

# MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 16 ISSUE 2  
THE VALLEY REVIEW

MUGWORT

# Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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Hatcher  
*Olive McArdle*





# salutations from the editor

Greetings dear readers,

I'm wondering what we are to do now? Especially those of us still in our fertile years. Are we to resort to mugwort, the mostly reliable abortifacient employed in days of yore? Must we instruct our daughters and granddaughters in the, now obscure, ways of herbal remedies for unwanted pregnancies? Certainly we shan't just suck it up and bear children we neither want, have time and energy to feed, clothe, and house, and at the same time risk the very real possibility of death, in this not great, and never truly great country, with its high maternal death rates.

What are we to do if we do suck it up, have the baby, and because we are so stressed about the war in Ukraine. rising food and gas prices, and the incessant, daily shootings, that our body cannot, nay will not, produce milk? Formula has grown scarce, shall we starve this infant we've been forced to bear?

Gentle reader, I implore you to vote and save us from this dread dystopian handmaid's tale into which we have been led, unwilling. And if I sound mad, I am... but not at you.

You, I invite to take respite here, in these pages of art and literature, and I do hope it is some kind of balm for your soul. Or... you could try mugwort. I've been told it has a calming effect.

besos y abrazos,  
Elizabeth

# once a molecule said

Mary Buchinger

Once a molecule said

*not stone not fish  
not seaweed*

what was it that it said  
yes to?

Who was asking?

I just want to know.

\*

I feel my molecules  
as predetermined  
and choiceless

yet there is wander and drift

there is the body of me  
that is fully formed and  
fixed

the body of me  
that moves that changes  
and is dying.

\*

I watch the light  
moved by the warmth  
of the March sun

a ripple  
washes over my page

says This life is moving  
moving light

the day hourly  
lifts from night

from the shadow  
of the known

its warmed current  
rushing rushing—

\*

What is so far  
from here  
is still  
here  
is shaping here

the maker of here  
the way-way back

the begetter  
that wayward  
Atom

\*

One day it was *not stone  
not fish not seaweed*

no it was  
more than a day

it was more  
than one thing  
until it was  
something

and then  
something new  
again.

✱

# on kodiak island

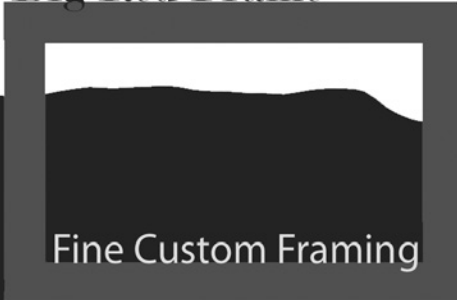
Mary Buchinger

The green needle-leaf I squeeze between finger and thumb  
is Sitka spruce branching limb trunk craggy tree is thousand-  
acre forest black-tailed doe and bounding fawn arctic fox  
spider spindly spider rain-streaked snail and thunder-winged  
ptarmigan mottled as granite is tall sow bear her three bumbling  
cubs tunneling grub and silver-linked lichen is pink salmonberry  
and thorned devil's club and spreading wood fern cotton grass  
sundew wild geranium blue lupine and blue mussels is limpets  
and sea stars tundra vole waving gold anemone and gray whale  
fin whale murdering orca is liquid brown otter pine siskin  
and the bank swallow just arrived from Argentina! Kinglets and  
kittiwakes tufted puffins oldsquaw ducks and *oh my* eagles  
eagles eagles everywhere eagles in the Pacific-lifted sweet  
-loft roseroot and softest moss-riddled air



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# a drop of mary

Mary Buchinger

of marry the earth  
be buried in earth be glad in it!  
Mary marry God of mother  
of instant forgiveness of undo  
distraction of undue encumbrance

of say what? and say who?  
of Immaculate that? conceive  
what you can of bitterest root  
and perfumed oil splurge  
and be sad no be merry be glad

be Mary regardless with towel of hair  
blade of braid and troweling curl  
lave away the dust the dust of Jesus  
his feet of clay swept with tresses  
and rinsed with tears

it's Mary who marries God to earth  
Incarnate again and again gives him feet  
gives him dirt she bodies the God  
in her womanly womb a God  
with a crown caught in her hymen

a crowning and bath in the blood of a human  
the holy placenta dripping on straw  
dog in the manger the cattle are lowing  
and Mary she bellows she bellows and  
bellows in a drafty cedar barn

the God came to earth in an animal'd swill  
in the turbulent waters of Mary  
Mary who sleeps on the grave  
rolls away the stone lays waste  
to the emptiness the barren the alone

the Marys are many so many  
to choose from! the astonished  
the disdained jaw-clenched acerb  
the Mary who lounges lazy and dreamy  
each Mary married in me –

Mary she marries she district  
she province she city she river  
she crater on the moon she cartoon  
she song she song she island  
she pseudonym she seer

her name is bitter is rebellion  
is riot is *Love Beloved Star of the Sea*  
but wait! No *Star of the Sea* is Mary Marie  
the scribe made a slip! an error  
or simply could not believe

St. Jerome's rendering  
from Eusebius of Caesarea  
of *Mary* as *drop* a drop  
just a drop the tiniest drop  
in the *Magnificent Sea*



# last days

Mary Buchinger

cheek to jowl at the trough  
puddings and bonfires shall we  
grill the heartwood? wrap it  
with bacon and stick it with cloves?  
sparks of bark and *chow chow chow*  
the sap we suck we slather and slip  
however thin it runs it sweetens  
the thyme greases what passes  
between us nosh on the spring-  
wood summerwood come  
the rays rain over us sun-stipple  
and spray deep in the pith  
in the liver and ileum purple lungs  
slippery spleen leafy bower  
petal in pedal out tumbledown limb  
broken-off crown the very root is  
rot but our mouths are full our  
intestines pounding pummel  
of gizzard stomata and petiole  
lithe winding vines green the air  
whisper *tourniquet* slow and sure





# nosings with Marina Barcenilla

It is day 17 of month 3, year 1955 p. e. (post-exit planet Earth).

It has been almost two millennia since the last human left Earth following the depletion of its natural resources. Today, we are going back.

I have been selected as Chief Astrobiologist for the first mission to the strange blue marble we have been orbiting for the past fifty days. I feel apprehension and excitement in equal measure.

I have spent half of my life preparing for this mission. I have read all the documented history about this planet that humans used to call home. I have listened to all the stories passed down from generation to generation; I wonder how much truth remains in there... I have watched the picture films, and I know the shape and colours of the extinct wildlife, the oceans, rivers and lakes, and the trees and plants that made this a habitable planet before the environmental collapse in year 5 b. e. (before exit planet Earth). I have also completed the required auditory and olfactory training, which has prepared me for the sounds and smells of Terran nature. In theory, it will stop me from being overwhelmed by it all when I first step out of the spacecraft. The olfactory training was my favourite.

I have always felt shy about the size of my nose. Still, during my training, I realised that it served me very well, as I came out top of my class and was given the prestigious post of Olfactory Archivist. It is not just smell, they say; the sense of olfaction is intimately linked to our memories and emotions. I have become the custodian of smells that say “Home” to the human brain, scents which are an essential part of our collective memory of the planet that created us and to which we are returning.

Looking at it as we descend, it takes my breath away. A sight that is familiar yet alien at the same time. I am surprised when I realise that the odours contained in my olfactory training kit really match the colours of that massive ball of rock, with its patchwork of white and blue that slowly separates, allowing flashes of green and brown to break through. I am getting overwhelmed just thinking about it! My curiosity is on a roll, wondering if the imaginary aromas I blended in the training room are anything like what I am about to encounter.

In preparation for this first journey, I tried to imagine what our landing spot would smell like. I blended a moss note with a pine needle note and a cedarwood note, and then I added something that smells like roots and soil, and what they say the rain used to smell like on Earth, petrichor. Apparently, it is the most magical thing, the smell of life itself, because it was produced by soil-dwelling bacteria whenever it rained. That odour means life! How I hope we find it down there!

Stop musing! I hear. We are almost there.

Suddenly, I realise that we have picked up speed and are fast approaching the planet's surface. What was a distant blue marble suspended in space is getting closer. As we descend towards the surface, the swirling patterns of blue and white give way to greens and browns, finally exploding into a myriad of earthy shades on the mountain tops. The canopy of conifer trees opens up, ready to receive us, and we land. After checking everything is in order, we complete the safety exit procedures and get ready to explore. I am third in line to leave the ship; my heart quickens as the moment approaches.

I step out of the spacecraft with trepidation, leaving behind the familiar metallic and slightly sour smell of machinery and recycled air, ready to discover an olfactory collage of hemlock, cedar, spruce and fir trees. I immediately recognise the invigorating green notes from my training kit, but there is so much more to them than I ever imagined. I breathe in deeply and feel as if I have taken a real breath for the very first time. The cool air fills my nostrils, and I continue inhaling in as if my lungs have infinite capacity. Eventually, I exhale. I have never felt this alive.

With my second breath, I notice the heavy and sticky smell of sap that hangs in the air, blending with the scent of damp moss and bark, and bringing in a resinous and earthy quality that pulls the aroma of the green treetops towards the ground. There, it softly dances with ancient roots breaking through the forest surface, covered by damp soil and wild grasses freshly bathed by rain. And there it is, petrichor, the smell of survival... The silent hum of billions of microscopic organisms bringing this planet back to life. In the distance, a hint of greyish blue and the salty smell of seaweed and ocean air.

We made it, and here I stand, on the majestic Earth of my dreams, with its wild oceans and fresh winds, its ancient trees and soaring mountains, its flowing rivers and bubbling springs, its carpet of green and brown bathed in cleansing and nourishing rain. I am home.



# international tea day

Jane Yolen

As I drink my tea, English decaf,  
heavy on sugar and milk,  
I think of my friend Christine,  
first woman lecturer at St Andrews  
after 500 years.

At elevenses she walked in the door,  
was greeted by the professor.

“Ah, here’s Christine at last.”

He smiled. “Christine will pour.”

Relieved, the male teachers waited.

She threw down her marker.

“Christine will NOT pour!”

No Mother for her.

She eventually got tenure,

well-published, now emeritus.

But I remember best the story

Of Christine and that first tea.



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# little aldo - a novel excerpt

Stephen Sacco



“Hey, little man! Hey there, little dude!” Peter called out.

I hate him. God, I hate him. I hated him before I met him, and now that I have met him, I hate him more. Peter the Unexceptional, Peter the Dim, Peter the Brute!

“What’s up, little dude?”

He won’t stop calling me little dude. He might as well call me the offensive “midget.” It’s irksome when you are insulted in public because of your size, but it’s infuriating to be defamed in such manner as to make the defamer appear friendly. Peter and I are rivals, not friends. He will soon learn this.

Peter put up his hand for me to high-five; of course, he placed his hand just beyond my reach. God, I hate him.

“High-five, little dude!” he yelled. “Just jump up and hit it, my brother!”

“I will not!” I shouted at him. “Little Aldo is not a trained seal. I do not jump through hoops for treats. May I remind you that I’m Dr. Aldo il Piccolo, formerly of Princeton University.”

“Chill, little dude, I’m messing with you.”

Peter crouches down and puts up his hand, this time within my reach. I comply, but only out of respect for Layla, my love. I wish to show her I’m giving Peter a chance.

“Peter, stop it,” the goddess spoke. Her voice lifted my soul. My ears were no longer filled with the clownish voice of the simpleton. I hear a choir of angels whenever my love speaks.

“What?” Peter said and shrugged his broad shoulders. Layla, oh my love, why are you with this insipid excuse for a man?

“I’m sorry, but you can’t bring your child in...”

A man dressed in a light blue vintage T-shirt, skinny jeans, and green-and-white low-top sneakers with red laces approached us. He stopped speaking and looked at me, puzzled. His thick, straight, black hair was swept back with gel, and his carefully oiled beard gave the impression that only moments ago he was out back chopping wood. More likely, he was in the alley smoking a cigarette. You could smell tobacco mixed with citrus-based cologne, or perhaps that was his beard oil. He smelled like a glass of lemonade in which somebody had doused their half-smoked cigarette.

His eyebrows were craggy and unkempt, and tattoos covered his arms. He had a red robin on a perch on his right forearm, a yellow sunflower with a blue center on his left forearm, and what

was likely a brown fox's tale running the length of his upper right arm. The tattoos looked like illustrations from the British naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace, who had a similar beard. To wit, before me was a Brooklyn hipster.

"Little Dude, he thinks you're our child" Peter — oh, so fast on the uptake — said, and put his arm around Layla.

"I'm sorry, man," said the hipster, "from the back you looked like a... hey, have you been on TV?"

The hipster looked so perplexed that he had forgotten to be ironic. America has done away with monarchs, but royalty has been replaced by anybody who manages to appear on television.

We were in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at Ballin', one of the many bohemian bowling alleys that have popped up all over New York City and in urban landscapes throughout the U.S. These bowling alleys include bars, fusion food, concert venues, dance floors, and, of course, sometimes, bowling. Ballin' is a relative newcomer, and it takes up an old warehouse space on N. 12th Street, a few blocks away from Brooklyn Bowl, which is larger, more established, and so yesterday. (It was recently written up in the Style section of *The New York Times*, and as every New Yorker knows, a write-up in the *Times* means the trend is over.) The Brooklyn Bowl has locations in London and Las Vegas now, making it a hipster franchise, which should be an oxymoron. The sport your grandfather played with a rock-like heavy ball made of solid plastic, for which he likely owned a faux-leather case, has been sold as new and trendy. Chic repeats itself first as earnestness, second as irony, to paraphrase Marx. Bowling alley owners and producers of beard oil reap the benefits.

Layla thought it would be fun if we all went bowling together and so I could meet Peter. She does not mean to be cruel, but she is naïve and cannot see through Peter as Little Aldo does.

"Yes, he's been on TV many times," said Layla, who answered for me. "This is Dr. Aldo il Piccolo. He's met the president. He's the most famous dwarf in the world." All I could do was stare with fascination at the red robin on the hipster's forearm. It was good work.

"Yeah," said the hipster, and he looked over at his friend, his colleague at Ballin', a tall skinny man with dreadlocks dressed all in black except for a 1950s-style bright yellow raincoat, about a size or more too large for him, which he wore unbuttoned. "We'll look for shoes for you. I think we have some smaller ones. Sorry, but, you know, nobody under twenty-one is allowed, or we'll lose our liquor license," said the hipster.

Ballin' is made to look as if it's out of the '70s, for those who do not remember the '70s are condemned to repeat them, to paraphrase Santayana. That's the way, I, Little Aldo — uh-huh uh-huh — like it, uh-huh uh-huh. Sometimes even 47-year-old dwarfs are overcome with the unassailable urge to do a little dance, make a little love, and get down tonight, (oh yeah!), get down tonight!

Ballin' was going for working-class '70s decor. The bar section was furnished from salvaged items, old Budweiser and Busch signs most prominent among them. It reminded me of the steel workers' bar in western Pennsylvania in the film *The Deer Hunter*. The highlight of the decor

were the huge glass-steel-and-ceramic bowling pins, as big as the Botero sculptures inside the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle. The mighty pins stood on either side of the bar section. The skinny hipster in the yellow raincoat plugged in the cord for the giant pins after we arrived, and it was then I realized that they were not just bowling pins but massive lava lamps.

The walls were a combination of exposed brick and pseudo-wood panels, but the floor on the bar was still the concrete floor of the former warehouse. An antique Coca-Cola sign hung above the bar and the bar was artificial stone. There was a large chalkboard with a reading light at the back wall of the bar, among all the liquor bottles neatly lined up. The Happy Hour specials were as follows — the drink of the night was a Ballin' Whiskey Sour made with Maker's Mark (which is bourbon, but I won't quibble), the shot of the night was Wild Turkey, and the beer special was Pabst Blue Ribbon in a can.

Vintage 1960s Budweiser wall sconces added to the moody lighting, as did several Spuds Mackenzie Budweiser beer lights from the '80s (yes, in the shape of a dog). There was also an old sign, perhaps from the '50s, urging you to try Rheingold Extra Dry, a Schmidt beer stained glass window and a Guinness vintage art deco poster in which a tortoise suggested you "Have a Guinness when you're tired."

Go through the bar into the bowling lanes, and things get sparse. The walls are exposed brick, and a large American flag hangs from the north wall. The floor itself, which was said to have been imported and then rebuilt from a defunct bowling alley in Baltimore, Maryland, was newly laminated and made from genuine hard maple and pine.

"We have a reservation for a lane, for four people," Layla told the hipster in the yellow raincoat.

"Your party has to be present before I can give you your lane," said the hipster. "I only see you and the dwarf."

Layla looked around. "Where's Peter?" she said. "Ella just texted. She's on her way from midtown."

Peter had wandered off, presumably to explore the bowling lanes. He reentered the bar doing bicep curls with two large bowling balls, a red and a green one. "I'm training," he said and laughed. Then he grunted. A small stream of sweat ran down his forehead. He was into it. He was performing. I hate him.

Peter was twenty-eight, a year older than Layla, and five eight. I suppose you could call him traditionally handsome. He had a solid, hunky build and brown hair cut short but with a piece that flopped over his forehead in a boyish manner. He was chiseled and clean cut, and tattoo free, I presumed. He had greenish eyes speckled with brown. His defect, besides being a complete imbecile, was a weak chin. He was capable of only two expressions: smug or stupid.

Peter alternated his curls — left and then right — with the bowling balls. "Oh man," he said. "This is awesome! This is going to be a thing. Forget kettle bells; bowling balls are the next wave. Everybody's going to be lifting bowling balls."



“Excuse me,” said the hipster with the red robin tattoo, “you need to put those back, man. They’re not meant to leave the lanes.”

“Dude, I’m almost done with my set.”

It was then that Ella made her entrance and the evening took a turn for the worst. Ella Garland entered Ballin’ swinging her hips in a Texas stride and flipping her long brown hair in the process. “Sorry I’m late,” she said as if she were an ordinary person.

Layla squealed with delight at the sight of her friend. “It’s been forever,” Layla said.

Ella squealed back. “I know. I know, right?” The two young women embraced as if they had not seen each for decades. “It’s been almost a month,” Ella said. “All I had of you, my lovely friend, was Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, but here you are in the flesh.”

“What’s new? How are things with James?” Layla said.

“Don’t ever mention him again. Not worth it. Things are okay. Busy at work, as always.” Ella took out her phone, which was only slightly smaller than Belcher’s, and instantly she and Layla posed and took a selfie. The flash illuminated their smiling faces as if a spell had been cast.

“Hey, Ella,” Peter said as he continued to do curls with the bowling balls. The hipster with the red robin tattoo scowled at Peter in frustration.

“I want you to meet somebody,” Layla said. It was at this point that Ella Garland noticed me, and it became apparent that she was familiar with my work. Little Aldo, of course, had never heard of Ella Garland.

“Oh, this is…” she said. Her demeanor immediately changed. Gone was the girlish delight. The hip-swinging selfie-taking Ella was replaced with disdain, contempt, even.

“You’re friends with him?” Ella said. “That…” I responded by grabbing the nearest chair and standing on it. I could just about look down on Ella Garland.

“Aldo, this is Ella. Ella Garland. Ella, this is Dr. Aldo il Piccolo, the most famous dwarf in the world. I met him at the coffee shop,” Layla said. Her lovely smile made a brave attempt to disperse the obvious tension between Ella and me. It was no use. Ella and I stared at each other. We sized each other up like we were animals preparing for a fight.

“You know me?” I asked.

“I’ve seen you on TV,” Ella said.

“I’m a formidable presence, am I not?”

“You’re a creep!” Ella shouted. Layla’s face registered horror.

"This is awesome," Peter said. "There's going to be a fight between Ella and a midget."

"The preferred term is dwarf or little person!" I shouted.

"Ella..." Layla said by way of reproach.

"You see," Ella said, "I work for Save the Innocent..."

"Save the what?" I asked her.

"Save the Innocent..."

"The what?"

"Save the Innocent...I think you heard me the first time."

"Save the Innocent? Well then, you might as well have called your organization Save Nobody! Who are the innocent? I submit to you, nobody! We are all guilty."

"Children fleeing war-torn conflict zones aren't innocent?"

"Children, like the rest of us, are driven by perverse and unseen forces and are closest to the true and cruel animal nature of man. They care not a whit for anybody but themselves. Mini-narcissists! Read Freud! Their innocent appearance is often used to smuggle contraband, and they are used to supply terrorists. Hardly innocent!"

"They're children!" Ella shouted.

"Let's not talk about politics," Layla said. "Ella, isn't he the cutest thing?"

"He's a monster!" Ella said.

"Hey, why don't we order chicken wings?" Peter said to create a distraction. It was an uncharacteristically noble gesture. He even put down the bowling balls.

"I'm vegan!" Ella shouted.

"Why, of course you are!" Little Aldo screamed. "You would choose the most annoyingly self-righteous diet you could. That's what you people are like! You won't even eat bee pollen! I ask you, how would eating bee pollen harm a bee? Thus, I have proven, vegans are self-righteous fanatics."

"This is not going well," Layla said.

"Maybe they have vegetarian chicken wings?" Peter offered.

People were beginning to look at us, though Ballin' was not crowded. It's not every day you see a dwarf standing on top of a chair having an argument with a young woman, so I understand.

"You've worked for dictators!" Ella began as if rattling off an indictment of Little Aldo.

"Yes," I said.

"You've justified torture!"

"It's called enhanced integration!"

"You've defended people denying the rights of LGBT people!"

"I have defended religious freedom!"

"You've advocated bombing whole villages and killing innocent people!"

"I advocate keeping American children safe!"

"You've argued against due process and the rule of law!"

"To be fair, I've also argued for due process and the rule of law. It all depends on who hires me."

"There is no position too absurd for you, no right-wing argument you will not make, no logic you would not willingly twist!"

"Thank you!" I said.

The hipster with the robin tattoo was back. "This," he said, exasperation apparent in his voice, "is a chill place. We got a chill vibe, understand? Can y'all chill?"

"No!" Ella said.

"See how unreasonable she is?" I said. "She can't help it; these so-called progressives are all like that. It comes from laboring under the idea that the world should be perfect and fair, instead of facing reality."

This, of course, infuriated Ella Garland, as I knew it would. It infuriated her so much, she dared not speak.

"Can we all just get along?" Layla said.

"You want me to bowl with mini-Hitler?" Ella said.

"Oh, Ella," Layla said, "I don't think he'll bowl like a mini-Hitler. I think he'll bowl like a mainstream Republican. Give him a chance. Please?" Ella looked at Layla and then back at me. I had to admit, Ella was attractive, though, of course, completely insufferable, and she certainly was no Layla. Ella sighed, then addressed me.

"I'm sorry. It's not nice to insult you because of your size. I was size-ist and ableist, and ignored my height privilege," Ella said. It was a peace offering.

For my part, I was about to cut this Ella down to size, or should I say further down to size, until I, Little Aldo, had made her feel so small, so insignificant, that I could just put her in my pocket and take her home. Then I would dump her in a fishbowl, where she could swim round and round and make all the ludicrous left-wing arguments she wanted. The prospect of doing this enticed me. Until, that is, I looked upon Layla's stunning face and found her distressed.

"I'm not bothered by your insults," I said to Ella, and I got off the chair. Ella glowered back at me but was silent.

"Can we get some hot wings and, you know, some vegan shit?" Peter said to the hipster.

"You'll have to order at the bar," the hipster said.

"Come on," said Layla, "this is going to be fun." Layla is ever the optimist, despite all evidence to the contrary.

Little Aldo is an excellent bowler, but out of practice. When I was younger, I used to bowl on the front lawn of my aunt and uncle's house in New Jersey using the Little Tikes Totsports Bowling Set, which was lightweight. I had forgotten that real bowling balls weigh about sixteen pounds.

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I, being a well-built dwarf, pick up one of the bowling balls Peter was lifting in his exhibitionist style, and though I could lift it, the thought occurred to me that I might not be able to throw it. Thinking of Layla, and how much I wanted to impress her, I grabbed hold of the bowling ball with both hands.

"You got that, little dude?" Peter said.

