities across South Florida. Learn more at [sebastians-arts.com](http://sebastians-arts.com).

**DAVID ROMANDA** has work in places such as *Columbia Review*, *The Louisville Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*. He is the author of three books, including *Your Lover Stabbed in the Streets* (Frontenac House, 2025). Romanda lives in Kawasaki City, Japan. Check him out online: [www.romandapoetry.com](http://www.romandapoetry.com).

**GEORGE SHUSTER** is a Rhode Island poet who has studied poetry at Columbia & the University of Virginia. He has been writing for over 30 years. He is a direct lineal descendant of Anne Bradstreet, the first colonial woman poet in America, and is publisher and editor of *Prudence Dispatch*, a poetry journal from Prudence Island - Chippaquasett - at the center of Narragansett Bay.

**NOEL SLOBODA** is the author of two poetry collections as well as seven chapbooks. He has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein. Sloboda teaches at Penn State York, where he also coordinates the English program.

**PRADEEP R. VARADWAJ** is a scientist developing functional materials for sustainable technologies, bridging advanced research with real-world impact. A poet and writer, he explores human emotion, social realities, and the intricate relationship between people and the natural world. A nature enthusiast and spiritual seeker, he draws inspiration from lived experience, yoga, and meditation. His work weaves reflection and insight to illuminate human experience and invite deeper engagement with the world. He is the author of *What the Pond Teaches* and *Without You, My Existence Drifts*. Forthcoming works include *What the Tree Teaches: A Quiet Instruction* and *COOKCOO: The Breath That Learns to Listen*.

**LEE VARON** is a social worker and writer. She is a co-editor of *Spare Change News Poems: An Anthology by Homeless People and Those Touched by Homelessness*. Her poetry and short stories have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and published in various journals including *Painted Bride Quarterly* and *Atlanta Review*.

**CHARLOTTE WALDO** is a sophomore student at Tulane University studying English and History. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, Charlotte now lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and plans to attend law school after graduation. Although Charlotte is on the pre-law track, writing has been a passion for as long as Charlotte can remember. Charlotte's goal is to someday publish a long-form prose piece, whether that be in the form of a short story, a novella, or a full-length novel.

CHRISTOPHER WOODS is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. His monologue show, “Twelve from Texas,” was performed in NYC by Equity Library Theatre. His monologues have been performed most recently at Equity Library Theatre in NYC, The Invisible Theatre in Tucson and the Pro English Theatre in Kiev, Ukraine. He has received residencies from The Edward Albee Foundation and The Ucross Foundation. Gallery - <https://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/f861509283>.

HEATHER WRIGHT is a recent Robert Pinsky Global Fellow who was raised in the U.S. South and now lives on the North Shore of Boston. After thirty years as a manicurist, Heather returned to the classroom in 2020, earning an M.A. in English Literature from Salem State University. In 2025, she graduated from Boston University with an M.F.A. in Poetry. Heather now teaches writing and studies working-class rhetorics as a Ph.D. student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her writing appears in *Molecule*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *The Gloucester 400+ Project*.

# Submission Guidelines

Poetry and prose submissions should be included as text-format attachments (.doc or .txt). Please submit no more than three pieces of poetry, and limit prose to one piece no longer than 4,000 words. Please begin each new poem on a separate page. Text should be in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced. Please number document pages.

Artwork should be submitted in a high-resolution format, and of megabyte size or larger, and named in the following way: Lastname\_Firstname\_Titleofwork.JPEG. Please include dimensions and media with all submissions. Limit ten pieces of art/photography per person.

Please include a short bio of no more than 100-150 words in your cover letter. Name, address, email, and phone number should also be included in your cover letter.

The *Tulane Review* only accepts previously unpublished work.

We accept simultaneous submissions, but please notify us and withdraw your work if it has been accepted elsewhere.

If you have any thoughts or questions, please contact us at [litsoc@tulane.edu](mailto:litsoc@tulane.edu).

The Tulane Literary Society normally acquires first North American serial rights, but will consider second serial publication.





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S O C I E T Y