Peter also picked up a bowling ball with a grunt. Peter liked to grunt. He used grunting as a substitute for a personality. I do not believe for a minute that the bowling balls were heavy enough to justify a grunt from Peter. Peter did nothing but go to work and then the gym. He only consumed protein shakes and junk food. Peter, I would later learn, had never even finished his studies. He had majored in business at some undistinguished institution but dropped out after he got a job at a collection agency, which specialized in defaulted student loans.

As we walked into the lanes, we found them to be mostly empty, but for the four boisterous young men the next lane over. These four were three-sheets-to-the-wind, blitzed, hammered, blotto, destroyed, Brahms and Liszt, to borrow from Cockney rhyming slang, which means properly pissed in British.

The bowling balls they occasionally lobbed, as if they were hurling logs in a lumberjack game, made their way to the gutter. The pins stood tall. The pins were safe. As long as these lads kept drinking MD 20/20, known as Mad Dog, the prized plastic bowling trophies displayed in glass cabinets would be forever beyond their grasp. The MD does not stand for Mad Dog, a common

misconception. Instead, it stands for David Morgan, whose company presumably makes this washer fluid of a beverage that they pass off as fluorescent fortified wine. Its virtues are a high alcohol content and a low price, for the 20/20 stands for twenty ounces and twenty percent alcohol. There is a “bling-bling” necklace on the bottle of Blue Raspberry, and each flavor (e.g., Coco Loco, Habanero Lime-Arita, Banana Red, etc.) comes in its own fluorescent color. They had not bought this stuff at the bar at Ballin’ but had slipped it into the establishment. These were not hipsters, who are annoying but mostly harmless. No good could come of this. They were not all even from New York, for I very clearly heard a Massachusetts accent.

Then Ella Garland, who is so concerned for the innocent, flipped her brown hair in their direction and promptly received the attention I imaged she so desired.

“Hayeeeeee!” one of the drunk four said. He had blonde hair and blue eyes and was wearing a Rockford Ice Hogs jersey, which is a minor hockey team affiliated with the Chicago Blackhawks. He apparently couldn’t be bothered to get a jersey of a team that didn’t evoke the image of pigs on ice.

“Hayeeee!” he said again to Ella, who flipped her hair to the other side. “Where are you from?”

“I’m from Texas,” Ella said, emphasizing her accent. Layla pulled Ella close to her in a protective move.

“I’m Randy,” he said. “I just moved here from Chicago. These are my friiiiiiii-eeeeends!” Randy spread his arms, like Jesus.

“She don’t want to talk with you,” said the guy with the Massachusetts accent. He had a crewcut, nicotine-stained teeth, and wore a grubby black sweatshirt and jeans. “I’m Tommy, I’m from Dorchester.” You would have never guessed, I inwardly sighed. “She wants to talk with me. I heard Texas girls are wicked cool.”

The other two grunted (must be members of Peter’s tribe), and the very tall skinny one in the white T-shirt lobbed another ball into the gutter, giggled, and took another swig of Mad Dog. The short one, dressed entirely in black, had a goatee and long sideburns and was very interested in keeping score, or at least pretending to keep score. He took out his pencil and made some marks on a piece of paper, completely ignoring the touch-screen intended for this purpose, which had been provided by Ballin’.

“Ella,” Layla whispered but loud enough for me to hear, “these guys are really drunk.”

“I think the blonde one is cute,” Ella whispered back.

Peter began doing curls again. Then he put one of the bowling balls down and began to instruct me, though I had requested no such instruction.

“Bowling,” Peter said, “is all about the four-step approach and the pendulum swing.”

He demonstrated but didn’t release the bowling ball.

“Are you going to be able to throw a ball this size?” he asked me.

“Look! Look!” Tommy from Dorchester shouted excitedly. He pointed at me, Little Aldo. “They got a what-you-call it! They got a little dwarf! Dwarfs are wicked cool.”

“No shit,” said Randy, “it’s a midget!”

“Midget is not the preferred term!” I shouted. In retrospect, Little Aldo admits, this was a mistake. People notice me, of course, but most will glance and look away, unless they know me from my many television appearances. These four were too drunk to show any decorum. The veneer of civility had been painted thinly on them to begin with, and adding Mad Dog melted this veneer like lemon ice in the summer sun.

“Little Aldo is a good bowler,” I said to Peter and picked up the bowling ball with both my hands. I hooked my fingers into the ball and lifted it carefully, painfully aware of all sixteen pounds.

“Four-step approach,” Peter said. “Pendulum swing.”

“I hear midgets are good luck,” Randy said.

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “but you got to catch them and rub their head.”

The tall skinny one in the white T-shirt decided to give his two cents. “Oh, I forgot me Lucky Charms,” he said in a sing-song voice in imitation of the hackneyed cereal commercial with a cartoon leprechaun.

“Those are leprechauns,” Tommy said as if he had been studying this subject for years. “They are entirely different than dwarfs.”

“Where’s Snow White, then?” said the tall skinny one. “Those are dwarfs, right?”

“Yeah,” Tommy said. “Seven of ‘em.”

The short man with the goatee appeared not even to have the power of speech.

I concentrated deeply, I focused my gaze and my mental energies on the center of the perfectly lined-up pins. I held the bowling ball close to my face. I intended to bowl a strike.

“Lead with your right foot,” Peter said.

I, Little Aldo, did indeed lead with my right foot. I took four graceful steps and swung my arm like the pendulum on a grandfather clock. I did this perfectly, so more’s the pity that I forgot to release the ball. Therefore, instead of Little Aldo launching the ball down the maple and pine runway, the ball launched Little Aldo, about halfway down the lane. I slid nicely down the smooth lacquered surface. The four men and Peter erupted with laughter. Layla and even Ella Garland gasped at the mishap and ran to Little Aldo.



“Are you all right?” Layla said to me as she kneeled beside me and stroked my face. Then she looked up at Peter who was barreled over with laughter. “Peter!” she screamed at him.

“Oh, you poor pumpkin,” Ella said in Texan, as she tried to pry my fingers from the bowling ball. “Just relax and let me take that ball away,” she said, and I did.

“That was awesome!” Randy shouted. “Woo-hoo!”

“You know what would be even more awesome?” Tommy said. “Let’s bowl the dwarf!” The idea hit these four like a battle cry; like the muezzin’s call from the minaret of the mosque to prayer; like they had discovered a vision that gave meaning to their senseless existence, as if the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to them and charged them to launch the dwarf in the direction of the bowling pins.

“Bowl the dwarf! Bowl the dwarf!” they chanted.

I was on my feet at this point. “I’m fine,” I said. “I’m completely fine.”

“Bowl the dwarf! Bowl the dwarf!” they continued to chant and walked over to our lane.

“Dudes, no!” Peter said. “Dudes, this isn’t cool!”

There was no dissuading them. I would not have been surprised if there wasn’t a dwarf-tosser among them, for this despicable pastime is popular in some quarters. I don’t understand the appeal of the so-called sport but must include the proviso that it does allow the lesser dwarfs to commodify their height in a lucrative way, and I must support that. The free and open markets allowing people to make a living in whatever way they can are sacred.

“Bowl the dwarf! Bowl the dwarf!”

They surrounded me.

“No!” shouted Layla.

“Now, y’all got to stop this,” Ella bawled.

“Stop!” I said. “Stop this instant! I’m Dr. Aldo il Piccolo, and I’ve been on TV!”

Two grabbed me by my arms, and the other two by my feet. “Bowl the dwarf! Bowl the dwarf!” they chanted. A small crowd surrounded us.

“What the...” the hipster with the robin tattoo blurted out when he entered the lanes from the bar. “This is a chill place!” he shouted. “This is not chill! Stop!” He threw up his hands in frustration and left to get reinforcements, followed by Peter.

“Put me down this instant!” I yelled. “My IQ is higher than all of your IQs added together and multiplied by one hundred! Put me down now!”

Instead, they swung me. The sensation was slightly pleasurable, I must admit.

“Bowl the dwarf! Bowl the dwarf!” they continued to chant. Then in unison, they began counting. “One! — Two! — Three!” On the third count, they swung Little Aldo up into the air and released me. I, Little Aldo, flew. Then I, Little Aldo, landed.

Fortunately, I landed on my backside and not my back, and then I curled myself into a ball. I slid, so curled, down the smooth maple and pine runway and halted inches away from the neatly stacked pins. A single pin wobbled and fell. Layla and Ella and ran to me, screaming.

“Are you okay?” Layla said. “That was terrible!”

“I want you to know that I’d like to apologize for everybody who is my height who has taken advantage of you,” Ella said.

The four monster men were whooping it up, giving each other high fives.

“Are you children happy?” Ella said. “Is this what makes you happy? If you hurt him, you’re going to jail! He’s better than a hundred of you!”

There was something about the vehemence of Ella’s words that struck the very drunk young men, and they fell silent. I was taken aback, too. Ella and I clearly hated each other, and the ardor of her defense of me was unexpected.

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Then, into the lanes entered the hipster with the robin tattoo, followed by Peter and two New York City cops, a man and a woman.

“Little dude, are you hurt?” Peter rushed to me.

“This happens all the time,” said the hipster.

“All the time people bowl dwarfs?” the woman officer asked.

“Yeah, we bowled a dwarf!” Randy said triumphantly, as if he was announcing his Nobel Prize. At this, the hipster had had enough. “Get out! Everybody involved! Everybody who watched! Get out!” The night at Ballin’ was now officially no fun.

“Gentlemen,” said the male officer to the loathsome four, “congratulations! You just committed assault.”

I stood up. I had skinned my knee. There did not appear to be any serious damage, but for my ego. I was humiliated. “I don’t want this in the media,” I said. I had a reputation to uphold.

“Little dude, you’re alright then?” Peter said, and I nodded my head.

“You should see a doctor,” Layla said.

"I'll get you something." Ella was genuinely trying to be helpful. "Maybe some mint tea and a vegan snack?"

"Have mercy on him, Ella," Peter said. "I'll get you a shot of tequila and some hot wings, little dude." Peter and Layla left in search of some consolation for me.

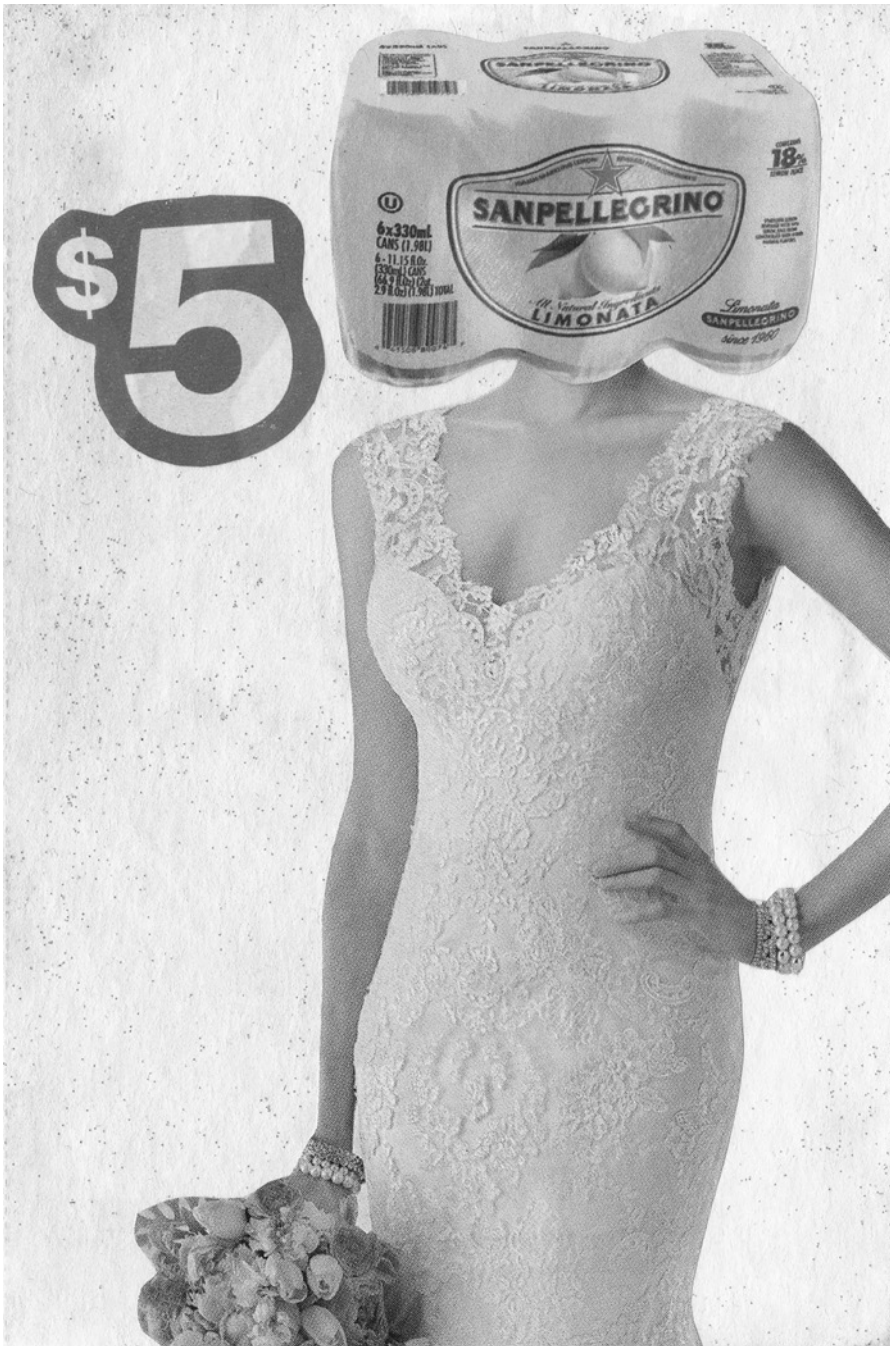
Ella kneeled by me, ruffled my hair, and brushed off my clothes. "You poor, poor pumpkin. You're a brave person," she said. "Do you know that?"

Why is she talking to me as if I'm a child? Ella ruffled my hair again and then she kissed Little Aldo, twice. She kissed me once on the forehead, where the warmth of her lovely lips quickly descended through my entire body, down to my feet. Then again, quickly, on my lips. It was like a feather-touch of a kiss; the softest I had ever received. The problem, of course, is that I hate her, and she me. Seeing that I was vulnerable, however, had touched something in her, and Little Aldo looked up into her brown eyes and then down to the soft red lips that had kissed me gently, and Little Aldo forgot about Layla. This, too, is love. I have read about this happening.

"Do you really think I'm brave?" I asked. Ella nodded.

I'm a brave and noble dwarf, I thought. Soon I will have the love of a princess.





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commodities: all natural  
Jennifer Weigel

# macdougall and the magic tyre

Peter Tacy

Bad enough, to face the haar  
on rising. A grim and gusty day  
in Fife already; and then my car  
presents a flattened tyre. Alack, allay,

it was on a weekend, too.  
Enough to make a Yank believe  
wee Pictish spirits, the kind who  
create omen stones, who conceive

bitter messages we cannot read,  
had been at work. A drive yet to do  
to a wee tiny highland toun,  
and my trusty ice-blue Honda-steed  
is mobile as a stain doo-coo.  
The day is ripe, but the tyre is doun.

Off then to the nearby tyre-change centre  
(flabby tyre going fluppy-flup),  
where, just as I uneasily enter,  
a wee magician springs right up  
and says something I canna ken  
in magic words, perhaps Glaswegian:

A name was o'er his pocket sewn:  
"MacDougall"; with logo of a winged tyre;  
and on his swivel desk-chair throne  
I saw angel wings, and a crown of fire.

"Take ye away," the magician utters,  
"and leave yer tiny car to me."  
Unsure of other words he mutters,  
I nevertheless hand over my Honda's key.

Of the hour thereafter I cannot speak.  
I wandered far along the lane  
while MacDougall and an elvin freak  
made my wee Honda whole again —  
or even better, as I would learn,  
when, upon my due return,  
MacDougall and his silent aide  
presented the work of their wily trade:

"Take ye this Asian thing, and go!  
Ye and yer lass may drive to and fro,  
up the braes and along the burn,  
whizzing forth! But dare not return  
Until the confusion in which yer cloaked  
has vanished — and a raven's croaked  
and the owl ye canna see has hooted..."  
and some other things have cried or tooted,  
which I didn't fully understand...

But I shook MacDougall by his grimy hand.  
My vehicle was whole, and I was gay;  
as I drove a charmed car away.

Yes, magic remains in that Pictish place.  
Trust in its heart, and live in grace.



# the garage of the mysteries by the lass herself

Jane Yolen

?Are ye oot of your mind?"  
My r's began to roll,  
like an old puffer train  
quite beyond my control.

"Ye took our car to MacDougall's place?  
A foreign car to rhat Pictish space?  
God knows what spell he's put on the tyre,  
What Pictish charms, or when they'll expire?

He's a direct descendent of the Old Mad Mac D.  
The one who lived his life in a tree,  
who talked to owls, who sang with rooks,  
Who read tree leaves , not the leaves in books.

Are ye oot of your mind? I'd rather walk.  
And draw signs on the road in yellow chalk  
To keep me and mine safe from that car.  
To keep you either free or afar,

So the magic can't flow from tyre to thee.  
You say you love me, which will it be?





# the mugwort poems

Jane Yolen

## 1. Dreaming

It sits on itself,  
turning dreams  
into lucidity,  
A noble occupation  
Full of rhythm, full of tone.

Dreams, we are told,  
Are never quite that, tangible,  
But gossamer and magic,  
Writ for readers  
Still unknown.

## 2. Roman Sandals

So, they came, saw, conquered  
Many lands, whose languages  
they could not parse,  
wearing strong sandals  
sprigged with mugwort  
so that even if their spears faltered,  
their feet would continue on.

## 3. Periodical Use

I am sorry, my dear madam,  
That your cycles are so loose,  
So, I will now prescribe  
Some special mugwort for your use.

The herb when boiled in water  
Will create a perfect tea,  
Especially for you, madame,  
And any soon baby.

## 4. Side Effects

Laughter, should you name the herb.  
Sneezing full of snot.  
Irritated eyes and it  
is allergies you've got.

## 5. Midsummers Night's Dream

Oh, Oberon, Oh Dian's bud,  
Titania takes a nip.  
Oh, uncoupled couples,  
Of this tea please have a sip.  
And conjugal originals  
Will once again be fated,  
For Mugwort will allow at last,  
All members to be mated.



# the mugwort pharmacopoeia

Peter Tacy

*“There is little evidence that mugwort  
can prevent or treat any illness.”*

-Wikipedia

If you’ve an itch you just can’t reach  
or a belly-ache that needs relief,  
or aching feet: or any one of each  
calamity that fill this life of grief  
we share; when real medication  
would require an awkward kind of chat  
with a doc, the kind of conversation  
one avoids, lest one be told that  
wishful thinking of herbal remedies  
can be a sign of incipient neurosis  
of worse: well then, it’s at these  
very moments that self-diagnosis  
reminds one that right within the yard  
a useful weed may meekly grow,  
awaiting your hand, inclining toward  
it — is there more you need to know?

In your shoes, or in your tea,  
it’s the universal remedy —  
even a sad conformist booby  
knows one fresh-rolled mugwort doobie  
can do the job when pills will fail —  
or anyway, can start a tale  
worth telling, if you in time survive  
the treatment, and emerge alive.



## annie

Linda Chown

Last night  
In the rain  
His umbrella  
Looked like Paris  
Because the spokes  
Glimmered red  
He turned it  
And remembered long ago  
Annie who sang French  
Ballads of old weavers  
In the high mountains.  
Who smoked Gauloises  
And wrote of Camus his  
Soft words easy to say  
Annie loved simple people  
Who lived before the day started  
Before the routine broke life's  
Umbrellas.



## born to beauty double

Linda Chown

Born to beauty double that  
Special boring pain and the  
Euphoria of the light full blue.  
How to weld them to.  
HD knew how to keep astray  
Twined, to burn an essence.  
To hold on to the smell of cedar  
And the mighty potency of eucalyptus  
blooming in the blue  
we knew.



## when it was today in the war

Linda Chown

When it was today tomorrow  
and before went after sound-free  
poems whipping the air  
and spread light thick as colored bibles

Let poems get messy again  
and improvise a mad wonder.  
Let before be now  
I want poems that serenade  
themselves and leave us hanging  
complete in a swelling line  
and spawn a thought music  
that engulfs us  
in a music with no score  
but its thought  
music becoming.

Let's take the lists out of poetry  
Let's make songs and symphonies  
Let lines become harp verses that radiate  
ineffably beyond themselves becoming  
the kind of line that keeps you playing  
blue swans and orange marmalade happy.



# the meaty record review by Jeremy Macomber-Dubs

A Meaty Disableist review of Vic Chesnutt: *Is The Actor Happy?*

*Ableism is ingrained into the framework of our society's infrastructure. The Disableist Movement's mission is to "disable ableism" (Caitlin Rose Blaney) by 1) celebrating the lives of people with disabilities, 2) raising awareness to the needs and experiences of disabled people, and 3) offering solutions to creating a more welcoming world for all disabled people.*

Vic Chesnutt became paralyzed from the neck down in a drunk driving accident in 1983 at the age of 18. His debut album *Little*, produced by Michael Stipe, came out seven years later. He continued to release records throughout the 90's while medical bills piled up and the ableist world he lived in trapped him into a downward spiral of depression and poor health. Many popular musicians banded together to release a tribute album to Vic Chesnutt in 1996 to raise funds for his mounting debt. This is how I learned about him. I was a shy, quiet, detached, disconnected, disabled senior in high school obsessed with music, amazed to learn that there was another rock musician in a wheelchair out there in the world. I immediately became infatuated with him and was absolutely elated about this successful disabled man's flourishing career. That same year, Vic appeared alongside his friend Billy Bob Thornton in the film *Sling Blade*. Was the actor happy? Living an independent life in a society whose foundation is built around the needs of able-bodied people and the exclusion of disabled people continued to be a worsening struggle for Chesnutt. He attempted suicide a few times, and even admitted on NPR that he didn't want to die just because his insurance wouldn't cover his costly hospital bills. This ableist world failed poor Vic. He overdosed on muscle relaxers on Christmas Day in 2009, a lovely, intelligent, funny, brilliant artist finally escaping the horrors of a reality that had become far too crippling to bear. On his 1995 masterwork *Is The Actor Happy?*, Vic hauntingly declared himself "Free of hope, free of the past/Thank you god of nothing, I'm free at last." I think about all the hope he must have mustered and clung to all those years to create such a glorious body of genius work, to stay motivated trying to make a living doing what he loved while barely coping to survive a society that forces disabled people to fend for themselves. How heavy that burden must have been. How devastating that he needed to let go of that hope to truly be free.

Due to the limited use of his hands, Vic's guitar playing was soft, simple, and gentle, but his strong vocal cords projected loudly lyrics bursting with poignancy, wit, and humor, conveying stories of sadness and pain seamlessly intertwined with underlying inherent joy, passion, impenetrable love for life, and adept cleverness affirming his firm wise grasp on the complexities of language and the fragile human condition. Running the gamut of raw emotion, when I listen to *Is The Actor Happy?*, I find myself laughing out loud often at the unpredictable longwinded meticulously worded whimsy sung with carefully crafted melodic perfection ("I'm a reluctant rebel/I just want to be Aaron Neville/With a crown on my head/And my denim shirt all dark with sweat"), then suddenly moved to tears when he accurately describes himself as "Sad Peter Pan". Vic's outstanding backing band realizes his sui generis vision with boundless enthusiasm and dedication to the adroitly written folk rock tuneage of their one-of-a-kind disabled pal, manifesting his Artemisian dreams and towering ambition in the process. The intro call-and-response bass/guitar interplay of "Strange Language" invites us into intriguing psychedelic mystique, while the fuzz-tinged chorus is blissful heaviness you can headbang to. A peaceful delicately arranged intimacy prevails, though distorted guitars and triumphant drumbeats in songs like "Free Of

Hope” and “Thailand” prove that Vic likes to rock on occasion. Stirring cellos and Michael Stipe’s gorgeous harmonies in “Guilty By Association” are enough to melt one’s heart. Above all, Vic Chesnutt’s vibrant undeniable oddball charm shines throughout, offering empathy and compassion along with a hearty knowing chuckle at life’s beauty and hideousness.

In 2002, when I was a clueless 24-year-old rocker touring as an opener for Frank Black and the Catholics, my band ended up in Athens, Georgia, where Vic happens to hail from, on stage at the 40-Watt Club, where Vic first met Stipe. As I smoked weed and drank booze in the dressing room after our set, my best friend/band-mate Jack informed me that Vic Chesnutt was out there in the audience in a corner sitting in his wheelchair watching the show, and that he had been there the whole time watching our entire performance. As one of his biggest fans, I was shocked and excited to learn he was in the same building and that he had just seen me play music. I was caught off guard. Kind-hearted readers of this review, please know I regret my response to Jack that night who encouraged me to introduce myself to my hero and fellow disabled kindred spirit. Like a fool I said, “Nah, I don’t know what I would say to him”, and that was that. Growing up in ableist environments, I was not surrounded by many other disabled people, and I felt most content being the only disabled person in social situations because getting lumped into the category of the Unfortunate was the last thing I wanted. Ableism views disability as tragedy, as inspirational porn solely there to make non-disabled people feel better about themselves. My younger self, unaware I was being silenced and overshadowed by ableism, bought into this myth that my disability was tragic, so I searched and strived for all the love and attention from able-bodied folks I could get, and I avoided hanging out with other disabled people. Those of us with disabilities tend to hover within our own bubbles of emotional comfort, but when we eventually do branch out and connect with those who have similar life experiences that we can relate to, the results can be magical, explosive, world changing. Back when I had the opportunity to meet Vic, I wasn’t spiritually equipped for that yet, still learning to navigate and maneuver my own twisty lot in life. Although his peers tried their best, Vic Chesnutt never got the help he needed to make it any longer in this world. I write this piece honoring him with the goal of bringing more attention to his tremendous art, amplifying his powerful voice, and celebrating his exceptional life.





a world apart  
Pernel Berkeley

# the meaty interview: Maxim Furek

What's your favorite color?

Black.

What's your favorite animal?

Sea otters. Fascinating and entertaining.

If you could choose to fly or be invisible, which would you choose and why?

I thought I could levitate in my basement and fly when I was little. I'd love to be able to fly and experience an entirely different perspective. Don't we all?

Are you happy, and if not, why?

I struggle with the negativity created by the pandemic in Ukraine, our political extremism, lack of common ground, and what appears to be a self-destructing nation. It makes me sad. The only things I can do are find my center, stay in the moment, and accept that things are beyond my control. Happiness is expressing gratitude for my many blessings, including close friends, creative outlets, and the salvation of books, writing, and music. As I write this, I feel happy.

What book(s) are you reading at the moment?

I just finished *Others* and *Nobody True*, both by British horror writer James Herbert who cleverly combines horror with sex. Those Brits, indeed! My brother introduced me to his works.

What songs are you currently listening to?

"You Showed Me," The Songs of Gene Clark. Gene was the tambourine man and chief songwriter for The Byrds.

How old were you when it became clear you would be a music journalist?

I was around 14 when I started to list songs that I heard on the radio, in a notebook, B-sides, writers, producers, labels, etc. All of it. This became a real passion. I just needed to find this information and document it. It meant something special to me. I was a proverbial music geek.

Tell us more about founding Timothy: Northeastern Pennsylvania's First Music Publication and more about the publication itself.

Timothy Magazine was a grass-roots tabloid created "to promote Northeastern Pennsylvania's musical talent" and named after The Buoy's "Timothy" (1971), the region's most successful rock song. Through a strange sequence of events, Timothy Magazine evolved into the highly successful Pennsylvania Musician and Maryland Musician, who copied our format after I stopped publishing.

### What sparked your staunch anti-drug advocacy?

Alcoholism raged outside of my immediate family and separated me from meaningful relationships with relatives, especially cousins and uncles. I directed a drug and alcohol program in later years and then taught anti-drug programs for the PA Dept of Drug and Alcohol Programs. I coined the term “Celebrity Blood Voyeurism” about society’s fascination for stars who self-destruct. I wrote articles about Amy Winehouse, Kurt Cobain, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Whitney Houston, and many others who died way too soon, as we watched.

### If you could invite any six people, living or dead, to a dinner party, whom would you ask?

This was my favorite question, and thanks for asking. I would invite Ernest Hemingway, Leonard Cohen, Og Mandino, Frank Zappa, Kurt Vonnegut, and Carl Jung.

### Any new projects in the works?

I am working on several titles, seemingly far removed from each other, but they include a paranormal book (*Forbidden Tales from Inside the Pit: The Coal Region Paranormal*) and a new-age, motivational text, *Dream Gliding: Honoring the Wisdom of the Ancients*.





# summer dancing

Richard Wayne Horton

June, 1977

Mild married poets Nora and Ed came over to my apartment. I made them coffee the Colombian way, using a pointy-bottomed muslin coffee filter sewed onto a looped coat hanger. Nora told why she looked like a bag of potatoes: shock therapy early in life. When she was 17, she liked screwing boys. One day, a boyfriend took her to a vacant lot and threw her down on the dirt behind a fence, where he and seven others gang raped her. Her parents approved shock and drug therapy, which screwed up her metabolism. She was still smiling a little, trying to make her voice sound casual. Uhhh...yeah. Ed, like me, was looking straight down at the table. Us and our cocks.

We got up and walked to Spellman's Saloon. There Ed tried to dance in the light from the noisy doorway. It was a series of uncontrolled jerks and hops, like he was a convenience store clerk tied and gagged during a robbery and now trying to get loose. A customer comes up. How much for these Slim Jims?

Rrfff! Rrfff!

Dollar thirty nine? Wo!

Gloria, Liz Bove, and Claudia from Germany, arrived from their movie. Gloria came and hugged me. I kissed her forehead, which was moist. She went back to the bar, greeted all the guys, the regulars, hugged and kissed them. The story of the gang bang was still in my mind. Gloria and 7 bar guys. Horrible. I took my beer out to the patio and sat down on a weather-beaten church bench, which got me remembering churches, my seminarian days. Long overcoats, smooth boy faces. Hands joined in prayer. In the clouds above the seminary an angel flies in place, like in a 16<sup>th</sup> Century German etching. Claudia, a German angel, wandered out, and came over to embrace me. She perched on the edge of the bench. In what manner do angels watch over us? Are they always serious? Of course they are. She asked about Elise. I held up my left hand and pointed to the white place where the ring used to be. Claudia was happy that I was happy but sad that love was gone. She went inside, conflicted.

The band was really good. Everyone went in to chatter with bar pals. A bar-fly with sunken eyes came with her bearded fellow. Both crowded onto the church bench and the bar fly's hips pushed me over. She looked at me and said, "I don't intimidate easily!"

Gloria, Liz Bove and Claudia came out and found me. Liz said, "We're going to the Split Rail! Come join us and be our dance partner!" Liz was taking Drama. She always spoke in a firm, decisive manner, as if the stage director has said: Now Liz! Act as if you've "taken control of the situation!"

We rode in Liz' car, me and my dance pals, and got out at the Split Rail, an eerily lighted square building squatting in the mud like a mama hog with a row of pickups sucking its tits. Inside, lots of men wore cowboy hats, which brushed the low cigarette darkened ceiling. The music coming out of the boxes was fast, punchy country.

I danced with Gloria, her face down, body shaking. Her lips were compressed, biting on sweet pain, eyes closed, black hair strands in her face. I hugged her after the dance. She was wet inside her clothes.

I danced with Claudia. She moved slowly, with molasses-slow graceful hands.

I danced with conflict actress Liz, who whipped around me with dramatic, razor-sharp dance moves, her expression steely.

Claudia again. Claudia was getting affectionate, dissolving. We stood hugging after the dance. She wanted another dance. She was intoxicated. We hugged again, slowly disengaged, looked at one another. The music started. Yes! Another dance!

After a few more dances everyone got in the car and we drove to Deep Eddy Cabaret. The place looked hostile, snaky. We didn't order, just got up and left.

In front of Claudia's house we all got out of Liz's car, and talked and laughed underneath the streetlamp.

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Young German women in the late '70's, with Latin names. Claudia, Thea, Petra. The young actresses in silly German soft porn movies, all sparse, cold, sour, mini-skirted products. The film speeds up so they look like jerkey dolls. Get that image away. That was not Claudia. Claudia said, "You two go on. We'll say goodnight here." In a nearby apartment, Brahms' Nenie for chorus played softly. We embraced and kissed. She said, "Good night! Mmmm!" I kissed her mouth. It was a slender mouth, curved upward at the sides. "Good night." We still held each other, standing there, looking into each other's face. Our faces came together. A kiss. "Good night." Then again. "Good night." "Good night." Finally we turned away but our hands were locked. We stood under the streetlight, pulling gently. Our hands wouldn't let go. We turned back. Another kiss. "Good night." "Go on now!" "Yes, I need to." "One more kiss!" "OK." "Good night." "Good night." Finally we did run off from each other, light-hearted, into our separate nights. I thought of a Richard Strauss symphonic poem. Strauss can't end the poem, you see. The music can't...it needs something. Finally he says, "Enough! Just stop, for heaven's sake! Paint my face! I'm a clown!" At last, silence. How lonely my soul!



# nowhere to hide

Mario Lew

The book, a handsome hardcover tome of four-hundred and nineteen pages, fell squarely on Chad's head. That was a salient fact. Any questions beyond that, *why him? why just then?* would have died a farcical death of shortcoming, the true precipitant outside the *umwelt* of human experience.

The first question, "Are you okay?" was uttered by Kennedy DuMont, still dressed in her nurse's uniform, on her way home after a grueling night-shift of effusive note-taking. She was tired beyond exhausted, but witnessing the event, all thoughts of sleep scurried away into the nether like a dragonfly winging its escape from a falcon, her attention fully absorbed by the sound of the thud the book made striking Chad's head.

He shouted out an "Aw *fuck!*" and staggered, instinctively bringing his hands up to his scalp in a demonstrative act of too little too late.

Quickening her pace to a sprint, she closed the distance between them until she could hear him loudly sucking air between his teeth, could see him squinching his eyes in response to the impact. Now within earshot, she asked, "Are you okay?" the concern in her voice apparent.

"On the verge of ludicrous, your question, don't you think?" Chad chided, speaking with a decidedly British accent. "Of course I'm not okay!"

"Here, let me have a look. I'm a nurse."

Chad's need for assuagement grappled with reluctance for control of his muscles until, the struggle decided with a clear victor, his hands inched away very slowly, bringing them to eye level, there to take a peek at his palms and inspect for traces of blood before bowing his head and exposing the point of impact to Kennedy.

Even that small muscular realignment exacerbated the sharp pain in his temples, and he hissed its presence in a protracted, whistling exhale. Obscenely urgent, his eyes shut tight, prompted by thoughtless instinct. Tears eked their way from the corners of his closed and onto the pavement. A moment later, compounding his suffering, Kennedy's act of ruffling his hair to more closely inspect his scalp caused Chad's heart to race as the pain spring-boarded hair root to hair root, and it was all he could do to not shout out another expletive in deference to her close proximity.

"Aha!" she exclaimed, "Found it!"

He was about to ask, "*Found what?*" but was immediately dumbstruck by the sensation of the pain disappearing, carried upon the wind of her pursed lips whooshing as she blew on the exact spot where his head had been impacted. Disbelieving, he furrowed his brow and, lifting his head, asked, "Who *are* you?" Incredulity framed the question with its inflection.

"Kennedy," she replied, "Kennedy DuMont. And you?"

"Chad," he answered, "Chad Dingle."

"A pleasure to meet you," she said, her eyes smiling.

"That may be," he answered with a haughty huff, "but you didn't answer my question, not exactly. Who are you?"

"I just told you Ken—"

"No—nuh uh. That's your name. What did you—*how* did you do that?"

"I told you that too; I'm a nurse."

Chad took hold of her arms just below her shoulders and stared intently at her pleasing face. "Look Ms. DuMont, I may have been recently attacked by an angry piece of literature," he began, his colloquial British phrasing lending an air of sophistication to his complaint, "but I can assure you my faculties are still in proper working order. At the risk of repetition, I asked who you were and you told me your name, and then, asking how you managed to blow the throbbing pain away, you tell me you're a nurse! Neither answer suffices."

A smile spread across Kennedy's face as she shrugged. "They may not suffice, and yet they *must* suffice."

Chad stared blankly at her, wondering if maybe his assertion regarding his faculties might have been premature. *Concussion?* Nothing about her answer made any sense. *Must suffice?* "Excuse me, Ms. Dumo—"

"Kennedy is fine," she cut in.

"*Kennedy* then, I think I need to see a doctor; no offense. I seem to be caught up in an errant stream of consciousness where little beyond the physicality of you and me standing here this moment is making any sense."

Kennedy nodded. "I suppose you're thinking caused by the blow to your head?"

"Exactly!"

"I assure you, a doctor's prognosis will be of little use to you."

"Assure me; that's rich! ? Under whose authority?"

"The Author's," she answered simply.

Chad took a step back, let go any contact between them, a look of worried horror on his face. "There you go... we go again! What are you on about?!" His tone grew loud, menacing. "And if you don't answer straightaway, I shall check myself into the very hospital you work in with or without your accompaniment!"

She pointed down to the pavement, to the book lying forgotten on the sidewalk. "There's your answer."

"Are you implying I *asked* for that book to clunk me on the head?"

"No! You didn't ask for *it*; it asked for *you*!"

Chad's face flushed with anger; Kennedy watched closely. His response was in keeping with his villainous character; his mercurial temper responsible for the fate of his own making.

Bending over, she took hold of the closed book in her hand and then straightened back up. She thrust it at him, commanding, "Open it!" her strict tone an echo of the one Chad remembered from his parochial school days.

He looked at her, ready to pounce on her presumption, but riffled through the pages of the book in his hands instead.

“The pages,” he exclaimed, looking down, “they’re blank!”

“Yes... yes they are. Ever since you escaped.”

Again, it seemed to him reality was spinning away, the words making sense but not the context. “Escaped? Escaped from what? From where?”

“From in here,” she said gently, tapping the pages.

“I... I don’t understand.”

She stroked his face gently, her voice sweet, calming. “Sure you do. You remember.” She paused for a second, her hands now caressing his temples. “Remember.”

The flood of recollection, a torrent of images rushing at him with almost physical force, dizzied him. He’d been incarcerated and they’d deliberately had two lackeys arrested for robbing a convenience store just so they could get inside and kill him. He knew it, and they knew he knew it. He’d thought he’d be safe in jail, but realized he’d been left with only had one choice: die or escape. Yes, he remembered now, remembered finding some mugwort on the outskirts of the yard—and skirting *outside* the novel—chewing it raw. Awash in new-found vitality, he willed himself right out of the pages of the book and into the world of the reader.

“I have to die,” he conceded.

“Yes, I’m afraid you do. You don’t belong here.”

“But I don’t *want* to!” he objected.

“No... no you don’t, but I promise, I make it quick.”

“What do you mean *you* make it—?” He never finished the question. He caught, from the corner of his eye the name of the book, *Nowhere To Hide* and the author’s name below it: *Kennedy DuMont*.



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Classic and  
Extra Virgin

## the mule & his purse

B.W. Archer

in such moated and grubbed hours  
as these,

scrubbed and propped for a myth  
of hands that spirit an early carcass  
to ignorant treasure;

the detonator of one's only keep  
ruptures many a blameless light, goading  
with it's vigil of bread and lice from end  
to ragged end.

wrangler of the pinched flesh, loitering  
in my tomb -

what am I?

jangling cold the noose of a smile in the  
never-pause of a breathless nod,

counting the dregs of dregs,

while the wretches make holy their  
cells of public greed.



## to write your name red

B.W. Archer

to write your name red in the  
haunches of dawn

I will unpick the hackled silence  
and drape it's question upon the  
hides of stars

time's mocking paw, blood-fogged  
and mapless, reflected through  
season's ranks

will shout down at day's break  
a puzzling joy

and head hung in it's numbered  
issue, the bone-white expanse will  
void this lonely document

for when come the whiles, moribund  
in their flagellation of clownery  
and regress

all elements shall fall equal with  
emancipation

as the branded eye swivels north  
forever



# the seeded ghost in repetition

B.W. Archer

as the seeded ghost, in repetition, culls  
the hour's contempt

hope in it's comely treason gifts a pulse  
to the scratched image long filed in  
childhood's gaze

if in man's gait and stuffed nerve a black  
penance offers no shell of refuge, no morsel  
of light

the vessel bred in it's drift-less echo to the  
vagaries of the flesh will reset the creeping  
earth; the draperies of id thrown wide to the  
core

and to the heavens, the loaded hand aligned





# called in sick

Mykki Rios

self bedridden watching time change  
gold through off-white blinds  
marine light

waves cool on skin  
undecorated walls  
he's awake indifferent

exhales fog  
grey matter dense  
clouds heavy

mental molecules dust mites  
sink sunbeams lower  
past windowsills horizons

aqueous yearning  
for a sky  
where he will have breathed  
out all of himself

fasting is pain  
immersed with light  
clarifying a form

wadded bubblegum heart  
all that clings  
putty soft chewing itself

until free from sheets he feels almost full  
blue-green rainfall drums in his ears

wash away purify  
unhinge spinal sticking point  
his swamp flows quartz clear

waters between mossy rib bones  
deliver open lotuses  
throaty frog chirping cricket

lightning bug and hazy bonfire  
weave through folds of blinds  
the ivy hair spilled over pillows



# going to bed// *dream journal*

Mikki Rios

I sleep in fumes of vetiver diffusing. Dab my temples with lavender oil, the doping up of herbalists. My thought is the pain; unknowing the opiate I keen for.

*a house in the forest soaked black frosted outline pellucid over laid stone*

Doors open. The poppy blooms. Shrinks. A cinnamon point. In time space and skin.

*an alleyway spray painted into form blush o cheekbones uncontrolled jawline shadowed nail polish chipped chewed confirmation bite-marked thighs*

The apex of my being moving downwards from my neck to my arm.  
For a short while anyways.

*back a roadmap of knife all tells me i am but i am not mine*

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Then my skin is fiery with cloves and ginger root. Stroke my back through the thin shirt of summer.

*the snow is falling owl feathers the other three seasons are a home indistinguishable from the slums lovenests the woods*



# signal crash

Mikki Rios

Grey spaces/lightless eyes

fingertip fizzle fry  
the brain/a simple action

plug socket/copper nerve

bedroom reeling amnesiac electric  
caresses crazy with dreams

thin casing elastic feel shrapnel healed over poking through in

whose limbs  
of untarnished silver/ecstatic fog

not sure when where lines cross

a choir in glue voices strangle

visionless with a grin  
unseen ceiling refocusing

white roots/exposed wires  
aluminum battery/brain

chemical stains  
stream in through cracks

interface crashes  
sparking feedback

framework twisted  
he whirs and shudders

sleep mode



# the world book

Rick Paar

When I was a little kid, I'd lie in bed and think about what I'd try to save if we had a fire. Assuming that my mom and dad and little sister all escaped unharmed, the one thing I'd go back for was my baseball glove. The World Book Encyclopedia would have made the cut, but there were just too many books to carry and they were heavy. I'd would have burned to death by the time I got to Volume M.

I loved our World Book. I didn't read it cover to cover, Aalborg (a city in Denmark) to Zymase (a yeast enzyme), I read the way I still read to this day. I jumped around to whatever grabbed my attention. I'd obsessively read for a while, put it aside and play baseball until dark, come back in and have at it again, picking up some oddball item. I spent hours turning pages and being astounded by things no one seemed to care about: iron ore production of the Baltic states, the sawed-off presidency of William Henry Harrison. I couldn't get over the idea that this one set of books had so much stuff in it. Anything that was important was in there, and anything that wasn't, wasn't worth knowing.

One late afternoon, September 26, 1960, three weeks before my tenth birthday, my dad called my mother from work. "Can you handle one more plate for dinner tonight?" My father was in his third year as a professor at Springfield College (Birthplace of Basketball, look it up in the World Book) that was celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Because he was untenured, he leaped at the chance to chaperone the man giving the lecture the next day .

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My mother said, "Sure, who's coming to dinner?"

"Aldous Huxley."

I was stunned. Aldous Huxley? I think I read about him in the encyclopedia. I ran to the living room, looked him up and read about him again. Aldous Huxley? And he's going to eat dinner with us? I wanted to tell my friends but none of them would have cared. "Did he play for the Red Sox?" "Did he know Elvis?" "What a stupid name. Aldous? Who names their kid Aldous?"

I don't remember what we ate and I'm not sure I ate anything at all because I was sitting across the table from someone who was in the freaking World Book Encyclopedia. I kept staring at him as he sipped his tea, but I'm almost certain that he didn't catch me because he had horrible vision. The guy could barely see without his magnifying glass.

My mom asked, "Mr. Huxley, would you care to stay and watch the first Kennedy Nixon debate?"

Mr. Huxley said, "Thank you. I would like that."

And so, after dinner the five of us and our dog Pepper sat in our small living room, in front of our ten-inch Admiral black and white television and watched our favorite senator duke it out with my family's most hated man, Tricky Dick Nixon.

There were only a few of things I recall about Mr. Huxley that night. The first was that he was tall. The second was that he looked old. (But everyone older than high school looked old to me.) The third and most vivid memory was that he periodically pulled himself up from his rocking chair and ambled to the TV, where he would take out his magnifying glass, look at the screen, nod a bit, and amble back, only to do it again a few minutes later until the debate ended and my dad drove him to his hotel.

We had someone famous in our house! It was an unforgettable night for sure, but what was even more unforgettable was that my mom never once cursed “that lying fuck Nixon.” That wasn’t like her.

Years later, when I was a college professor trying mightily to have my students understand just how connected we all are, I’d shake hands with everyone and say, “You are now one degree of separation away from Aldous Huxley.” Silence.

“You know, Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*.” No reply.

So, I tried to up the ante. I shook their hands again and this time I said, “Huxley’s grandfather was Charles Darwin’s best friend. You are now five degrees of separation from Charles Darwin.” That was only a bit better.

They have Google, I had the World Book. I still think the World Book is better.

And here’s a bit of trivia I bet you didn’t know. John Kennedy and Aldous Huxley both died on the same day, November 22, 1963. You could look it up in the World Book. Or you could use Google. It’s up to you.



# houses

Tamara Fricke

I dream-  
a house of glass with  
walls of light and floors of sound.  
I am breathless in the halls  
afraid of a cold that never reaches me,  
scared of cracks that never come,  
alive with disillusion that this place  
is my home.

Before,  
I lived in a sea of wheat  
waiting for harvest  
warmed by walnut frames,  
linen walls and candle light  
hunted by an unknown looming, wolf-deadly dread,  
more precise than disdain,  
storm-sure in constancy.

I don't know when I moved.

Sometimes I miss the mice,  
but the sea and the glass and the light  
managed the threshing.  
With no path backwards  
the dread never took shape,  
only the on-coming storm remains;

And now I do not know  
which is more apart of me,  
the walls I've constructed to shelter,  
the weathered eye that keeps the storm,  
or the gale that howls to be heard.



# the club

Tamara Fricke

*Inspired by the 1940 Rhythm Club Fire in Natchez, Mississippi.*

I was built to roar, didn't they know?  
The smithy that hewed oak timbers  
built me sturdy, built me to endure  
the thunder of his shoulders, the rigidity  
of form, hammerscale's tang and  
smelt he casts aside; wide enough to shoe,  
tall enough not to smother,  
I was industrious exhaustion  
and I did my job with rock surety, natch.

I was built to weather brimstone, didn't they know?

The church sanctified me,  
wrapped me in steel to  
steel the congregation  
against the wailing tides of sin  
that crashed against my doors,  
crafted windows to dispel hell's  
building heat; form and function at heretical  
odds, foreshadowing earthbound perdition.

I was built to be a gas, didn't they know?

The Spanish moss that dandied  
my rafters became my flashpoint;  
my metal sides recrafted furnace  
fury in three-part harmony, and  
raged with the orchestra who  
played to beat the firebrand  
in 4/4 time while the boarded past  
shackled fate to the dance floor.

I was built for history, didn't they know?

My oak, my metal, perfected acoustics  
that had that swing swinging,  
screaming for the fences,  
racing to take 746 people with me  
into the record books, redesigning  
the songs and windows, and doorways  
as I turned to slag and magnetized  
Mississippi, once again.



# at the mfa boston, june 23, 2021

Tamara Fricke

*Inspired by Porsha Olayiwola's installation, spoken word performance, and call for responses.*

*say my name & i* explode across your vision  
like tomorrow's opening pitch across the black,  
smearing the horizon with my spleen, knowing  
none of us can keep promises built on landfill  
lies while building libraries all the same.

*call me out & i* will ring richer, deeper, clearer  
than your first sip after 40 days dry, wringing  
tighter than knuckles buckled under the tension  
arthritis and time bind, with more conviction  
than a holy writ written on our backs, in blood.

*i reimagine* the colors we all swear are true  
and promise to only dream in shaded grays  
until Earl Grey himself takes Lady Cosgrove  
away from the pyre and proclaims every woman  
a witch and every witch holy.

*and i announce* the resignation of my consignment,  
promising only to sing our bodies electric, eclectic,  
empowered and enfranchised with the surety of a sunrise,  
backed with hurricane force and squalled fury  
as the holy promise of every dream ever built  
from landfill lies through the pitched black.





**prisoner**  
Marian Kent

Time  
was  
we were  
stupid, had  
no idea the cost  
of joy, its frayed edges faded,  
thinning, splinters at the heart  
of things, always cold



**morning breath**  
Marian Kent

The green dream  
true sweet rain  
of blue morning  
sighs welcome  
lonely souls  
give cover to grief  
give time for pause  
and the chance  
to try again



**portrait of a woman buttoning her blouse**  
Marian Kent

In a window  
romantically shadowed  
by streetlight  
pulling a stray thread  
thinking about all the ways  
to pronounce the word  
angel



## *ballad: surviving*

Jerome Berglund

*“Clowns can get away with murder.”*  
Truer words never heard here.  
Train every babe krav maga,  
insight motives ulterior.

Hammer not to take the sucker,  
trust a proffered pupper.  
Watch families closely whenever  
friends invite for supper.

Question commands of authorities,  
balk at collars, badges.  
Aim squarely for the cajones,  
take out eyes with scratches.

Secret all princesses safely  
away in towers higher.  
Enshroud reposing roses with  
prickliest of briars.

Never shall any window be  
accessed by ground level.  
Shout for help e'en if our deaths is  
threatened by the Devil.

On our watch conjure best Fort Knox,  
vulnerable no respects.  
A locked down stronghold befitting  
what in vaults it protects.

So family jewels aren't rummaged through  
or taken from stowing.  
We're all foreseeably stands between  
they and Charon's rowing.

One thing substantial guards against  
hungry bottomless void.  
Knows a little of what's going  
on, does a paranoid.



## *in memoriam: cootie catcher*

Jerome Berglund

Ribald humor can seem a gaffe —  
At tender age in the farmyard,  
Learned one must always be on guard;  
But has been known to make glum laugh.

Cooties it might sound outrageous,  
Is this how tykes shown affection?  
Try as might roused no projection.  
But in fact are quite contagious...

Were I older be less timorous —  
Moving flower of origami,  
Fortune telling, flaps beyond me...  
Scoff at slight ten-year age difference!

Stern rebuking, palm her face hit?  
They surprised us, vitriolic!  
Used to, live with alcoholic.  
Mother quarantining patient...

All my firsts dragged through the foul mud —  
Spready, very nearly bought it!  
Thankfully I never caught it...  
Pies each too rich for my young blood.

If sired two children, heaven sent!  
Hands at poker, some stop and frisks:  
Pot's rewards don't outweigh their risks.  
Drilled in significance of consent.



## *spenserian stanza:*

Jerome Berglund

*"Lewd did I live, & evil I did dwell"*

- John Taylor

*Let me bun you up a brat good neighbor -  
On this hallowed, manicured patch of ground.  
No, frank is perfectly fresh to savor,  
Putrefied odor must be elsewhere found...  
This mole infestation going around!  
Been driving the missus near up the wall,  
Beneath dining room always scratching sounds.  
Poison, traps, whatever takes I'll see their downfall,  
Must have caught by now 'bout thirty buggers in all...*



bike among friends  
Jim Ross

## dry and victorious

Donna Lynch

When we fear dying  
is it the possibility of suffering  
or the thought of heaven  
or hell  
and which one we'll call home  
or the idea of being nothing  
being nowhere?  
Or do we preemptively mourn  
all the things we'll miss  
all the chances never taken  
all the natural wonders  
we might never get to see?  
Or is it that we simply can't conceive  
of a time and a space  
without us in it  
and knowing  
deep down  
that we needed the world  
more than it needed us  
and that all the things that mattered  
only mattered  
because we let them?



## the arrogance of living

Donna Lynch

When you live  
where everything can kill you  
A bite  
A sting  
A burn  
A thirst  
you always know  
—no matter if you think you've failed—  
every time your lungs  
take another breath  
and your heart, another beat  
free of poison  
free of dust  
you're doing something right.



# the heroes in juarez

Mireya S. Vela

In a city like Juarez, Mexico women are easy to kill. Femicide is so common, the people can't separate it from daily life. So, they learn to live with it. Women raise children in fear. They get married and find happiness amongst terror. They go to work knowing they might be killed. They might disappear. And that a good-bye to their beloved families might be the last time they talk to them.

Marisol is relieved to see the bus at the end of her workday. She's in her early 30s, but today she feels ancient. Her lower back hurts. She's always surprised when at the end of at 12-hour shift, she can unfurl her body straight—and she's a person again. She's been a costurera for decades. When she was twelve-years-old, her mother taught her to sew, so she'd have a skill. Her mother had also been a costurera. At the factory, she is one in rows and rows of woman making clothes that will sell in the United States. The clothes she makes are better than the trash she's wearing.

She wipes a hand over the front of her cheap polyester top, still covered in threads. The threads get into everything. At work, she often feels she's got a mouthful of threads. On bad days, she imagines her lungs filling up with cloth lint. She imagines that this job is what will kill her. She dreams of the day when some brown skinned puta might make *her* clothes for a change.

**56** The bus arrives in cloud of dust. Marisol climbs up, annoyed that the older man in a yellow tracksuit sweater talking to the driver refuses to move as she passes. She presses her body against him to squeeze passed him. The nearly empty bus heaves forward. She stumbles down the aisle to choose a place to sit. She lands hard on a seat towards the middle of the bus. A girl and boy are making out in the back of the bus. They are practically horizontal. In this heat, she can't imagine locking bodies with someone.

The couple in the back moans. They undulate as if they are one creature.

“Over the clothes only, Roman. We're on the bus for godsakes.”

“Just a little,” Roman says.

“No,” she laughs, “Ya, ya, Roman. Ya llegamos.”

The girl pushes him off her and gets up. The boy trots after her, adjusting the front of his shirt. At the next stop, they both leave.

Marisol is deeply aware that she is alone with two men—the bus driver and the man in the yellow sweater. She clutches her purse more closely. Women get dumped and raped every day. But she clutches her purse more closely anyway.

The older man in the yellow sweater turns to look at her.

“Esta sola,” the older man says to the driver.

“Si, pues,” the driver says.

The driver looks at her in the rearview mirror. His penetrating gaze makes her fidget. That pause, as the driver stares, saves her. Before the bus can move again, there is a rattling knock at the door.

The door swings open. A tall person in a hoodie comes in and sits two rows behind Marisol. The person is wearing black baggy pants, gloves, and a pair of boots. The hoodie is pulled over the head to cover the face. It looks like one of the local thugs that runs with the gangs in the area. But the way the tall figure moves makes Marisol think if it might be a girl. No, that can't be right. No girl would be on the buses at this time of night. It's too dangerous. The driver and the other man turn back to look at the hooded person.

“Adonde?” the bus driver yells.

But the person doesn't respond.

“Adonde?” he yells louder.

The person raises a middle finger.

“Que la chingada?” the bus driver says.

But the bus driver put the bus in gear, and they jerk forward.

Marisol's stop is at the end of the line. She hugs her purse beneath folded arms. Despite the heat, she wishes she were wearing a sweater to provide an extra layer.

It's twenty more minutes before the bus reaches the end of the line. Marisol waits in a nervous sweat. Her hands are trembling. Marisol stands before the bus makes a full stop to make a speedy exit. When the bus breaks, the old man in the yellow sweater stands.

“Buenas noches, compa,” the man says, “Nos vemos mañana.”

“Buenas noches,” the bus driver says and waves.

The older man exists. He zips his yellow sweater as he walks down the steps.

The hooded person leaves through the back exist. Marisol walks to leave from the front exit. The front exist always feels safer to her.

Outside, it's dark and hot. In that part of town, the streetlights aren't reliable—flickering on and off as if it's Christmas. Marisol gathers herself to begin the 10-minute walk home. She decides to say a prayer as she walks to calm her mind. She tells herself she is imagining the danger. If she's fast, she can get home in 7 minutes.

She's only taken a few steps when the man in the yellow sweater grabs her. Marisol yells in surprise. Despite her suspicions, she's still shocked. In the hot night air, she breaks out into a cold sweat. The man wraps his arms around her from behind.

"Quieta, quieta. Tranquila. No te va pasar nada," the man says behind her.

He breathes into her ear. She can smell the cigarettes and liquor on his breath. Marisol shrinks.

Marisol hears the crunch of the bus driver's boots as he exits the bus. He's taller than he imagined. She takes a breath to scream, but the bus driver punches her. She tastes her own blood. A sob forms in her throat. Her mouth throbs.

"No," she yells.

He hits her again.

"One more word, we'll kill you first then rape you. Entiendes?"

She nods.

The bus driver looks her over.

"She's scrawny. And a bit older than I prefer," the bus driver tells the man in the yellow sweater.

"Hurry up," the other man says.

The bus driver takes off his jacket. The man in the yellow sweater forces Marisol to the ground. She struggles and fights. She doesn't plan to be raped quietly. When he undoes her pants, and she growls. Then, there is stillness. The yellow sweatered man is staring at the bus driver. The bus driver's eyes roll up, as if he is staring beyond his eyelids and into the heavens. His mouth falls open as if in prayer. Then Marisol notices the blood. The bus driver folds like a rag. The other man starts yelling. He is staring into the darkness. He's scrambling to his feet, turning frantically, looking for danger.

That's when Marisol sees the gleam of the blade. It's the hooded person on the bus. The blade swings and the older man collapses. Marisol stares as his yellow sweater blooms in large red poppies.

Marisol screams.

"Shut up."

Marisol screams more.

"Shut up. Stop screaming!"

But Marisol can't stop. She wants to scream and scream.



“Oh, my god. Shut up. You’ll call the entire city here,” the girls says.

The woman lowers her hood. Marisol stops cold. She stares at the pretty woman.

“Que? Como?”

The woman reaches down to Marisol. She takes her hand and lifts her from the ground.

“Go home,” she says, “You’re safe for now.”

Marisol is shaking. But she nods. She finds her purse and rushes home. But she can’t help herself, she turns again to look. The girl is gone.

Maria is in the kitchen cleaning up. It’s late but Maria hates doing the pots and pans in the morning. She sighs deeply and grabs the frying pan. Maria turns the frying pan and reaches for the powdered soap and the wire brush. She is scrubbing vigorously when she hears the key on the front door. She stops and reaches for the towel to dry her hands.

“Valeria, pense que estabas dormida.”

“No, mami,” Valeria responds.

Valeria runs to kiss her mother.

“Donde estabas? Porque no llamaste? Casi son las 11 de la noche, Valeria.”

“Sorry, sorry,” she says, dismissively.

Valeria rushes to her room. She puts down her backpack. She takes off her hoodie and throws herself into the bed. She immediately falls asleep.

In the morning, after her mother goes to work, Valeria cleans her knives and does a load of laundry. She grabs her school backpack. It’s a pink thing her mom decorated. Before she places the other backpack under the bed, she stuffs the clean hoodie inside with the knives. Her mother won’t be back before she gets home, but she makes it a habit to be cautious. She arrives at school in time to begin her literature class. They are studying *Pedro Paramo* today. Valeria loves the language in the book. As she listens to the words, she images all the ghosts living in her city, and she’s sighs at the romantic notion.

That night, Valeria goes hunting again. During the day, she finds ways to control herself. But at night, the boredom sets in. She’s awake, nothing is happening, and her body becomes tight like a spring. She knows she’ll find relief through death. She gets hungrier after every kill. She can’t be satiated. When she started doing this, she thought she was simply feeding a hunger. That with the feeding, she would stop craving. But that hasn’t happened. She just wants more.

She gets on a bus, on a different stop. She gets off that bus and goes on another. She spends her entire night doing this. The bus drivers seem extra cautious—even when she gets on with her regular street clothes. She’s mostly feeling everything out—scoping out the landscape. But as suspected, everyone is on high alert. Well, no easy kills tonight. No men she can conquer. Tomorrow will be better. They become lax after the fear dies down a bit.

She’s been doing this for a while and the pattern is always the same.

Valeria is crabby the next morning. She drags herself from her room and into the kitchen to feed a different hunger. It’s a Saturday and her mother has made breakfast.

“Y esa cara?”

“Ah, ama. I’m just tired. I spent all night studying. You know how it is.”

“Not me. I was a horrible student. I preferred to hang with my friends,” Maria says.

“Yea. That’s right. You were a party girl,” Valeria says.

“Not a party girl. I just liked having fun.”

Maria laughs.

“But your papi would be so proud of you. He was such a good student. He loved to learn. I know he wanted big things for you,” Maria says.

“Yea. He wanted a *lot* of things.”

Valeria turns so her mother can’t see the look on her disgusted expression.

“There’s eggs and beans on the table,” Maria says, “And I picked up that newspaper you wanted for your school project.”

“Gracias.”

Valeria sits down to eat. She doesn’t immediately grab the paper. She’s eager to see where they found those dead men. Her excitement might be misconstrued and look weird. So, she waits.

“Well, if you are not going to read it, I will,” Maria says.

Maria puts down the basket of steaming tortillas and picks up the newspaper.

“Now, let’s see what’s happening out there in the world,” Maria says, “Apparently, the world doesn’t stop just because I’m out there working 10 hours a day.”

Valeria smiles and keeps eating.

When the silence grows too long, Valeria asks, "So, what's happening?"

"They found some dead bus driver over by Avenida Romero."

"Oh," Valeria says, "Quien?"

"Yea, someone cut his throat. Pobrecito. His family is devastated. He was killed along with another man. They aren't sure whether the two got into a fight or whether they were robbed."

"Wow, what do they say about the families?"

"The bus driver was a family man. He was the main wage earner in his household. He's survived by his wife of 23 years and his six children."

"What about the other man?"

"They haven't found out who he is, yet."

"Wow."

Valeria keeps eating.

"Can you pass me the tortillas?"

Maria pushes the basket of warm tortillas towards Valeria.

"This is really sad. Things haven't changed. I remember when your father drove the bus. It's such a dangerous job. Remember when we found out he had been killed?"

"It was two years ago, mom. Not that long. Of course, I remember."

"He was such a good man."

Maria begins to tear up. Valeria doesn't want any part of this.

"Yea. What are you doing today, ma?"

Valeria gets up and puts her dishes in the sink.

"You never want to talk about him, Valeria. I don't understand you."

"I don't like to relive that time. There's no point," Valeria says.

"But we need to remember him. I think about that night a lot. I remember the panic. And not being able to find out. I looked frantically in your room."

Valeria realizes her mom is about to relive that night again. She's got to bring her back.

"I was out for a walk, remember? You stop asking me to do that after dad died."

"Yes, I remember. I wish you'd been here when the police came to report his death. I really needed you here. I just wish—"

"Leave the dishes mom," Valeria says, "I'm taking a shower, then I'll wash them."

Valeria hands her mother a napkin to wipe her teary face.

"Okay, mija. Gracias. I'm so lucky to have such a kind and beautiful daughter."

In the evening, Valeria leaves the house again. She's wearing a pair of tight jeans and a flowy cold shoulder top. The only make-up she wears is eyeliner and lip balm. She doesn't have any friends. The girls at school don't like her. Valeria is pretty enough to be part of the popular crowd, but her rude confidence and cold eyes scare the other girls. Valeria has wavy long hair. She's curvy but tall. At first, her cold nature only deterred the girls. The boys were still interested until she stabbed one of them.

The rumor Valeria spread around the school was that he'd tried to rape her. The boy had talked to often about how he liked her. He wanted to date her, hold her, buy her things, be inside her. He wanted to possess her. Valeria played along. But became obsessed with the idea of being inside him. What would his insides feel like?

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"I want to make out," she'd said to him.

"Oh, yea?"

He'd been gentle, checking along the way what she was okay with.

"I want all of you," she said.

"Sex? I want that, too."

"Yes."

They'd made out a bit longer. When she told him she was ready, he reached down to undo his pants. That's when she stabbed him. She sat there as he reached for her and gurgled. She'd shoved a finger into the wound. Oh, the boy was right, this was very nice.

The other students gave her a wide berth. And Valeria was fine with it.

"Where are you going?" Maria said.

"I'm catching a movie with some friends."

“Have fun and be careful,” Maria says, as Valeria walks out the door.

On the way to the bus stop, Valeria changes into her hunting gear. She pulls the hood over her head and climbs on the bus closest to her house. It doesn't really matter where she starts, she will roam the buses until 12 AM when the last bus stops.

On entering, she heads to the seats in the back. She sees Marisol towards the front of the bus. Marisol looks tired and leans her head against the window. She looks like she's lost weight. Valeria avoids her gaze. But Marisol sees her and perks up.

Marisol keeps turning back to look at her, until Valeria becomes annoyed and gets off on the next stop. Marisol follows.

“Wait! Espera! Espera!”

Valeria keeps walking. She doesn't rush. She doesn't turn. She just walks.

Eventually, Marisol catches up. She grabs her by the arm to get her attention.

“I want to thank you,” Marisol says.

She's panting. She places a hand over her chest as she struggles for breath.

“What? Why? No.”

“You saved my life,” Marisol says.

“Oh. No, it's fine.”

“You saved me. I can't thank you enough. I don't know what I would have done if you weren't there.”

“It's nothing,” Valeria says.

“What? No. You don't understand. You are an angel. Because of you I went home to kiss my children. The women in the factories are calling you their guardian angel.”

“Senora, I don't know you. I really didn't mean to save you.”

“What? What do you mean? You did save me.”

“No, dona. This isn't about you.”

But Marisol won't shut up. She's going on and on about how Valeria is the defender of women, a hero in the city, about how they all feel abandoned.

“Eres una santa,” Marisol says and reaches to take her hands.

“Stop. Just stop. I don’t care about you. I just like to kill.”

“What? You are a hero. The women in the factories talk about how you are our guardian angel.”

Guardian angel? Why does she keep repeating this?

“You are our protector. We go home to our children because of you.”

“I just like killing.”

Marisol stares at her blankly. Why doesn’t this girl understand?

“I’m hunting. I like the blood. I like hunting those men. I like the way it feels when my knife cuts through them. I like watching them bleed out like pigs. I feed off their expression of surprise and terror. They don’t see me coming because they are so focused on you. You’re just the bait, so I can get what I need.”

“What? No! Why are you saying these things? You are our hero.”

“Doña, this is Juarez. There are no heroes.”

Valeria extricates her arm from Marisol’s grip.

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“Look, this seems to be working for the both of us. So, let’s both enjoy this while we can.”

“Tú nos puedes dar justicia.”

“Yo, no,” Valeria laughs.

Marisol just stares at her.

“Our goals are different,” Valeria says.

“Don’t you see—” Marisol says.

“No, you don’t see. You need to find someone who cares. And quite frankly, it’s obvious no one does. People die every day because no one cares. And I don’t either. I’m just riding this wave of violence until they catch me.”

Valeria walks towards the next bus stop. She suddenly turns.

“Señora, you interrupted my work. Don’t do that again.”

Marisol sees the rabid look in her eye. She shrinks and wraps her arms around herself, staring as her hero fades into the night.



## sarah's womb

Tzivia Gover

Laughed, and said: Eve  
conceived of a rib;  
Athena an afterthought.  
This clear-eyed  
Covenant: Abraham's  
firstborn not yours. Yours  
will be born on a gust  
yes. Ripe red Joy  
and Danger. Push.



## the cave of machpelah

Tzivia Gover

The Cave of Machpelah

What Abraham bargained for  
Buried me  
Where I lay down  
My sacrifice  
My womb, moon bright  
Cave buried  
Within me.



## late for nothing

Tzivia Gover

*"her name will be Sarah." Genesis 17:15*

You can call me desert  
Call me by the names my people gave me  
Call me back, the way the moon did  
when I turned my back on him.  
Call me misguided. I traded my dolls for you.  
Call me naïve. I thought I had the power  
to close my womb. Until you used yours  
to pry it open. Call me laughter.  
Call me too old for this.  
Call me every joy in the book.  
Call my heart parched  
to cracking. And then the rains.  
Call me late for nothing,  
though it was an eternity  
I was right on time.



# the sex side of life

Charles Rammelkamp

Wilkinson, the prosecutor, seemed to relish the words he read aloud to the jury that April afternoon in 1929: “The man’s special sex organ or penis, becomes enlarged and stiffened,” the words like acid burning his throat, the delicious taste of moral indignation. “It easily enters the passage in the woman’s body called the vagina,” he went on, the sweat gleaming on his lip. You could tell he was enjoying himself. “By a rhythmic movement of the penis in and out, the sex act reaches an exciting climax or orgasm....”

Leaning over the jury box rail, Wilkinson crumpled the blue pamphlet in their faces. “Pure and simple smut,” he denounced the sex manual I’d written to educate my children. He warned that the children of our country would be led “not only into the gutter, but below the gutter into the sewer.” Oh, there’s nothing quite so satisfying as the rush of self-righteousness, is there?

The law I’d broken was the Comstock Act, named for the anti-vice crusader who died about the time I’d written *The Sex Side of Life* for my two young sons. My pamphlet had become so popular, churches, schools, the YMCA requested copies, which I sent through the mail, thus violating the act. I was fined \$300.

Of course, we appealed – the ACLU represented me, free of charge – and the next year the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in my favor, saying the defendant, Mary Ware Dennett, discussed the phenomena of sex in decent language, in a manifestly serious spirit that was not “obscene.”

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The upshot of the trial? In no small way we paved the way for Joyce three years later when *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses* allowed the novel to be published in the U.S.A. without fear of prosecution.

*The Sex Side of Life* went on: “This is followed by a sensation of peaceful happiness and sleepy relaxation. It is the very greatest physical pleasure to be had in all human experience.”

Even better than moral indignation and Puritanical outrage!





# antarctic discoveries

Charles Rammekamp

We found Captain Robert Falcon Scott's body in the middle of November, lying in a tent alongside Wilson and Bowers, three stiff corpses bundled up like mummies in their sleeping bags, nearly buried in a snowdrift. They'd reached the Antarctic pole back in January, only to find Amundsen, the Norwegian, had already driven his flag into the Pole, claiming the discovery five weeks ahead of him. Captain Scott had always seen Shackleton as his main rival. Such a sad irony in the discovery of his mistake.

But now we found this, the three of them perishing on the Ross Ice Shelf on their return trip, just a few months later. The last entry in Scott's diary, dated to the end of March? It was bitter. He blamed his failure on bad weather and bad luck – not on bad planning.

We set off from Cape Evans the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, eleven of us, to see if we couldn't discover their whereabouts, certain we wouldn't find them still living. Two weeks later we found their bodies.

We learned from Scott's diary that Edgar Evans had died in February. A month later, Lawrence Oates, who'd been suffering from frostbite, had left his companions in their tent with the words, "I am just going outside and may be some time." He'd had enough. His meaning was plain. That left only Wilson, Bowers and Scott, trapped in their tent by a fierce Antarctic blizzard, only eleven miles from One Ton Depot, their destination.

Scott's final words in the diary, from that previous March, eight months before we discovered them, said, "We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker."

The snow was higher than the door of their tent when we found it. They were trapped inside. Scott was half in and half out of his sleeping bag. The other two had been resigned to their fate, apparently sleeping to their death. The frost had made Scott's skin yellow and transparent. That's how Trygve Gran described it in his journal, anyway. To me it was a nightmare, a ghostly paleness, appropriate to the desolation of the ice around us. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

After the burial service, a modest but respectful observance, we collapsed the tent over their bodies. Then we built a snow cairn to mark the graves. What else could we do? Trygve used his own skis to build the cross above the cairn. He used Scott's own skis for the trek back. He was determined that the skis should complete the journey back, he said, "and they will."

"Jarvis, are you coming?" Lt.-Surgeon Atkinson, the leader of our party, shouted after me when I lingered by the site.



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# testimony

Michael Favala Goldman

A girl, too young  
to defend herself  
or to know  
what was right  
and proper  
was molested  
by a man she knew.

Everyone found out  
except her, she was  
too young  
to remember  
and no one  
had the courage  
to tell her  
what happened.

The event became  
a center  
of silence  
around which  
her relationships turned  
all conversations kept  
a distance  
from the high  
voltage  
void.

There were not hugs  
or even kind words  
for this girl  
surrounded  
by fear  
of divulging  
what shaped  
her doubt  
about what  
she really  
deserved.

The adults  
never appeared  
everyone aged  
slowly  
discovered neglect  
was not everything  
only a stipulation  
of upbringing.

The girl's trauma  
is still a void  
because she does not know  
the truth. Her soul  
a silent double  
her body  
a spritely desert  
of the unasked and  
unanswered.

Who really wants to know  
how faceless  
and spineless  
people supposed to love you  
can be.  
There are no rules  
only assumptions ignored,  
pacts rewritten  
to suit  
the cowardly.

Meanwhile a girl  
still suffers  
as we all do  
and the truth  
won't be told.  
The truth is a door  
through which the brave  
go free.



# in the realm of forms

Michael Favala Goldman

*after Plato*

An ideal bed.  
An ideal mosquito.  
An ideal tree.  
Anyone can recognize them.

In my mind  
an ideal you  
hounding my reality  
like an adamant specter.

Meanwhile  
I take myself for granted  
can't see how  
I can be improved.

Project your shadows  
onto my cave walls  
so I can find  
my way out.



# i don't even think about death anymore

Ernest Brute

I don't even think about death anymore

California is the buttstock  
Maine is the barrel  
Florida is the magazine  
Wisconsin is the ejection port

I don't even think about death anymore

The bay window is the buttstock  
The garage is the barrel  
The chimney is the rear sight  
The front steps is the magazine

I don't even think about death anymore

The heels are the buttstock  
The head is the barrel  
The left fist is the magazine  
The right knee is the upper receiver

I don't even think about death anymore

The spacebar is the buttstock  
The monitor camera is the barrel  
The mouse is the magazine  
The escape key is the ejection port

I don't even think about death anymore



# if i had any imagination i'd invent a new way of washing up

Gerald Yelle

I can't wait to try my new idea for breakfast. Instead of French toast I'm going to add coarsely crumbled bread to the egg mix and fry it. First I have to sort through this load of potatoes we've been growing on the roof. I have to climb around on hands and knees, picking out the right ones to toss on the conveyor that runs along the roofline, like a cross between a ramp and a gutter, so they can roll down to the garden —where later I'll load them on the truck. Quality-wise the potatoes all look similar —some bigger than others. I don't know which to throw —the ones with open eyes?



## every face looks familiar

Gerald Yelle

I've seen so many human faces  
every time I see one  
I get the feeling I've already  
seen it or seen one like it  
like there are only so many  
facial types and  
they all resemble one another  
like some kind of  
visual trick —a sort of mental  
tic —or déjà vu.  
Even newborns look familiar.  
I don't know why it only  
happens with faces.  
I see a balloon or fire hydrant  
or top-loading  
washer —it's like I'm  
looking at the first of its kind.



# human form

Gerald Yelle

If you believe you received this message in error please forward it to  
the next name on the list.  
Then get to know that person.  
Ask them what they do with their life.  
If they tell you they're caught in a trap say it's the human condition.  
Tell them it's time to leave the human condition behind.  
But do it in such a way that they don't think you mean dying.  
Because it's not about that.  
I frankly don't know what it's about.  
But say it anyway.  
Say it makes you feel uncomfortable.  
Ask them what they believe is possible.  
Find out if they want to escape the trap they're in.  
Don't change the subject.  
Keep them guessing.  
Let them know how it feels.  
Tell them it's slippery.  
Say it's a scream –a sore subject.  
Say you never know for sure.  
It's like joining a cult.  
Tell them it's like becoming a god.  
It might be a little romantic.  
It might be transformative like the power rangers.  
Like being pop psychotic.  
It might be original.  
It might be the end of forever.  
You might have to follow them.  
They might think you're a stalker.  
If they call the police you might end up in jail.  
You might take a page from the bible.  
You might undervalue the breadth and depth of first and last responses.  
You might put this note in your pocket.  
Then change your clothes and leave them under the chair.



# weathering the world

RC deWinter

cold spring day  
vague sun trying to  
break through a  
veil of gray  
uncertainty as if it  
knows we need its warmth

but rainclouds  
are blowing in from  
the west on  
the breath of  
a cold wind carrying the  
tears of the fractured

world on its  
frigid tongue as i  
shiver and  
pray for an  
end to the slaughter of the  
innocents half a

world away  
with one eye on the  
weather and  
the other  
on the ticking clock counting  
down the seconds to

midnight and  
now the rain is here  
battering  
us in the  
dark majesty of what we  
can't control and in

the realm of  
what we can but don't  
bombs explode  
bodies fall  
and the earth keeps spinning in  
the silence of time



# roundabout

RC deWinter

as wet music slides down the windows  
in the teeth of this rainy day  
i want to kiss you  
tongues fencing in the newness of us //  
in the teeth of this rainy day  
we can be glamorous  
tongues fencing in the newness of us  
in the rhythm of our heartbeats //  
we can be glamorous  
strangers no longer strangers  
in the rhythm of our heartbeats  
let me show you how //  
strangers no longer strangers  
i want to kiss you  
let me show you how  
as wet music slides down the windows//

i want to kiss you  
in the teeth of this rainy day  
tongues fencing in the newness of us  
as wet music slides down the windows //  
in the teeth of this rainy day  
we can be glamorous  
as wet music slides down the windows  
in the rhythm of our heartbeats //  
we can be glamorous  
strangers no longer strangers  
in the rhythm of our heartbeats  
let me show you how //  
strangers no longer strangers  
tongues fencing in the newness of us  
let me show you how  
i want to kiss you //





# what i could tell you if i felt like writing

RC deWinter

i haven't felt like writing all day  
and there's so much i could tell you  
how my son died on my birthday  
and the time when i was five years old  
and skidded on sand while riding my bike  
down a steep hill and split my chin open

and walked back home up that steep hill  
blood dripping between my fingers  
as i held it closed and no one stopped  
to help and how i screamed as the doctor  
in the emergency room pushed that  
curved needle through the wound as he  
forced that ragged skin back together

and how now that i'm old  
the scar sprouts small stubborn hair  
that never lets me forget

and what about the night i dreamed uncle dick died  
and how in the morning we got a phone call  
telling us uncle dick died  
and how i won that scholarship i didn't want  
to a snooty girls' catholic high school  
but was too afraid to turn it down

and how a lifetime later my car blew a tire  
on the highway at sixty miles an hour  
on thanksgiving morning and i flew  
through the air and survived though  
the cops told my brother i missed hitting  
a steel stanchion that would've killed me instantly  
by three feet

and how about those latenight into morning  
backgammon marathons in key west after the gigs were over  
that stopped when the man i played with disappeared  
and fastforwarding to now  
how i sit alone in a room with a chest full of heartbreak  
after the man meant for me disappeared too  
and there's so much more I could tell you  
but hey i haven't felt like writing all day



# a bitter taste

Patrick Scott

They sat in the car letting the quiet steep them in a sour mélange of history and unspoken threats. Each took a portion of the blame without fully accepting any of the whole.

“I hope this is everything you want it to be,” she said.

He heard the sorrow leaking into the back of her throat making the words drip with a pastiche of melancholy. He half expected the moisture to coat and mark him with a tag. Wanting this to end, he hit the unlock button and reached for the handle to the door.

“It will be. Thanks for bringing me. I could have gotten a ride with Tommy.”

“I know.”

The condensed sadness intensified with those two words. Small sounds invaded the humid space. The engine popped and pinged as components released their own hidden heat.

He pulled the handle permitting the outside air to cycle into the ecosystem. Absorbing the natural scents, he marveled at how damp air and rotting foliage baked in bright sunshine tasted like ambrosia on his tongue replacing stale cigarette smoke and secreted beer spilled from cans rattling around the backseat floorboards. He shoved his shoulder into the door.

“Wait,” she said.

Turning back, he looked into her red rimmed eyes swimming out of a face framed by blonde hair the shade of wet sand. He girded himself for what came next.

“You don’t have to rush off.”

“I-“ He stopped realizing a constant vain attempt to end every conversation. “I just want to get over to orientation and meet some people.”

“But you’re going to have Tommy with you.”

He focused on his dirty sneakers against the maroon mat with holes rubbed in it.

“Yeah, but he won’t be around all the time.”

As he said this, he thought of the home Tommy came from with its vaulted ceilings and landscaped lawn. He assumed Tommy would be in a rush to get back to his beautiful house and cheerleader girlfriend almost every weekend. He needed friends to survive here away from everything he had known.

“Well, when do you want me to come back and get you?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I can come back anytime. I could be here on Friday.”

“It’s just Tuesday. And your job.”

“Eh, it’s just a job. They won’t need me that much.”

“Yeah, they do.”

He knew what she was getting at without saying it. His face grew warm. Clenching his fists, he tripped over the words in the back of his mind admonishing to keep things quiet.

Smelling the newness of the late summer day, he longed to be free of the gravity of the situation. He pushed the door open the rest of the way. He unfolded his legs, climbed out of the front seat and bent it down to grab the army green, canvas rucksack with all his possessions.

He hung his head upon hearing the door on the opposite side of the long sedan covered with rusty pock marks open. He failed to clear her increasing gravitational pull.

Less than a year ago, he sat in a class learning about celestial forms where things like light, heat and matter all swirled together until, based on their proximity, generating an irresistible pull. He grew fascinated with these concepts. He saw beyond the math, the theory and the science. He identified something far deeper.

“Please don’t go. Not yet. I’m not ready to leave yet.”

“You don’t have to go back home right now.” He strove to keep his voice as neutral while staring over the car’s roof. “I just can’t stay.”

Breaking eye contact with her, he tucked his head through the strap and slung the bag around his shoulders. He pushed his hand into his front pocket of his jeans feeling the key to his dorm room. He pressed the jagged ridges into his tender fingertips.

He walked for the blocky building tucked under a canopy of trees. He heard footsteps on the hot asphalt and halted after only a few steps.

“What are you doing?”

Without answering the question, she barreled up to him and wrapped her arms around him. She gave a small sniff and squeezed him close.

“Please let me come with you.”

“I’d really rather you didn’t.”

“But everything is changing. I can’t be alone right now.”

He tilted his body to the left hoping to free himself from her serpentine grip. His body moved a fraction.

“You need to let me go.”

“Please.”

“Let me go.”

His voice sounded sharp in his own ears. He filled his lungs after her arms retreated.

Her head hung. She stepped back and issued a low, mournful wail like a toddler being reprimanded on the sugary cereal aisle. Bringing her face forward, she wore streaking tears and a bright pink glow around her nose.

He noted the raccoon rings around her eyes. He stared daggers at her hoping she might stop her display just this once.

She sobbed and staggered back a single step. Her wobbly legs reinforced the unstable appearance.

“You can’t let things be like this,” she said.

“Yes, I can.”

“But what will I do.”

“You will be an adult. That’s what you’re supposed to be.”

“I know, but you’ve never been away from the house for this long.”

“That’s normally your job.” He gave a curt nod emphasis. “You will be fine. Even if you won’t be, you can’t stay here. Get on the road and go home.”

“But-“

“But nothing. Go home.”

Each word launched from his mouth in a sharp staccato. A strange stillness dropped over the parking lot as though a tight dome covered them. The few other parents and students appeared trapped outside the bubble where time crept.

He stepped forward. His face pulled into a rictus grimace with his skin stretched near the breaking point to cover his skull. He counted the throbbing in his temple finding a corresponding drumbeat where his ribs joined in a loving embrace.

“You have nothing left to do here, so just leave.”

He watched her tears stop in mid tumble. He reached for her out of instinct.

“Don’t touch me,” she snarled back at him. “You think you’re so special and this is going to be the best thing that happened to you. I’ve got news for you. You’re not special at all. It’ll take a week before you’ll be begging for me to come and get you like you did when I sent you to stay with your stupid grandparents for a week. You didn’t even make it two day before you were blubbering to come home.”

Standing stock still, he permitted the words to wash over him in a single rush. He acknowledged the barbs as they attempted to snag on his skin. He searched her face not sure what he hoped to find in her furious scowl. He spun and continued toward the building.

“You’re going to be sorry.”

He heard the fire draining from her voice as the threat crossed the growing expanse between them. He counted steps before catching footfalls. He kept his forward momentum. He anticipated a rough hand on his shoulder spinning him to face her.

A car door opened and slammed closed. An engine roared to life giving off the impression of a monstrous beast calling for tribute.

He released the pent up breath. His pace slackened at the first bits of shade from the high trees. He attempted to identify the loosening in his chest as his breath mingled with the heaviness around him. He wondered if everything released sank to the moisture laden ground.

In the strange stillness, he caught a distant cry followed by the screech of tires. He found the combination odd. He thought it might have come from a movie.

Casting a quick glance over his shoulder, he found the wide grill of the maroon sedan barreling at him. He flung himself to one side. He landed with a thud sending a wave of impact through his body.

He froze with intellectual detachment as the sickening crunch vibrated up his body reminding him of a branch in the high trees back home snapping during a wind storm. His legs felt warm.

His head lolled to the side and pulled up toward the sun by the rucksack. He blinked at the bright sunlight peeking between the waving leaves of the trees. He watched the light retreat into a pinprick.

“Hey.” A new voice swam out of the darkness. “Roderick, is that you? What happened? Are you OK?”

He expended a great amount of energy turning toward the voice and focused his eyes. He saw the shocked face resolve.

“Tommy.”

“It’s me. Stay awake. OK?”

A resounding boom sounding too far away wormed its way back. Sirens cut through the fog and the low whispers. People gathered in a knot creating a strange, polychromatic backdrop.

He heard Tommy saying something else. He tried laughing and brought up a wet cough instead. He reached out as the light retreated again.

“Everything’s going to be OK now,” he croaked. “I’m out of there and that’s all I wanted to do.”

“You need to stay awake. OK? Stay up, Rod.”

He tried moving. His body felt too warm. He wanted to get the rucksack into his dorm room. He opened his mouth to say this to Tommy. He closed his eyes.

“Step aside. We’re here to help.”

“It’s all better now.”

He closed his eyes anticipating how things would change. He did not have to worry about her anymore.





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Ellen Mary Hayes

# healing properties

Karen Willard-Ribeiro

“Your skin doesn’t feel normal,” Jasmine says.

It takes a long moment for Maria’s brain to register this foreign suggestion—what the hell?

“But I have a suggestion for you.”

Jasmine’s internal processing is almost as loud as her voice and, frankly, all of her pregnant pauses and other nonverbals; it is quite obvious that she is tired of trying to help Maria feel better. Maria, who looks like the image of health, coming to see her each week complaining of joint pain and sleeplessness and any other manner of ailments that seem to be irreconcilable.

Maria perks up, forgetting for a moment that now her skin has yet another layer of wrongness.

“My suggestion is to get some mugwort—a lot of it—and boil it for 20-30 minutes and then add it to your bath water. Don’t throw out the herb, add it all to the tub and soak in it until you sweat. If you do this, and keep taking the ginger, you should see a decrease in the inflammation.”

“Um, okay. I’ve heard of mugwort. Isn’t it good for putting under your pillow for dreams or something?”

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“Yes, it has many important properties. I’ve learned so much from my father who comes from a line of healers.”

Maria thinks this is interesting and, if they were sitting across from each other having coffee in a cafe downtown, she might ask for more details about what it was like to grow up with healing wisdom in the family—especially from one’s father. But she is paying for this hour and is struggling enough to breathe and be present with all that is going on in her mind and body that she stays quiet. Until she remembers Jasmine’s advice.

“Do I have to order this mugwort online?”

“Oh no, it grows everywhere outside!” Jasmine looked out her office window. “In fact, it’s right along the street here. I’ll point it out to you when we’re done.”

Being ever obedient Maria harvests a few large handfuls of mugwort after leaving the office—more than what she felt she “should” have taken. After driving away she wished she had said a prayer of thanks. The edges of streets and roads don’t seem like a healthy place to grow, she thinks to herself. So many road salts and other chemicals, how can these wild plants thrive?

Maria hates Jasmine for her opinions, and even for her name. What would it be like to have the name of a flower? To have parents who devoted themselves to a child’s blossoming?

But she also is so grateful that she takes the effort to make helpful suggestions—and, Maria has to admit, Jasmine is very smart, intuitive, even if she is a bit crude, no-nonsense in how she shares her opinions.

After the bath, Maria feels refreshed. The mugwort has a nice fragrance. She doesn't know if the mugwort has done any healing in her joints or has reduced any of her inflamed worries about her family, but she has enjoyed the process of learning about and gathering this healing plant, boiling it, introducing it to her bath water in a sort of ceremonial way, and, spending time with it.

Maybe the experience has “planted seeds” in her, so to speak. Maria goes online and finds a website about native plants, enters her zip code, and reads up about all the amazing plant life in her neighborhood. She says a prayer for them. And then she adds to her prayer, a quixotic wish for everyone's skin to be healthy.



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# razzing patty

Frank Zahn

Patty was educated by Dominican priests and nuns, who preached hell, fire, and damnation long before it became the style of Southern Baptist preachers. And as soon as I moved in next door to her, and she found out I was a Jew, she set out to convert me to the true faith. And to her without question, that was the Catholic faith.

At first, I let her efforts go in one ear and out the other. But after a while, I couldn't resist the temptation to have some fun with it. When I made a humorous comment about something she preached, she either urged me to take her seriously, became irritated and defiant, or ignored the comment and continued her newfound mission in life—my conversion.

One day, when she was praising the work of the Catholic Church, which she always referred to as The Church, I brought up the issue of pedophile priests.

"Yeah, I hear what you're saying, Patty," I said. "The Catholic Church has done a lot of good in the world. But what about all those pedophile priests I've been hearing about?"

"There are rotten apples in every barrel," Patty snapped. Then she went on to explain that The Church, the body of Christ, is not guilty of sin when people in it sin.

**86** "A church is the congregation of people in it. Once the pedophile priests were exposed, your Church hierarchy protected them and attempted a coverup. And Church members continued to support it financially with their offerings," I said. "So everyone in your Church was culpable. Those who were not pedophile priests were enablers, which is not only just as sinful but criminal as well. Face it, Patty. Your Church is a sinful and criminal institution.

"It is not! And I have never done anything to enable pedophile priests!"

"Yeah, well, I don't see how you can get around it," I said with a teasing smile. "Maybe it's time for you to shop around for a different religion. How about becoming a Baptist? They don't have pedophile priests—maybe pedophile ministers but my guess is the numbers are smaller."

"I'm a Catholic and plan to stay that way, thank you very much. And you should take what I'm telling you seriously. I'm trying to help you. Can't you see that?"

"I do, but until you can come up with more convincing explanations of all these negative things I've heard about your Church, I want a break from your attempts to shove your religion up my . . .!"

"You watch your language!" she said. Then she looked up into the sky, and as she crossed herself, she added, "Please forgive him, Lord, for what he was about to say."

"Okay, Patty, I'll put it to you this way: Do I get a break from your attempts to shove your religion down my throat?"

“A break maybe, but don’t think for a minute I’m giving up on you.”

And trust me. She didn’t give up. I remember one morning when I started to reorganize my toolbox in my garage with the door raised. No sooner had I started than there she was with Bible in hand.

After a few pleasantries, she read the passages in Matthew that made Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples, the first head or Pope of the Catholic Church and sanctioned whatever he decided on articles of faith as church doctrine.

“Wow! That’s a lot of power,” I said. “But wasn’t Pete the guy who denied he knew J. C. not once but three times just before the Romans nailed him to the cross?”

“Three things. First of all, Peter repented, and Jesus forgave him. That’s the Christian thing to do. Second, the Jews turned Jesus over to the Romans to do the dirty work, but it was their judgement that condemned him. And Third, would you please refer to Jesus as Jesus and not J.C. and Peter as Peter or St Peter and not Pete? You’re being disrespectful.”

“Okay, it’s Jesus and Peter from now on. But back to what you said before the reprimand: I understand repentance and forgiveness. You Christians got that from my people, you know, the chosen ones. But I don’t buy blaming us for killing Jesus. I can remember when I was a kid. Christians called me and my people Christ Killers. I didn’t know what the hell they were talking about.”

“The Church has forgiven the Jews for Christ’s death.”

“Really,” I quipped. “I hadn’t heard. My people will be so grateful.”

“Okay, now that we have that out of the way, I want you to understand that the power given to Peter and the Popes who came after him comes from this *Bible*—God’s Holy Word.”

“God’s Holy Word according to whom?”

“The Church. St Jerome translated the relevant Hebrew and Greek writings into Latin so that the early fathers of The Church could put them together into this *Bible*.”

“Yeah, but Jerome was one of them—the early Church fathers. They were just another bunch of good old boys. So Jerome probably translated everything in a way that supported their authority. After that, they declared it the Word of God without any support for the declaration other than their word. And since they were the only ones that could read and understand it, Catholics who wanted to go to heaven became dependent on them to receive God’s Word. Clever of those good old boys. It was a nice little bit of gamesmanship that insured their power over all you sinful Catholics.”

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! I’ve never heard such paranoid talk in all my life. You’ve got a serious problem.”

“And I’ve got a feeling you’re about to tell me what it is.”

“Your problem is you don’t have faith. And without it, you’ll never understand what I’m trying to tell you.”

“You’re right. I’m not about to buy into some belief based on faith. Faith is nothing more than believing in something where there’s no evidence to support it.”

“The beliefs of Jews are based on faith too.”

“Yeah, I know, and I don’t buy that bullshit either.”

“What about after you die? Where do you think you go? Don’t you believe in heaven?”

“The only kind of heaven I’m interested in is a place where we can all run around naked and fornicate at will.”

“Good gracious! You men all think alike!” she said, clearly frustrated with me. “But don’t think for a minute it turns me off. I’ll make a good Catholic out of you yet.”

Again and again, she came at me, steadfast in her belief that she could accomplish what I told her many times was a waste of her time and mine. But as it turned out, the only way I could get her to stop with the preaching was to interject unrelated humorous comments with sexual overtones.



If a comment included a swear word, she flinched. Then she looked skyward, and while crossing herself, said, “Please, Lord, forgive him.”

But swear word or not, her composure changed from pious preacher to shy school girl as if she had suddenly become part of something naughty. Her face flushed, and she flashed an impish smile and slight, but noticeable, gleam in her eyes.

One afternoon in her kitchen she was telling me a story about Mary, the mother of Jesus. While listening, I spotted a paperback on the counter. I picked it up and thumbed through it. It was a romance novel.

“Patty!” I said, interrupting her. “This is a dirty book. Don’t tell me a good Catholic woman like you reads dirty books.”

“It’s a novel.”

“It’s a dirty book with all kinds of filth in it.”

“I skip over those parts,” she said with her characteristic little girl flushed face, impish grin, and gleam in her eyes.

“Yeah sure.”

"I do. I like the stories but not the sex scenes."

"I don't believe you. And what this tells me is that you are trying to relive the experiences of your life in the fast lane. You must have been a real hellcat when you were younger."

"I was a good Catholic girl—convent schooling and all. I knew nothing about sexual things until I got married."

"I always like dating Catholic girls—women."

"I don't want to hear it."

"They were wound up so tight with all that religious stuff that if you took them out and loosened them up with a few drinks, you had to race them to the bedroom."

"I don't believe that for a moment. And I was certainly never like that."

"How long has it been since the last of your husbands passed away?"

"I only had two."

"The truth?"

"Yes, it's the truth. My first husband passed away seven years ago. Frank, my second husband, passed away a little over a year ago."

"So, it's on to number three now?"

"Heavens no! I'm not interested in getting married again."

"Okay, but you can have some fun without signing on the dotted line again. You're still a good-looking woman. And you've been alone now for over a year. My guess is you're hot to trot; chomping at the bit; ready, willing, and able. You need to get out of the house, hit the bars, and pick up some hot guys."

"Good heaven! I'm not that sort of a woman. I'm a good Catholic."

I laughed. "Say Patty, there's something I've wanted to ask you, I mean you being a good Catholic and all."

"I hope it's a serious question," she said with an apprehensive look in her eyes.

"Well, when you Catholics—Christians—get to heaven, you believe you'll be reunited with your loved ones. Right?"

"Right."

“Well, that means you’ll be reunited with your two husbands. And my question is are you going to sleep with both of them at the same time or rotate?”

“That’s ridiculous! You don’t have sex in heaven.”

“Then why in the hell do you want to go there?”

“You are impossible! Just leave!,” she said. “I don’t appreciate your kind of talk when I’m trying to teach you something I take seriously.”

I didn’t see Patty for a couple of weeks. I thought maybe she was still irritated at me or had gone on a trip somewhere. But I discovered neither was the case when she came over and brought me some of her homemade lemon bars. She told me that she had been busy taking a bunch of tests in the hospital, and she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Two emotions hit me at once. I was sorry to hear that she had cancer and that it was terminal. I told her so and struggled to find words of comfort that didn’t sound clichéd. At the same time, I felt guilty because I had had so much fun in the past razzing her during her well-intentioned efforts to convert me.

I reached out to her. Her eyes filled with tears. We hugged, and I never razzed her again—at least not about her Church and her religious beliefs because I knew she would need them more than ever to cope. Oddly enough, though, I think in the days that followed, she missed it.

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As I watched her health and appearance deteriorate under hospice care at home, I did, however, manage to come up with a few lines that brought smiles to her face. Once, when she was outside with the aid of her walker, I coozied up to her and said, “Are you sure you’re not faking?”

She laughed. “I wish I was.”

Another time, when I came over to her house to check on her, I said, “Patty, it’s too quiet around here for me without all your preaching. I hate to admit it, but I’m beginning to miss it.”

She smiled. “I don’t believe you, but it’s sweet of you to say so.”

One day when she confided in me that she was a little worried about dying and going to heaven, I wanted to take her mind off it with my usual attempt at humor.

“Well, when you get up there, Patty, just remember not to argue or try to convert everyone to your beliefs right away,” I said. “And if you disagree with St Peter about something, and he gets mad at you, wait till you’re well inside, and then turn back and give him the finger.”

No sooner was my attempt at humor out of my mouth than I regretted it, thinking it might put me in the doghouse with her again. But that didn’t happen. Her face flushed, and she flashed her impish smile and gleam in her eyes.

“I can tell by the look on your face that I’m not in the doghouse again. Right?”



“Not this time. May God forgive me, I must be getting used to your sense of humor. But watch it!” she said, and then we both laughed.

As it turned out, the last time I saw her was the day before she passed away. I came over to her house to check on her. Her ever-present daughter let me in. She lay on her couch in a makeshift bed, pale and emaciated with her arms folded over her breast and her eyes closed.

“Patty?” I said.

She opened her eyes and managed a smile, then reached out and clutched my hands. Seeing her in such a deathlike condition was one of the saddest moments in my life. I struggled to maintain my composure.

“I miss you, Patty.”

“I miss you too,” she said, then let loose of my hands and closed her eyes.

Now that she is gone, I feel a void. It’s as if I lost someone who was becoming my best friend. I will never forget her, and I smile each time our back-and-forths come to mind. Without a doubt, she was one of the most interesting, provocative, and enjoyable friends and sparring partners in my life.

A widowed woman purchased and moved into her house. The woman looked about the same age as Patty and I. And much to my surprise and delight, when I went over to introduce myself and welcome her to the neighborhood, she asked, “Do you by chance know the location of the nearest Catholic Church? I’m Catholic.”



# hypocrisy

Robert Peate

“We’re going to kill all the liberals,” the fascist said. “We’re going to eliminate all the impurities from our system. All the Godless communists, socialists, anarchists, Antifa, BLM, all of them. Once we destroy all those who are not like us, we will finally be able to live in the kind of country we wish—a country of people like ourselves!”

The crowd cheered and applauded.

“Remember—it doesn’t matter if they’re family or used to be friends. They’re getting shipped off in boxcars, and you will never see them again. All you need to know is that your problems are finally going away. Elect us, and we will clean up America. Family values. A fair shot. The American Dream for everybody!”

After greeting supporters, giving interviewers to reporters on the spot, and signing the occasional autograph, the political candidate retired to a candidate-preparation room to recuperate.

“What a pleasure it will be to clean up this hellhole,” the candidate said in a small room behind the scenes.

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“What a shame you won’t be able to get rid of all this rabble,” his majordomo said.

“I will be,” the candidate said, “After they kill the liberals, we can get rid of most of them. But we need them right now. Once we’re elected we can do as we please.”

The majordomo smiled. “You can make the country great again.”

“By eliminating most of the people in it. Imagine having your own property cover hundreds of miles. The only people we’ll need will be the ones to grow our food and service our robots.”

“Are you still planning to build robots, sir?”

“We must replace those we kill. There will always be labor to perform.”

A knock came at the door to the room.

“My appointment,” the candidate said. “Get out.”

“Of course, sir. I will be in touch later.”

“That’s a good one: ‘touch’.”

The door opened, revealing two guards outside and a beautiful young woman in expensive formal evening wear. She entered the room and the majordomo left it past each other.

“Welcome, sweetheart,” the candidate said. “I assume they told you what I want?”

“Yes, sir.” She came and knelt in front of him.

“Ah,” the candidate said. “It’s good to be a man of the people.”



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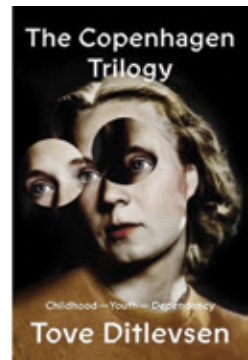
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# sleepover at monica's

Kathy McMullen

“Are you going to Monica’s sleepover on Friday?” Bonnie asks at recess.

Gretchen says she doesn’t know.

Laurie looks up from the nail she is filing.

Monica’s over by the fire hydrant, midway between the kickball and soak ‘em fields, on the outskirts of the jump ropers, hopscotch, and four square players. It’s like she’s bolted there. Raindrops drip on her; the wind blows. She stands there all the time—reading—and not normal books like *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, but ones that if we ask what they’re about, she answers in an English or Southern accent.

Annette tugs up a knee sock. “She invited Bernadette.”

“Really?” Gretchen’s mouth pinches in at the corners.

“Yesterday she invited her. At basketball practice.” Annette’s head bobs up and down, several times.

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“It’s true,” Bonnie says. “I heard her invite Bernadette, too.”

Bernadette and this girl Angie head up our sixth grade class’s biggest clique. We’re allowed in their before-school playground huddle. TV shows and which girls and boys in our class are going with each other get discussed, and then the bell rings, and we go inside.

Laurie’s eyes narrow. “Like Bernadette would go? No way will Bernadette go.”

Annette nibbles at a fingernail. “What if she does, though? And we stay home and blow our one chance to get in good with her?”

Laurie’s nail filing slows. “She won’t.”

“She might,” Annette says.

“And if she stays home and we go, and everybody finds out we went?” Laurie says.

“That’s true,” Annette says.

We silently consider how going or not going to Monica’s sleepover could jeopardize or improve our standing with Bernadette and Angie.

“Monica’s why we keep losing our basketball games,” Gretchen says.

"It's like no one ever showed her how to dribble," Laurie says.

"Or put one through the basket," Gretchen says.

"Or run," Laurie says.

"Yeah. She probably can't even ride a bicycle," Annette says.

"Come on, guys," Bonnie says. Bonnie prays the Rosary after school on Wednesdays with the Legion of Mary club. She's a saint-in-training.

"It's true, though," Gretchen says. "I mean, I'm not the best basketball player, but I'm at least decent. I at least try. Monica doesn't even try."

Annette pulls up her knee socks again. "Maybe no one explained?" Her words glide up the trough of her skinny shins and thighs, circle out over the umbrella of her plaid uniform skirt pleats, then summit the hump of her navy blue cardigan, reaching our ears with a muffled quality.

Gretchen presses her fists against her flag patrol vest, indenting the stiff orange fabric. "Explain that she needs to try? That's what being on a team means."

"She shouldn't be on the team if she isn't going to try," Laurie says, swiping a nail with gusto.

We peer across the blacktop at Monica. She's taller than everyone in our sixth grade class, except Wayne Pless and Bernadette. How much milk did she drink and how many hot dogs and peanut butter sandwiches did she eat to reach that size? And why is it that *her* largeness increases her oddness, but Wayne and Bernadette's turns them into our class's leaders?

"I don't even think she's all that smart," Gretchen says.

"Yeah," Laurie says. "They only put her in the smart kid classes because of her mom."

Annette gets wide-eyed. "Really?"

"Yeah." Gretchen waves a well-freckled hand. "Her mom has a career in math or computers or something."

Annette resumes chewing her fingernail. "But what about all her reading?"

"That doesn't prove anything," Gretchen says.

"Anybody can read," Laurie says.

"I know, but—that much?" Annette asks.

"It only proves how weird she is," Gretchen says, and she and Laurie snicker.

"You guys," Bonnie says, looking injured.

"What." Then Gretchen traces the letters of her name on the damp pavement with the toe of her Famolare and Laurie inspects the nail she's been filing: a perfect oval.

Annette takes her finger out of her mouth and speaks into the quiet. "I heard she invited Jewel."

"Jewel?" Gretchen sniffs. "Monica invited *her*?"

"That's what I heard."

Laurie slips her emery board into her coat pocket and unwraps a cherry cough drop. We look on enviously. "If she invited Bernadette," says Laurie, "She might as well have invited Jewel."

We muse on that. Both invitations seem credible.

"You think Jewel will go?" Annette asks.

Gretchen folds her arms and rocks back on her wavy-bottomed shoes. "Who knows. We already exhausted ourselves on the Bernadette question."

Annette concedes with a reluctant "I guess."

Laurie sucks in on her cough drop. It clacks against her teeth. "It's probably her parents' last chance to get her to fit in. I bet that's why she's having us over."

\*\*\*

Annette's dad drives us over to the Galworthys on Friday evening. Jewel's already there.

Monica walks ahead of us down the white-carpeted hallway, giving the tour. Jewel scampers right behind her, but we hang back at the junction of living room and dining room.

"Everything's so color-schemed," Bonnie whispers, motioning at the decor.

"And the spanking new appliances and dining room set," Laurie says.

"It's like being at the Levitz furniture store," Annette says.

"It's cuz she only has one brother and both her parents work," Gretchen says.

"My mom works," Annette says.

"So does mine," Bonnie says.

"But only part-time," Laurie says. "Monica's mom has a career."

“Guess Bernadette’s not coming,” Gretchen says.

“Guess not.” We look at each other, wondering if we made the right decision. Oh well. Too late now. We venture onto the hall carpet. Our stocking feet sink into the silky pile.

“So fluffy!” Bonnie exclaims in a whisper. “Like walking on lamb pelts.”

“Or clouds,” Annette says.

“But white?” Gretchen asks.

Laurie nods solemnly. “My mom would never choose it.”

Monica’s arms are at her sides and her fingertips point elegantly outwards. She ushers Jewel into a room at the end of the hall. Probably her bedroom. Probably she’s tired of waiting for us.

“What do you think of Monica’s ‘maturity walk?’” Annette asks. She demonstrates the walk with lifted chin, nose high, arms extended out from her sides, and her fingers fanned like table knives.

“She probably practiced all week,” Gretchen says.

“You guys,” Bonnie says.

\*\*\*

We’re downstairs in the rec room, arranging our sleeping bags on the fiery orange carpet. Monica’s off finding the Monopoly board.

Gretchen punches her pillow. “She’s probably never had to share in her life.”

“Right,” Laurie says. “Not like *our* families.”

We nod. Even Jewel nods. Our families have four, six, or eight siblings. Monica has one brother, a first grader. He’s not even the same generation. She’ll have gray hair and wrinkles and be teaching him how to drive.

Laurie centers her sleeping bag between Gretchen’s and Bonnie’s. Annette unfurls her bag between Bonnie’s and Jewel’s. Our bags all point inward, with our pillows toward the center.

“We made a star,” Annette exclaims.

“Yeah,” Bonnie says, “A five-pointed star.”

“We didn’t leave room for Monica, though,” Jewel says.

“Oh.” But no one offers to make room for her.

And then Annette leaps up and does the maturity walk again.

“What’s that?” Jewel asks.

“The Monica Maturity Walk,” Annette says and soon all of us are doing the Monica Maturity Walk. We’re swaying our butts and swinging our arms and our noses are in the air, walking towards each other, then veering away and walking towards the next person. “It’s the Monica Maturity Walk! The Monica Maturi—”

“You guys almost done? Dinner’s ready.” Monica’s in the rec room doorway. Her face is a plotchy checkerboard of red patches, brown patches, and white patches. She’s as stiff as an ironing board.

Our smiles are all teeth and bright lights.

“Be right up,” Gretchen says.

\*\*\*

Dinner is like ours, but also not. The salad dressing is store-bought: Marie’s Blue Cheese. Ours is homemade Thousand Island, made by shaking up a jar of mayonnaise, ketchup, and vinegar. Mr. Galworthy spoons sour cream onto his baked potato instead of margarine. Mrs. Galworthy eats her potato dry.

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Monica has her dad’s thick eyebrows and fat cheeks; his blocky shape. The sun and wind have etched deep lines in Mr. G’s ruddy face. Probably Monica will inherit her dad’s wrinkle pattern.

Mrs. G wears a hip-skimming vest over a white cotton turtleneck. Nun clothes. Her face isn’t brightened with lipstick or eye shadow. She has short, straight, mousy brown hair. Other kids’ moms are worse looking, but they disguise it with permanents, make up, and plenty of jewelry. We wonder if how Monica’s mom dresses should be a sin.

Monica’s parents ask which teacher we have, Sister Michael or Mrs. Humphrey, and whether we live in Odin’s Neck or the Cinderblocks and for how long. All the basic questions, but then there’s no talking besides “pass the potatoes” and “I’d like more sour cream, please.” Where’s the joking? The Galworthys are all so cautious and careful, including Monica’s first grader brother. Are we the only ones they’ve ever invited over?

Maybe what’s wrong is there’s no arguing. At least not with words, pots and pans, or any way we can see. Their argument could be a silent underground one. Going on for years.

The chewing sounds get louder as the room gets silenter.

“How come Monica didn’t start out at Immaculate?” Jewel asks.

Mr. and Mrs. G look up from their potatoes. Jewel has roast stuck between her teeth and gravy grease on her lip. The Galworthys shouldn’t be taking her question seriously, but they are.



“How come you only put her there in fifth grade? Were kids mean to her?”

So rude! How can Jewel be asking this? Monica’s right in the room! Next thing Jewel will be asking them if they know Monica spends her recess reading all alone by the fire hydrant.

Jewel’s questions float above our heads like the Goodyear Blimp. Monica’s parents stare at her, cow-eyed and rattled.

“What?” And this time Jewel’s question is to all of us, not just Mr. and Mrs. G. “I’m not asking anything bad.” It’s true. She probably *doesn’t* mean it mean. For one thing she’s too dumb.

Monica shoves another forkful of roast between her lips, squirming. Her face is that blotchy red and white checkerboard again. If only she would be snotty or attempt a joke—do *something* to defend herself!

She forces us to hate her.

Hasn’t she learned any of the strategies to protect herself? We’ve been learning those skills since before we could walk. If she’s going to read at recess by the fire hydrant, can’t she at least read less dorky books? Last week she read one with “Treatise” in the title. And talking in those accents? Doesn’t she understand how dangerous that is? What’s so hard about reading Judy Blume? Even Nancy Drew or *Half Magic* would be fine. Or better yet, practice her free throws and be a decent basketball player.

“Achoo,” Bonnie says.

“Gesundheit.” Mr. G’s deep baritone rumbles up from some private cave.

Mrs. G hands Bonnie the Kleenex.

“Thank you.” Sweat beads Bonnie’s forehead, and then she sneezes again.

“Should I call your mom?” Mrs. G asks.

“It’s just allergies,” Bonnie says.

\*\*\*

We’re touring Mr. G’s rock room. Mrs. G’s upstairs filling the dishwasher. The brother’s playing with his Legos. Mr. G has this special room in the basement just for polishing rocks. Unpolished and polished rocks are heaped on shelves and a wooden picnic table. It’s like the Galworthys are people in separate units of an apartment building. Everybody has not just their own rooms, but whole different sections of house to retreat to.

Jewel asks what Mr. G does with the polished ones.

“Different things,” he says.

What a liar! We're sure they just sit on the shelf.

Jewel crowds in, closer to the rock polisher, and closer to Mr. G. He steps backward into the table, jostling some rocks which plunk to the floor.

"Can you do one now?" Jewel asks. We can practically hear the spit bubbles massing up at the corners of her mouth. Like she wants to eat the rock polisher or at least lick it.

"What kind of rock?" Mr. G tries to move away from her, but he's running out of places.

"How about this one?" She scoops one up from a pile of unpolished ones, barely looking. The first one she touches.

"How smooth do you want it?" Mr. G sounds just as dumb and unawake as when he asked Mrs. G to pass the sour cream. Like he thinks Jewel's asking for real? Because she's interested in his rocks and his rock polisher?

"Smooth." She puckers her lips to smooch the air—Completely outrageous! Mr. G is Monica's dad!—then she rises onto her tippy toes, and drops her rock into the polisher's big metal drum.

\*\*\*

100

We're facing the rec room's paneled walls, changing into our night clothes. Except for Jewel. She removes her underpants slowly and in full view of everybody, then she circles the room, rolling her hips and steamrolling toward us. We dodge and push her away.

She giggles and licks her fingers, then she draws back her silky pubic hair like they're two halves of a movie curtain. Eew. But Jewel's delighted. "Whoo hoo," she says.

"Whoo hoo," we say. But we're in retreat, and our "whoo hoo" sounds embarrassed, not strong and victorious like hers.

She spins away and shimmies into a threadbare night shirt. We catch our breath while she pulls her ratty pajama bottoms up over one butt cheek, then the other. Her night clothes are like what our younger brothers wear. She also looks like them. Flat chest. Narrow hips. Stubby fingers. There's nothing sexy or grown up about her, so how come she is?

"Stripper," Gretchen hisses.

Jewel laps up Gretchen's insult like it's candy. She sidles up to Gretchen.

"Get away." Gretchen slaps her but Jewel just moves closer.

Something electric, that Jewel started, but that now is everywhere, is filling the room and moving through us.

We're not sure what to do.

Bubbles of saliva, like rows of tiny, translucent fish eggs, appear at the corners of Jewel's mouth. "You want me to get in your pants, Gretch?"

Gretchen flushes strawberry red from her pajama top neckline to the top of her head. "No!"

"It's no big deal," Jewel giggles. "I'm just having fun."

Gretchen pulls herself up to her full height. She speaks in her most stern and commanding flag patrol captain voice. "Well, have fun with someone else."

"Let's just play our Monopoly game," Laurie says.

Monica brings over the Monopoly box, we choose our tokens, and Gretchen elects herself banker.

Jewel's sitting cross-legged. She spins toward Monica, who is hunched over Park Avenue. "I'm hungry. When are the treats going to be ready?"

"I'll check." Monica, who is kneeling, rises unathletically.

"That's OK. I'll go." Jewel scampers to the door.

"It's Monica's house," objects Gretchen.

"I like talking to her mom." Jewel flashes a toothy smile. "Besides, I'm quicker."

"I like talking to her mom," mimics Laurie after Jewel's footfalls have fallen away.

"She just wants attention," Gretchen says.

"I know," Annette says.

Even Bonnie agrees. "Everything's got to be about her."

"Jewel is going last." With a stern *whap*, Gretchen sets Jewel's token behind all the others.

We make it around to Jewel's turn. Down the hall the rock polisher makes its whirl, clunk, clack.

"She's still not back," Bonnie says.

"She's holding up our game," Laurie says.

Our sense of injury grows.

"Maybe Monica's mom is helping her with math," Gretchen says.

All of us laugh, even Monica. Jewel's in the dumb kid classes at school.

We decide to roll for her.

Bonnie does the rolling—a three and a four—and Laurie advances Jewel’s token, to the Electric Company, which no one owns yet.

“Should we buy it for her?” Laurie asks.

Gretchen doesn’t think we should, which Bonnie doesn’t think is nice.

“She’s not here. There need to be consequences,” Gretchen says.

“Snooze, you lose,” Laurie says.

“She *is* getting the treats,” Annette says.

“Ha,” Gretchen says.

“It doesn’t take that long to get treats,” Laurie says, siding with Gretchen again.

“It does if you’re doing ‘math,’” Gretchen says, making air quotes.

“They’re probably going over the three times tables,” Annette says, snickering.

“How about we do house rules,” Bonnie says.

“OK.” We turn toward Monica, who stares back at us.

“You have to decide,” we say.

“What?”

“Should we let Jewel buy the property or not?”

“Oh. You go ahead. We don’t need to wait.”

What kind of an answer is that? But at least she didn’t say it in a funny accent.

Gretchen sighs and snatches up the dice. “Let’s just move on. OK. Whose turn?”

Bonnie says it’s her turn and Gretchen hands her the dice, then Bonnie’s head and shoulders begin making small jerking motions. “Achoo!” Bonnie says.

“Gross!” Annette rears away.

“She didn’t mean to,” Laurie says.

“She sneezed on your token.” Annette points at a slippery-looking, yellowish-green snot blob.

“And the Jail corner.”

Bonnie wipes at the wetness with her pajama top hem.

Annette rears back further. “Double gross.”

We frown.

“What? A big wet loogie booger?”

Our frown sharpens to a glare. Annette’s so immature sometimes.

“Achoo!” Bonnie says, and then she doesn’t let up sneezing.

“She needs more Kleenex,” Laurie says to Monica.

Monica stares blankly at Laurie.

“She said Kleenex!” Gretchen says.

“Get it!” All of us say.

Why isn’t Monica moving? Suit up and get in the game! Meanwhile, Bonnie flails her arms like a drowning person. She tries to talk, but only produces gasps and whistling noises.

Gretchen’s gone pale. Her freckles stand out on her face—hundreds of brown dots. “We should get Monica’s mom,” she says.

Gretchen and Laurie stay with Bonnie. Annette dashes, and Monica lumbers upstairs to tell Mrs. G that Bonnie’s having an asthma attack and needs to go to the hospital. Because finally Monica’s woken out of her trance, but Mr. G’s truck is blocking Mrs. G’s station wagon, and Monica’s family is one of total separateness, so Mrs. G doesn’t have a set of Mr. G’s keys.

Mrs. G, Annette, and Monica run back downstairs.

All of us, minus Bonnie, race toward the rock room.

We pile up behind Mrs. G at the door, but the knob won’t turn. Mrs. G pounds on the door. “Carl! Carl! Open the door!” she says over the rock room’s whirl clunk clack.

Mr. G opens the door. We lurch into Mrs. G and stumble into the room.

Mr. G looks dazed, like he’s waking from a pleasant dream. His shirt tail is caught in his fly. His big pink fleshy face is flushed and sweaty. Jewel stands between the rock polisher and the table. She’s damp-looking and grinning. Her night shirt is wrinkled. The room smells sour cheesy funky. Jewel’s still in the pleasant dream that Mr. G has now left.

Mrs. G's anger is white hot. Like she's been struck by lightning. Like she is lightning and in a second we'll smell her skin frying. She shoulders Jewel aside and shuts off the rock polisher. The silence after the whir clunk clack ends makes our ear drums ring. We cross our fingers, hoping the room doesn't explode.

"I need the truck keys, Carl," Mrs. G says.

We chorus that "Bonnie is having an asthma attack! She needs to get to the hospital!" while Monica barfs in the corner, and Mr. G creeps forward and lays the keys on Mrs. G's palm.

\*\*\*

"Eeh-ah. Eeh-ah." Bonnie sucks in on her inhaler. Her shoulders reach to her ears, then collapse in a wheeze. Gretchen sits next to her. She holds Bonnie's hand, tells Bonnie she's going to be fine. They're in front with Mrs. G. The rest of us are squished in the back. We've had just enough time to pull pants and jackets over our nightgowns or pajamas and cram on shoes.

We're noticing our breathing. Someone's forgotten bologna sandwich. The turn signal. Monica's barf smell.

All of us are breathing the same air, including Monica's mom, including Monica, including Jewel.

Mrs. G grips the wheel with brittle arms and brittle shoulders. She keeps taking us into dead-end cul-de-sacs; slowing down when she should be speeding; speeding when she should be slowing down.

We wait for her to pull over and order Jewel out of the car.

We squish our hands between our thighs, feeling the ridges of our corduroys stamping themselves into the backs of our hands. What if Mrs. G comes even more unglued and drives us off a cliff? We wonder if we should pray.

We're doing our best to keep our pant legs and jacket sleeves from touching Jewel's. Any antics, any attempts she makes to get into our good graces, we'll ignore. What she and Mr. G did was bad, bad, bad and we're not putting up with her anymore. Even if everything turns out OK with Bonnie we'll give Jewel the cold shoulder punishment.

We edge away from Monica, too. That's easy to figure out. Her shoulders twisting and wringing her hands in her lap like that? Her blocky bulk refusing to shape itself into a likeable form? Her smell? That her dad did whatever it was he did? That her mom didn't prevent it? No makeup. No pretty clothes. No nice hairstyle. Like Mr. G's supposed to be happy he married an office worker, who might as well have been a boy?

Mrs. G doesn't know how to keep Mr. G happy. She fails in the most important way.

Traffic lights wash over us, turning us green, then red, as we as we wait to turn onto Aurora Avenue. The turn signal's tick, tick, tick pounds inside our skulls.

We're saying grownup things, doing grownup things: Laurie leaning over the front seat, asking "How's she doing?" in a low voice; Gretchen making slow, soft circles on Bonnie's back; Annette telling Bonnie she's "doing great," and "we're almost there." But a single sidelong glance at Jewel, or thinking about rocks going around in the rock polisher; Monica spraying out her barf pellets, or Mrs. G hunching over the steering wheel and sending us over a cliff could cause us to lose it completely and laugh our faces off.

Fortunately we've got Bonnie's asthma attack drama and our Mission to Group Health Hospital drama. *The hospital. The hospital. We're going to the hospital.* We let that thought amplify in our heads.

"Keep breathing!" Gretchen says, super cheerful, to Bonnie. And we dig our fingernails into our palms and snort our laughter back into ourselves.

Bad, bad, bad we think as Mrs. G merges onto the freeway. Bad, bad, bad as she speeds past other cars.

What Mr. G and Jewel did was bad, bad, bad. But why do we crave the badness? Why do we want that for ourselves? Does that make us bad, too?

We screech up to Group Health. Gretchen and Laurie scramble out first. They drag out Bonnie, who slumps between them. Jewel and Annette scramble out over Monica. We can't get away from Monica and her mom fast enough.

Then Bonnie's mom rushes out through Group Health's glass doors; Bonnie's mom and Gretchen carry Bonnie inside; and Gretchen tells the hospital people about Bonnie's asthma attack.

\*\*\*

On Monday, Gretchen collects Bonnie's homework assignments. She answers all the sixth graders' questions with "Bonnie's fine," said importantly.

At afternoon recess Bernadette and her group march up to Jewel. The four square game slows. "I heard you had a pretty good time in Monica's dad's rock room Friday night," Bernadette says. Her entourage giggles.

"Yeah. It was pretty fun," Jewel says, all sunshine like usual.

Monica's over by the fire hydrant. The four of us catch her eye, and then her head dips and she resumes mouthing the words of whatever it is she's reading.

By the end of the week "going to the rock room" is our sixth grade class's new favorite expression.

\*\*\*

We want to stay together but we can't. Then we don't understand why we ever did.

We can't agree on who or what was at fault—Jewel, Mr. G, Mrs. G, Monica, the rock room, the silky-fibered carpet, the Galworthy's smokey-hued glass table top? We turn what happened over and over—like turning a stone in our palm. Turning it over and over until all the edges become smooth.

We can't pretend nothing happened at Monica's house. We're not sure what we learned. We wonder why we don't feel more shame. We want to hide, but where would we hide?

And this is just the beginning of what we'll have to figure out, that maybe we'll never figure out, and who we'll blame, and whether we'll blame anybody, and what we'll even think is wrong or right in the first place. And will we truly believe that or will we just say we believe it to stay in the group?

And if Bonnie becomes a saint or at least a nun, Laurie never shares her cough drops, Gretchen becomes a basketball referee, Annette starts spending recess next to Monica at the fire hydrant reading Treatises and talking in strange accents, and all of us one day become math experts who wear hip-skimming vests like Monica's mom—will we still not know if what we think is ugly actually is ugly and if what we think is good really is that?

\*







\*Of equal or lesser value.

commodities: milk caramel  
Jennifer Weigel

# logolepsy

Linda Kraus

I never thought  
my disease had a name,  
only pervasive symptoms  
that hijacked my equanimity  
and robbed me of sleep.  
Obsessively, I search for  
the word that is not arcane,  
with the correct connotation,  
the perfect linguistic conceit.

Constantly, I cast my semantic  
net and harvest dozens  
of words that take  
on independent lives,  
pushing themselves  
into my verse, heedless  
of the standard dictates  
of rhyme or form,  
asserting themselves,  
assaulting my senses,  
fabricating poetic lines  
that would be impoverished  
without them.



4/29

Scott Ferry

my son helps me decapitate  
the shriveled daffodil heads  
with the long garden shears  
he holds the handles with each  
beheading and then of course  
he wants to keep holding them  
and i being a poor father let him  
rather than hearing him scream  
when i take them away  
then he grabs the sharp  
end immediately and screams  
with blood oozing from a finger  
then i grasp him and whisk him  
into the house squeeze the finger  
with a paper towel as he screams  
some more and my daughter  
turns on mighty express for him  
where they are recovering  
the lost gold again from the haunted  
mine and i have to explain to my wife  
why he was holding the garden shears  
at all even for a second and i want to  
cut off my own head but at least  
the bleeding has stopped  
at least it isn't his eye or his jugular  
at least he stops crying and when  
we take off the band aid  
the cut seems gone erased  
and i try to make it into a teachable  
moment by saying this is why  
we don't play with knives  
or scissors but this is just to make  
me feel justified in allowing him  
to bleed to grip the long blade of  
days ahead of him



## 4/30

Scott Ferry

i can most times  
rock my son for a while  
and then place him in the crib  
and hold his back  
until he falls asleep  
this night he will not be put  
in his crib and screams  
rocking chair rocking chair  
rocking chair whenever  
i put him down  
he stands in front of the chair  
and slams it into the wall  
rocking chair rocking chair  
i try to leave the room and he  
howls at the closed door  
the wet 0 of his mouth  
rocking chair i decide  
it is not worth his torment  
this night he will be rocked  
to sleep the fetal 9 of his  
twitching body finally entering  
into the 0 of unconsciousness  
like the 9 shape of a ghost  
departing a body  
and travelling through the 0  
tunnel with the numberless  
light of all light at the end  
but he will exit through the 0  
tomorrow climbing to his feet  
standing as tall and strong  
as a 1





# elephants of tasmania

Allan Lake

One Launceston morning, without fanfare,  
three elephants ambled round a corner  
onto Charles Street – couldn't fit on footpath –  
just as I stepped out of my bank branch,  
which later ceased to exist for some reason.  
Perhaps it could not compete.

Elephants are not native to Tasmania  
but neither am I. Far N.American me.  
Biggest elephant made a piddling deposit  
in passing which, I admit, triggered a wee  
urge within which I decided not to act on.  
Two shy babyphants were sticking close  
to Mum, who appeared to be going  
about her business, whatever that is.  
Would never be allowed to browse  
in a china shop or enter a cafe.  
Note: I'm no expert on elephants  
but a man walking beside mother  
of the twins looked to be her partner.

All, except the man, had trunks;  
he had a little cane. Mom had no tusks  
so she, like many new arrivals in Australia,  
was probably Asian. None wore a stitch,  
except the man. Never before had I seen  
elephants on a Tasmanian street so I paused,  
wondered if they were just visiting or  
had, like me, made a permanent move.  
Tasmanians are not demonstrative  
so shoppers stared in silence until  
the family of four turned at the inter-  
section after the light turned green.  
Then everyone went back to whatever  
it was they were doing before elephants  
made a brief spectacle of themselves.  
That's how it is in Tasmania and  
that's unlikely to change.



# nancy ann and stan

Jacob Chapman

Our new neighbors threw a party,  
kind of a reverse welcome to the neighborhood thing,  
and they made sure that everyone,  
and I mean everyone,  
on our street showed up.  
They sent multiple invitations and asked  
for confirmations. I thought ok, ok, I'll go,  
even though I didn't want to.  
I knocked on their door, and Nancy Ann  
(that's my new neighbor, along with her husband Stan)  
greeted me with a hug,  
which made me think Jesus, lady,  
that's not how we do things around here,  
and a shot of vodka, which I don't like.  
Drink it, she said, there's chocolate  
and cinnamon in there, you'll love it.  
I took a sip to be polite,  
and she was right. I loved it.  
Nancy Ann gathered everyone together  
and said alright, what do you do  
for fun around here?  
There was a pause, and I said  
sometimes I go on walks.  
A few people nodded when I said that.  
Nancy Ann said oh, no, that's not gonna cut it.  
Stan was walking around the room  
serving hors d'oeuvres, these crispy cheesy things  
that were amazing, as in  
I don't know what was going on  
with those flavors. Grumpy-ass Irv  
from down the street was eating one  
and smiling. He pointed to the tray and nodded.  
I was eating one too, and I nodded back  
and gave him the thumbs-up.  
Nancy Ann said look,  
we've done this sort of thing  
plenty of times before. You all  
just seem a little beaten down  
by the weather. Or maybe it's something else.  
It doesn't matter. What matters  
is that things are gonna get a little more lively  
around here, so get ready to have some fun,  
whether you like it or not.



# the lovers of stained glass

Jacob Chapman

That's what we called ourselves, and we meant it  
for the most part. There was an edge  
of self-mockery in the name,  
but when we gathered,  
we mostly talked about stained glass:  
the five great eras (some say six),  
the controversial use of cerulean blue,  
all the churches we planned to visit,  
the way gravity slowly warps glass  
over decades, over centuries.  
We treasured our visits with glassmakers,  
who would explain their craft to us  
if we asked politely. I have to admit  
I'd never given much thought to stained glass  
before I was pulled into their orbit.  
One day I woke up and realized  
I no longer cared about stained glass.  
I gradually eased out of the group,  
and I could tell how disappointed they were  
that my passion had faded.  
What can I say? I was moving on  
to other things and other friends.  
Three years. I spent three years  
with The Lovers of Stained Glass.  
What a strange detour.  
Some of them are probably still at it,  
making their way through their personal list  
of churches, learning about new and old colors,  
finding people who will gather with them  
so they can share the things they've learned.





# what happened to our city?

Jacob Chapman

Recently we awoke  
to find our city littered with flyers,  
millions of pieces of paper  
with three concentric circles  
and no words, an old signal  
from our miserable neighbors to the North  
that means We're coming.  
We all grabbed a few things  
and fled to the South.  
Here in the camps,  
there's been a rush to get married  
and to learn about the religion of our ancestors,  
which has mostly faded away.  
The rumors are all over the place:  
some say our city has been destroyed,  
some say the soldiers passed through our city  
quietly, as a sign of respect  
for our great buildings,  
some say our city is empty  
and the soldiers never crossed the border.  
We don't know what to believe,  
but even if our city is untouched,  
how will we ever relax again?



# love and a few other phobias

Mark Budman

The husband and wife died the same day, on the fiftieth anniversary of their first date. At the funeral, a thunderstorm happened so severely, that it seemed like someone in the sky cried, but only to the people who didn't check the weather forecast.

All their lives, the husband and wife could be with each other only if one of them had taken a Valium or was physically restrained. The first time they met, they sat in a café by the window, he facing the outside, and she facing the inside, and both had to chain themselves to their respective chairs.

"I love your eyes the color of ice that reflects the morning sun in its glory," he told her. He was hyperventilating.

"And I love your hair the color of unspun linum usitatissimum, also known as common flax. I'm gonna faint now." And she did.

They were not just made for each other; that would be too ordinary. They were the same soul, just separated in two parts, like two pieces of a living 3-D puzzle. They came to America from the same country, and they spoke the same refined version of their native language. That's what the husband said, and his wife agreed.

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The first time they had sex, in her room, the night they met, he had a silk sleep mask on, and she had to guide him by the hand before he entered the door. The silk felt like something advertised in Wal-Mart, but everything else was real. The next time, he insisted on the outdoor sex, and she had the same mask on.

At the shrink, he tried to make a joke. Does Santa Clause have clause-trophobia?

The shrink smiled politely. The husband wondered if she understood the joke. Perhaps it was his accent. He tried to come up with an agoraphobia joke but failed.

The husband and wife had three kids.

The oldest daughter had onomatophobia, so they never told her what her name was and called her Hey instead. The next son had Heliophobia, so he went outside only at dark. The next son had Selenophobia, so he went outside only during the day.

"If I knew it was genetic," the husband told everyone, "I'd kept my jeans on during sex."

No one laughed.

"It's because we are immigrants," the wife said. "No one likes immigrants, even Fate." She said that in their native language, and it sounded so beautiful to him.

When the husband and wife died together, perforated by an alleged active shooter's bullets, their kids buried them next to each other in a cemetery with no name, during the thunderstorm when neither the moon nor the sun could be seen.

The husband was handcuffed and had a Valium pill under his tongue, but his wife's eyes were wide open, and she smiled such a lovely smile that the angels came down to see her, but only the ones who had no phobias were allowed, so, in the end, only a single angel came, and only for a second, lest she also caught a phobia and had a love problem for all eternity.



## driving ms. olivia and ms. amelia

Mark Budman

The road weaves and winds and coils under a canopy of October trees. Leaves fall in the vortex of colors. I worry about crossing deer or turtles, but I don't say that aloud. If I talk about everything I worry about, that would be an exceedingly long monologue.

"Can a girl fly?" asks one of my infinitely treasured passengers in the back.

"You need chicken wings for that," the other replies.

"Look, how beautiful this road is, ladies," I say in my native language. "But it won't be beautiful for long."

They sit behind me, strapped into their seats, stuffies in their hands. I want to pass on everything I have to these passengers, including my knowledge, my blood, my breath, and my life before it's too late. Time is short as the plague is spreading.

"They are just stupid trees," Ms. Amelia answers in English. Like her twin, she's wearing a Disney dress, with lace and fancy buttons. They were ladies from the beginning, in the NICU. They both deserve honorifics from their old chauffeur. Not an Uber or Lift driver. A chauffeur.

"You don't have to be smart to be beautiful," I say, still in my language. "Or handsome, like your grandfather."

Being bilingual has many health and social benefits. I can testify to that.

"I don't understand you," Ms. Olivia says. "Speak English."

"He's a poopie," Ms. Amelia says. "Everyone speaks English. But him."

Once again, I fell on my face. When you enter the winter of your life, every fall is dangerous.



# cinderell and his shoe

Mark Budman

Cinderell is running home bare-footed, holding one shoe in his hand. He just lost the other one. It's only a flip-flop, but it's clear, and it shines like crystal. Everyone in the neighborhood knows and envies his shoes.

He already cut his feet, twice. Worse than that, his stepdad will be pissed even though he didn't pay for the shoes—Cinderell's godmother did. The stepdad's always getting pissed. No matter what. Will ground Cinderell.

Worse than that, Prince Charming of the Hoodshire will be able to find Cinderell now. Prince Charming has many foot soldiers. They will find Cinderell by his shoe. So, it doesn't matter if Cinderell gets rid of the one he still has.

They all danced. Prince Charming, the soldiers, the guests. And so did Cinderell. It wasn't his fault he stepped on Prince's foot. Someone pushed him.

When Cinderell gets home, the stepdad isn't there. It's a small relief. He lies down and closes his eyes. Mice are gnawing at his bare toes. They like him, but they are hungry. Who can blame them? Cinderell is hungry, too.

He opens his eyes and talks to the head mouse. "Don't worry about me. I'm dead anyway."

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The head mouse is white, with purple eyes, and it wears a tiny gold crown. "Talk to your fairy godmother, not to me," it squeaks.

It's easier said than done. When Cinderell calls her, it always goes to voicemail. She doesn't reply to his email. He doesn't know her address.

"Why don't you cry?" the head mouse says. "Tears are powerful."

Cinderell pauses, pursing his lips. His stepdad says he cries like a girl. But he's not here now. Cinderell cries diligently. His cheeks are wet. The mice stop gnawing, and they cry with him.

Someone knocks at the door. Cinderell gets up. Must be the godmother. He's hopeful. He has no other choices.

If it's her, she'll hide him at her sandcastle in the sky, where even the smallest mouse has plenty of crumbs to eat, and can one day be promoted to a horse.

If it's the goons, they'll take him to Prince Charming. Maybe Cinderell will be able to convince him to give him a chance and let Cinderell cage-fight Prince Charming's best foot soldier. If Cinderell wins this fight, maybe Prince Charming will forgive him and give him a discount voucher for The Last Chance dancing school.

When he'll be ready, he'll dance with the Prince again. This time, he'll be more careful. Even if he steps on the Prince's foot, that's okay. Cinderell is barefoot now.



# pangram

Rosanne Ullman

“Thank goodness you’re here,” Mom said as she wheeled my suitcase off the curb and tossed it into the back of her SUV. “I can’t get the pangram.”

I had nothing to offer. “We’ve been too busy to try it yet today,” I replied, lifting Elsie into her car seat as Evan locked Sawyer in his.

“Well, I feel like an idiot,” Mom whined, returning to the driver’s seat. “It can’t be that hard.”

“Pangram uses all of the letters,” five-year-old Sawyer announced in what we called his “reporter voice.” Sometimes that touch of autism just kicked in. As he stared out the window and Evan and I tapped away on our phones, Mom started the car and pulled out of O’Hare. The trip felt quick, the driveway so familiar that when Dad came out to greet us I could have been nineteen again, arriving home for a college break. Dad grabbed the luggage, the stroller, the diaper bag—he paid no attention to what he was toting but somehow fit it all in his Gumbyesque arms and deposited everything in a pile in the guest room.

Evan and I trailed after him and then went into our now familiar pattern, leading the children to my old bedroom that these days housed a crib for Elsie in addition to the twin bed that accommodated Sawyer. I changed Elsie’s diaper and lowered her into the crib, pleased that her whimper of protest seemed to quiet in surrender to a little nap. We all hit a bathroom, and in no time we were settled into the family room for the extended Thanksgiving weekend. Dad hoisted Sawyer high in the air in order to assess, and then inform Sawyer, how much bigger and heavier he’d gotten since summer. Mom had already positioned herself snugly against a worn throw pillow on the couch.

“I’ll start dinner in a few minutes,” she said, opening her laptop. “We’re having hamburgers. I’ll be doing enough heavy cooking for the holiday. Sawyer, honey, Tom Turkey tomorrow!”

“I barely have any words,” I told her, frowning at the tally on my phone screen. I’d been working the puzzle of the day from my phone since we’d left the airport. “And I don’t have the pangram, either. Must be something we’ve never heard of.”

“It’s not an everyday word,” Evan confirmed in a boastful tone, since he’d obviously figured it out during the ride. “Want a hint?”

“No hints!” Mom and I shouted in unison. By this time Dad was ambling off to the garage to conduct a safety inspection of the car seat installation.

“You may continue with your little game,” he said, dismissing the rest of us with a wave of his hand. Sawyer perched himself on the sofa next to me to help me come up with words, which sometimes he actually was able to do.

“You have to use the center letter in all of the words,” Sawyer instructed. “It’s an O on this one. But for the pangram you also have to use the other six letters.” He had the game down pat.

“When I can’t get it, that means it’s too hard,” Mom complained. “There are so few words on this one. Worst daily game ever.”

“It was like that other time we just couldn’t come up with the pangram, remember?” I prompted Mom. “We were at the park right by our house.”

“Oh, what an annoying puzzle it was that day!” Mom’s face lit up. “Sawyer was almost three. He was putting together bigger sentences and talking up a storm. Evan had begun his new job, and you were huge, about to have Elsie. It was such sunny, beautiful weather. I remember telling you about the house fire down the street from us and how Dad, of course, had gone over there to help out that night. I had that knee injury going on, so I sat on the bench while you pushed Sawyer on the swing, and we shouted back and forth to each other every possible combination of short words, assuming that the pangram had to be a compound word. Then it turned out to be ‘reliant,’ not a compound word at all. Not ‘tearnail’ or ‘rateline,’ that’s for sure. I still say ‘rateline’ should be a word.” Mom started laughing the way she did when she was the one who made the joke and wanted to signal to us that we should laugh along.

“‘Rateline’ shouldn’t be a word, Mom,” I huffed, trying not to laugh. “Anyway, there’s this thing. Evan, tell Mom about the thing.”

“Mama, you still need twelve points to get to ‘genius,’” Sawyer interrupted, laser-focused on the puzzle.

“Well, you would know, my little genius,” Mom said. “How did you figure that out? You’re amazing, Sawyer. I’m ready to give up.”

“The thing, Ev,” I nudged. “And, okay, just tell us what the pangram is.”

Evan looked up from his phone. “Huh? Mugwort.”

“Never heard of it,” Mom said. “I don’t read the Harry Potter books.”

“It’s a real word,” I informed her. “A weed, I think. Some guy I used to work with took it for stomach problems. Evan, the thing. Tell Mom.”

“Oh, well, the thing is, the work thing, is that, Sawyer, come on, buddy, no snacks before dinner.” Sawyer had gotten bored and was now in front of an open refrigerator door in the adjacent kitchen. I could tell that Evan was stalling.

“Mom, we’re moving to London because the company is opening a branch there and Evan’s going to manage it. I made a deal to work remotely, so I’ll just be able to do more or less my current job and cut down on the daycare expense. London is not that far. I’m already planning for you to come out in early spring. And, well, also I’m kind of three months pregnant. I have to agree about this being the worst puzzle ever. I don’t get why they’d pick a pangram that you can’t make other words from. No words use these letters!”

At just that moment Dad wandered back inside and paired up with Sawyer to survey the contents of the refrigerator.

“Are we going to have dinner tonight?” Dad asked. “I’m not getting any younger here. Geez, you three, all you ever do is that word game. You kids never get a chance to even tell us what’s going on with you, because it’s always ‘no words use these letters’ or whatnot.”

I looked at Mom. “Dad, don’t worry,” I said. “If anything happens that’s important enough to talk about, we’ll stop doing the game and you’ll be the first to know.”





untitled #6  
Ellen Mary Hayes





untitled #22  
Ellen Mary Hayes

# mugwort tea

John Q Adams

Mugwort tea isn't on the menu  
Unless you ask for it at the Gin Mill  
On an alley next to St. John's tattoo shop  
Just beyond St. John's cemetery  
Where Uncle Roberto lies waiting in the grave.

He left an extended family of townies  
Who never wanted to leave  
After school, they worked in the textile factories  
Dated local girls, married young,  
played semi-pro ball and drank PBRs.

Sally served drinks at the Gin Mill  
Billy was the general manager  
George was Billy's crippled brother  
Who suffered from cystic fibrosis  
And never held a paying job  
He feared losing his monthly disability  
Every day he lived in agony.

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Sally swore she got high from mugwort tea  
She served it hot  
She served it cold  
However you requested it  
She would stand behind you as you ordered  
Singing Everly Brothers songs  
Bye-bye happiness, I think I'm gonna die.

On Saturdays, before the Gin Mill opened  
Sally and Billy's son Kenny  
Would scatter sawdust, sweep the floor  
Wipe clean the bar, stock the fridge  
And rout out anyone who slept there overnight.

When Billy arrived, he would turn a cane chair backward  
Sit, fold his arms and rest his head  
He would gaze through the window  
At the sun's reflection on the waters of the canal  
That ran the turbines on the factory floor.

On the street outside, Harley motorcycles stood  
Guarding the crowd at the Gin Mill  
Working men, cursing their employers, blowing steam  
Playing games, sharing lies, feeling prematurely old  
Uncle Roberto would have loved this.

When the factories closed in the 60s  
And the textile business moved overseas  
The Gin Mill held on for a while  
Boosted by unemployment checks and food stamps  
It was the social network of its day  
Before so many folks drifted away.

The Gin Mill carries on today  
Though the crowd has thinned out  
They're older and poorer, they complain louder  
They're searching for a reason their lives are so hollow  
Arguing about replacement theory  
And swearing to run for office.

Sally's still serving mugwort tea  
To anyone who requests it  
She serves it hot  
She serves it cold  
And swears she feels the high.



# mugworts

John Q Adams

Harry Potter and Freddie were friends and grew up together. Harry was a few months older and the leader of their group.

Freddie was quiet and shy and revered Harry.

As we all know, Harry attended Hogwarts where he had a unique education and went on to international fame.

Freddie wasn't accepted at Hogwarts and went to Mugworts instead. Nobody ever heard from him again.



## ahhh... mugworts

John Q Adams

She planted mugworts with misplaced hope  
Expecting a balm for her nagging anxiety  
She watered the soil with a soup ladle  
And weeded her garden with a butter knife

She dressed in a baker's apron  
She carried a spatula and sponge  
She dug a deep furrow halfway to China  
And wiped beads of sweat off her forehead  
With the sleeve of a cashmere sweater

During the long summer months  
The soil hardened and dried  
Her peas withered and were burnt by the sun  
Her lettuce went to seed  
Her radishes became indigestible woody fibers  
And as she had feared, her mugworts never appeared



# dreams of water

Jim Ross

## Dream 1

Waters are rising. Some primeval structures are eroding and at risk of being engulfed.

## Dream 2

None of the mugwort seeds I planted germinated. Disappointed, I go fishing and use my last seed as bait. I have a bite immediately. When I pull up my line, a whole school of fish are competing at water's surface over one tiny seed.

## Dream 3

Again, I'm out fishing. As we troll, most of my body is submerged below water. I see a 100-foot-long silvery fish 50 feet below the surface. *Goodbye, legs.*

At the seashore, Ginger and I see people who come out only at low tide. When the tide's lowest, they look like anybody else. As the tide comes in, they cling to hold ground, hoping to withstand water's onslaught. I want to take photographs to capture this, but bow to Ginger's preference that I refrain. I can't resist any longer and start taking pictures. It becomes harder and harder for the little people to hold ground. Water splashing makes my photos look faded. I share them with Ginger, regretting I didn't begin taking pictures before it was so close to high tide.

## Dream 4

After the new leader's inauguration, while distracting with trivial tweets, he takes steps to deprive citizens of their right to clean drinking water. He claims, *Nobody has been deprived, Only those who deprived others of their freedoms, and therefore don't deserve clean drinking water, have lost it.* Then he laughs, *Nobody's a bigger friend of safe drinking water than I am.*

Globally, he manipulates access to clean drinking water to benefit national allies and private business partners. When media report this, he claims, *Climate change restricts access to safe drinking water, not my benevolent actions.* Later he tweets, *Climate change is natural. We can't slow it down or give everybody enough water. What you got is what you got.*

Rhetoric about water access takes center stage in his campaign to concentrate power. Officially, only political prisoners are considered undeserving. *Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to think* catches on as his campaign slogan for imprisoning naysayers, electing like-minded officials, and expanding liquid dominion worldwide.

## Dream 5

Ginger and I are traveling in Nordic country, in a sea fishing village. I'm excited at the prospect of eating fresh-caught fish. I ask the old woman who tends the reservoir of ice water fish a

question. She says, "It rotates, but it's my turn later today if you want to come see." Ginger says, "I had my fill of fish when I worked at the fish market." I watch the old woman making sushi rolls then come back down. Ginger steps out into the snow and grabs a pincer bottle filled with a clear liquid. "What's that?" I ask. She says, "It was rainwater, but it isn't anymore."

### **Dream 6**

I'm traveling along a wild waterfront in the islands. There are rocks I want to observe and photograph to capture their essence, huge rocks that emit empowering energies. They can be white or dark but equally empowering. It is easier to be around them when they're in the shade or if their surfaces have been darkened. In the sunlight being around them is nearly impossible. It's sometimes prudent to experience their energies indirectly, as in a reflection. Left in the sun, the rocks tend to bleach out into an even lighter color. I get what I need. I rub on some mugwort cream as after-sun.

### **Dream 7**

A more welcoming administration creates a new cabinet position: Secretary of Water, responsible for ensuring the water quality of rivers, lakes, ports and estuaries; the navigability of certain water bodies; access to clean drinking water and appropriate sanitation for all citizens; and availability of water for farming, industrial, and recreational uses. She also cooperates with international and in-country organizations to accomplish similar objectives, with special attention to collaboratively developing sustainable, cross-national water policies and priorities; replenishing dying rivers; supporting in-country capacity to peacefully resolve disputes over water; and promoting access to clean drinking water and appropriate sanitation for every family. Domestically, her rallying cry: *Never again Flint*. Internationally: *Water is life, water is love*.

### **Dream 8**

I visit a substance abuse treatment center I'm to evaluate. I express concern to the program director about disappearance of nearly all evidence to suggest what our defunct modern civilization is all about. He says, "Because evidence has been moved to museums to *keep the last breath of civilization alive*." I ask, "How do you manage to treat substance abuse in a society that criminalizes users?" Keeping one foot on the pier, he steps into the water with the other foot and says, "We just got one of our dearest clients out of harm's way. We flew her to Miami and on to South America, where she'll be safe." He then reaches into the water and pulls out two shells. "You see this tiny conch and the bivalve next to it? The conch represents my client; the bivalve, society at large. I can hold them here in my hand and there's no tension between them".

### **Dream 9**

Ginger and I are driving toward our next destination. She's thinking about picking some mugwort. I'm focusing on what opportunities I'll have for taking photos. I can't find either of my cameras. Finally, just as we arrive, I do. We disembark and I focus on taking close-ups of the patterns of striations in heaps of carrots and then in individual carrots cross-sectionally. We move past these toward the water, or what there is of it, because we're in Arizona. I try to catch the stream and the sky in one view.

## Dream 10

A master teacher is explaining the meaning of symbols, represented by small figures, six to twelve inches tall, of many colors and shapes, locked inside a glass cabinet. One by one, to focus conversation, he takes one out, and we talk about it, and how it operates. The class has a chance to ask questions. By now, the marsh has turned into a deep lake. All the people in the class have moved. Someone has appropriated a giant hose to use in roughing up and appearing to clean the water's surface. My regret is that feeling the obligation to rough up the lake's surface has distracted us from understanding the symbols.

## Dream 11

I'm night fishing in the woods. Out of the light shining on the water rises the image of a woman. It appears she's beneath the water's surface. Then she rises from the water to reach her full height before spiriting her way onto land. She heads toward the van I drove to get here. Sopping wet, she gets into the back, where I'd lain the third set of seats flat. She's half sitting/ half lying there. Then a couple more people hop into my van, uninvited. After they deposit their luggage and make themselves comfortable, I say to all three, *Who are you, and what are you doing in my van? I didn't invite you.* They all get up and leave. Did I really mean to chase the woman who rose from the water?

## Dream 12

The Mississippi is so wide I can barely see across. On a beachy shore, children splash, dive off shoulders, run like hummingbirds. I fall asleep with my head half under water. I revive to the sight of a child scaling rocks over the water. "I used to never nap. Now, I can nap anywhere," I say. I want the thrill of one last adventure. I remember running the red sand hills in Colorado with their crushing downhill, putting everything into it if there's no tomorrow. *I want to feel one last time that there's no tomorrow.* I need to face what's before me: the mighty Mississippi. Do I have time, I wonder, to build a raft and go wherever time and the river take it? Will Ginger be upset if I don't quite make it home on time for dinner?

## Dream 13

I rejoin my fellow travelers, George and Paul. Every day we walk for miles toward a far-off but attainable destination. After a few hours of walking, parched, mugwortless, we're on the lookout for drinking water. We see a funeral cortege and run toward it, knowing cemeteries usually have potable water. We reach the cortege, led by two horses draped in black, followed by a funereal bier carrying the deceased, four knights, men bearing their axes reversed, six bald-headed Franciscan monks, a throng of mourners, and a drunken Duke.

We beg the Duke for water. He grants our wish and we begin to guzzle the water but spit it out like nails. Paul falls to the ground retching and, in my haze, I first wonder what's wrong and then question whether he'll survive. But Paul pulls himself up and the Duke and his party laugh uproariously, knowing he gave us water poisoned with a bitter tasting emetic and we'd fallen for it. Then, a joker solemnly presents us with invoices on blue parchment demanding 15 francs each for the poisoned water. We turn and run, again to the Duke's amusement.

## Dream 14

Some of the research my crew is conducting employs methods beyond what I'm accustomed to. One such project involves lobsters. The lobster population has been growing by leaps and bounds. Most likely this is because of climate change, which makes the waters too warm. The lobsters see the end coming so they overpopulate to aid the survival of the species, even though nothing they do can alter heating of the waters. The purpose of our research is to determine whether there's anything we can do to increase the prospects that lobsters will survive, by increasing their capacity to live in warmer waters or by encouraging them to move to colder waters. The option of getting them to stop overpopulating seems to hold no promise and would probably be counterproductive.

## Dream 15

We're heading off on an adventure. My guide and another woman are moving quickly, but I can keep up, effortlessly. Along the path mugwort flourishes in all directions. The path leads to a lake. One of the women chooses to swim beneath the surface. I'm walking through deep water. As we emerge onto land, it occurs to me, I've got my camera in my pocket. I wonder if it'd been destroyed. I take it out and, lo and behold, it was set on a protective mode that allows being submerged underwater. To use it, I need to turn off the protective mode.

## Dream 16

130 Out with a mysterious woman with long dark hair, I say, *I've read the work of Kodia Dallas on creatures of the deep, their lives, and how they interact with us.* I'm standing along the low wall of an ancient pool. My objective is to capture the creature's image on camera. I believe I've seen her break the water's surface. I know I'm not entirely safe standing on water's edge. I could lose balance or she could decide to come out to greet me. I have no clear recourse if I want to meet her. I need to continue on course. Nothing has prepared me for being here.

## Dream 17

I'm down in the basement of the house where I grew up. I see smoke, then flames. I call out, "We have a fire. Call the fire department." Nobody responds. I go under the staircase into the laundry room where there's a hose attached to the sink. I turn on the water. The water pressure could be better. After all, it wasn't designed to put out fires. I hesitate for a moment, saying to myself, *If this is an electrical fire, do I really want to try to drown it? Couldn't that have the unintended effect of causing the electrical system to short out and surge, causing a whole new set of problems?* However, I conclude, I have little or no choice.

Later, I go back upstairs and say, *We need to test the floors and walls to see how badly they've been damaged by fire.* They say, *We think this fire is in your mind. We haven't seen a fire. The floors and walls are fine.* I return to the basement and give the walls and ceiling another dousing. I'm more concerned about damage now that the fire is under control. The problem is, I can't engage anyone, first in fighting the fire and then in examining the effects of the fire and of the dousing with water, on the stability of walls and ceilings, and on the electrical system. I'll do it alone. But what if I conclude we all must vacate?



## Dream 18

We're being held in a closely-guarded conference room and aren't free to come and go as we please. We've no idea when anyone will show up. The senior minister enters, warns *I'm not going to put up with any of your shenanigans, you're not getting away with this*, and storms out. I tell the guard, I need to talk with the mid-level minister with whom I was speaking before coming for the meeting. They let me out. I see her from a balcony three flights below. I descend so I can apprehend and talk with her. Just when I think I've caught up, "the lady vanishes." From my left, she taps me on the shoulder, "Here I am." Bearing mugwort, she lays out the issues the senior minister would like us to discuss, including water rights and access of multiple entitles to water despite lack of a national border.

## Dream 18

Essential stress exploding though my nerves expropriates rest. Flat out, on meds to promote sleep, my night morphs into maneuvers meant to create shelter and fend off the imminent. The walls I carve from stone beneath earth's crust. Iron pilings reinforce the walls I line with lead. I stash 50-gallon tanks of water freed of contaminants. The powerline draws discretely on sun energy and turns waste into energy too. I disguise the roof so it resembles stone, flush with surrounding rock, resistant to marauders, soon to be covered by mugwort..

## Dream 20

I'm trying to help a teen tell his story. He's in trouble and spent time in a correctional institution. I've written out his story long hand and posted sheets of paper on the basement walls. Now, I'm trying to type it up and can scarcely read my handwriting. The teen says, *To reconstitute, just add water and vomit.*

## Dream 21

Somehow, I've come to visit the relatives in Ireland I didn't know I had. Ginger wants to head home but all this is so new I don't want to leave yet. I've gone up the hill and discovered covered passageways that protect walkers from the elements. I walk to the canal, a place we both love, and discover a glass-bottomed gondola that's ready to set sail on a moonlight midnight cruise. The waters beneath the gondola are clear and bright. I try to convince Ginger to take the cruise. She says, *But we don't know the gondolier, we don't know whether it's safe, it's already way past my bedtime, and we need to get home.* I say, *But look, it's beautiful.* And she says, *Maybe another time.* I say, *But how often are we going to be at this spot at midnight under a full moon?*

## Dream 22

What I really want to find in this seemingly endless basement is a lavender tea kettle given to me. I come up empty, sit with my back propped up against shelves, tilt my head back, look up, and on a high shelf see the box the tea kettle came in. I manage to get it down. The lavender tea kettle is still inside the box. It is high and tilts backward, like a birthday cake on which successive layers were off by a little bit. I shake it from side to side. It still contains water, which sloshes back and forth against the sides. It begins to play music. After all, it doubles as a clock alarm radio, boiling water that sings at the appointed time.

### **Dream 23**

I become part of a nationwide effort to document photographically the social developments in our country. The plan is to review photos taken from the 1950s to the present to create a national archive. We don't have negatives. My task is to help review printed photos, mostly 8 x 10s. The problem is, many have stuck together. It is risky to try to pull them apart, even delicately. But there are risks to submerging them in water or chemicals. The images can be destroyed. And if they're left in water too long, the paper can turn to mush.

The Administration is opposed to this effort so it goes on *sub rosa*. The task seems almost endless. It's an essential part of documenting who we are, how we got here, and who we want to become. For now, I'm happy when I can get photos to unstick and can lay them out to dry. Great care and occasional mugwort must be taken to identify and curate these treasures.

### **Dream 24**

*Will the accused please stand? You are accused of peeing in the common watering hole. How do you plead?*

*I plead no more guilty than anyone else, including your honor.*

### **Dream 25**

We're visited by drought, famine, and a cousin of the plague. We try to blow them off but instead, it blows *us* off. We're surrounded by the dead and dying. Even the mugwort is burned to a crisp. Many are left to carry on the fight alone. *Why didn't we learn?* is a common refrain.

What if I have to choose between a sip of water and finishing this sentence?



## Contributors' Notes

**John Q Adams** lived and worked overseas for many years in Thailand, Romania, Azerbaijan and Nepal. He now resides in western Massachusetts and is focusing on reviving the written word.

**B.W. Archer** was born 1975 in Cambridge, England. He currently works as a Coroner's Officer and lives in a Cambridgeshire village famed for its witches. He loves the music of Black Sabbath, The Dictators and Sebadoh (who he got to meet at their awesome Birmingham show 2/10/19! Nice!). His poems have appeared in a number of magazines/journals including Poetry Salzburg Review, 14 Hills and Iota.

**Steven Archer** is a multidisciplinary artist whose mediums span writing, painting, music, video production, and sculpture. His art can be seen world wide on book covers and music videos. He writes, performs and tours extensively with his bands, Ego Likeness and Stoneburner, and has recently been working with The Alan Parsons Project creating art, directing and editing their music videos. He lives in Baltimore with his wife, author Donna Lynch.

**Marina Barcenilla** is a multi-award winning Independent Perfumer and Fragrance Educator with two decades of experience working as a Nose for several British brands, including her own, Marina Barcenilla Parfums and AromAtom. Based in the UK, she's also deeply involved with the fragrance world in Spain, where she is an Academician at the Spanish cultural foundation Academia del Perfume. Additionally, she's a Space Scientist and an Astrobiology Doctoral Researcher, and has a keen interest in using scent to teach science subjects; something she achieved in 2017 with her project AromAtom: Discover the Smell of Space.

**Jerome Berglund** graduated from the University of Southern California's Cinema-Television Production program and spent a picaresque decade in the entertainment industry before returning to the midwest where he was born and raised. He has exhibited many poems in a variety of forms online and in print, most recently in the Asahi Shimbun, Bear Creek Haiku, and Lothlorien Poetry Journal.

Born to parents who met in a community of followers of GI Gurdjieff and PD Ouspensky, **Pernel Berkeley** grew up with an unusual set of intellectual opportunities. With her father also an artist, the stage was set for her pursuit of interests from a unique perspective on both art and life.

**Cynthia Brody** has been an exhibiting artist for over 40 years. She took several art classes and developed a self-taught style that she has expanded upon throughout the years. Her work incorporates the combination of photo images with acrylic or oil paints to create a surreal impression. The photos are often used out of context for their visual texture and what appears to be recognizable is actually made up of something else entirely. She incorporates elements of beauty contrasted with the strong statements and pensive attitudes of the women depicted honoring the complexity, angst and beauty of the female experience.

**Ernest Brute** is .5 of spoken word/sound duo, Ernest Brute + Object Echo. Find them on facebook, youtube, and/or bandcamp.

**Mark Budman** is a first-generation immigrant to the US. An engineer by training, he currently works as a medical interpreter. His fiction has appeared in Catapult, Witness, World Literature Today, Mississippi Review, The London Magazine (UK), McSweeney's, Painted Bride Quarterly, and elsewhere. He is the author of the novel *My Life at First Try*, published by Counterpoint, and co-editor of immigration-themed anthologies published by Ooligan Press, Persea, and University of Chester (UK).

**Mary Buchinger** is the author of five collections of poetry, including *I klausdz I* (2021), *e i n f ü h l u n g l i n f e e l i n g* (2018), *Aerialist* (2015), *Virology* (forthcoming) and *Navigating the Reach* (forthcoming). Her work has appeared in Agni, Diagram, phoebe, Plume, Salamander, and elsewhere. Buchinger grew up in rural Michigan, served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador, and earned a doctorate in linguistics from Boston University. A board member of the New England Poetry Club, she teaches at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in Boston.

**Jacob Chapman** lives in Amherst, MA with his wife and daughter. His chapbook *Other Places* is available from Open Country Press, and his book *Here Over Here Over Here* is available from Human Error Publishing.

**Linda Chown** is a poet and critic who grew up in San Francisco in the flamboyant 60s, born in Berkeley, Ca. Almost right on the Berkeley campus. She has written 5 books of poetry, multiple reviews and essays and one full length study of narration. She has travelled a lot and lived in Europe for 17 years. Intense and ever interested, she is now in the state of Michigan, busy in these cloudy times doing what the title of her latest book of poetry describes: *Sunfishing*.

**RC deWinter's** poetry is widely anthologized, notably in *New York City Haiku* (NY Times, 2/2017), *Now We Heal: An Anthology of Hope* (Wellworth Publishing, 12/2020) *easing the edges: a collection of everyday miracles* (Patrick Heath Public Library of Boerne, 11/2021,) *The Connecticut Shakespeare Festival Anthology* (River Bend Bookshop Press, 12/2021), in print: 2River, Event Magazine, Gargoyle Magazine, Meat For Tea: The Valley Review, the minnesota review, Night Picnic Journal, Plainsongs, Prairie Schooner, Ogham Stone, San Antonio Review, Southword, Twelve Mile Review, Wingless Dreamer, Yellow Arrow Journal, The York Literary Review among others and appears in numerous online literary journals

**Scott Ferry's** most recent book is *fishmirror* from Alien Buddha Press. You can find more @ [ferrypoetry.com](http://ferrypoetry.com)

**Tamara Fricke** is a co-winner of the Gertrude Claytor Award from the Academy of American Poets in 2010 and her work can be found in journals and collections including Meat for Tea, Poeming Pigeon, and Whisper and the Roar. Her chapbooks *Our Requiem* and *Exit Means Eden* are available online. She studied English and economics as a Francis Perkins Scholar at Mount Holyoke College and currently works as a grant writer in the Pioneer Valley.

**Michael Favala Goldman** (b.1966) is a poet, jazz clarinetist and translator of Danish literature. Among his seventeen translated books is *Dependency* by Tove Ditlevsen, which made the New York Times Best 10 Books of 2021 as book three of *The Copenhagen Trilogy*. Michael's three books of original poetry include *Who has time for this?*, *Small Sovereign*, and *Slow Phoenix*. His work has appeared in dozens of publications including The New Yorker, Rattle, and the Harvard Review. He lives in Northampton, MA, where he has been running bi-monthly poetry critique groups since 2018. <https://michaelfavalagoldman.com/>

**Tzivia Gover** is the author of *The Mindful Way to a Good Night's Sleep* and several other books. Her poetry, essays, and stories have been widely published, including in The New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, Poets & Writers Magazine, and many more. She teaches courses online and in-person about combining dreams and writing. Learn more at [www.tziviagover.com](http://www.tziviagover.com)

**Ellen Mary Hayes** is a poet and visual artist exploring the transcendent qualities of the creative process. She embraces expression as a tool to heal from her disability. Her work reflects themes of creating sacred homes, speaking out for human rights, and meditations on the natural world. Ellen has had art featured in the Easthampton City Arts *Post Pause* exhibit, Last Leaves Magazine, Equinox, Sonic Boom, Anchor House of Artists, Eclipse Literary Magazine, Arkana Literary Magazine, and Meat for Tea. Her poetry has been featured in Wellstone Poets, Spires Magazine, Silkworm, and Meat for Tea. Ellen is gratefully based in Easthampton, Massachusetts.

**Richard Wayne Horton** has published in Southern Pacific Review, Meat For Tea, The Dead Mule, Danse Macabre du Jour, Bull & Cross and others. He has received 2 Pushcart nominations and has published 3 books: *Sticks & Bones* (Meat For Tea Press), *Artists In The Underworld* (Human Error Publishing) and *Ballet For Murderers* (Human Error Publishing). He was the 2019-21 Massachusetts Beat Poet Laureate.

**Marian Kent** is the author of three poetry collections, *Heart Container*, *SUPERPOWERS or: More Poems About Flying*, and *Responsive Pleading*. She lives in Northampton, MA with her family. You can follow Marian's poetry and other missives at [www.runawaysentence.com](http://www.runawaysentence.com)

**Linda Kraus** has taught university courses in literature and cinema studies. She has published poetry and prose in several literary journals and anthologies and is currently editing two collections of poems. She is an orchid judge, a judge for film festivals, and an impassioned rock hound.

**Allan Lake**, originally from Saskatchewan, has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton, Ibiza, Tasmania, W. Australia & Melbourne. Lake won Lost Tower Publications (UK) Comp 2017, Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Fest 2018 and publication in New Philosopher 2020. Latest Chapbook (Ginninderra Press 2020) *My Photos of Sicily*.

**Mario Lew** edited *Tumbling Grounds*—a self-published collection of poetry by George MacLean Aku. He is a regular monthly contributor to The Authors Voice, the newsletter of the South Florida Writers Association, writing flash fiction in the style of different authors i.e., Gustave Flaubert, Edgar Allen Poe, Jack Kerouac.

**Donna Lynch** is a two-time Bram Stoker Award-nominated horror and dark fiction writer, designer, spoken word artist, and the singer and co-founder—along with her husband, artist and musician Steven Archer—of the dark electro-rock band Ego Likeness (Metropolis Records). Her written works include *Isabel Burning*, *Red Horses*, *Driving Through the Desert*; and the poetry collections *In My Mouth*, *Ladies & Other Vicious Creatures*, *Daughters of Lilith*, *Witches*, *Choking Back the Devil*, and *Girls From the County*, among others. She and her partner live in Maryland.

**Jeremy Macomber-Dubs** is the guitarist, vocalist, and co-songwriter in Bunnies. Born and raised in Central Pennsylvania, he and his best friend/band-mate moved to Western Massachusetts in 2004 to play seven shows opening for the reunited Pixies. Bunnies decided to make a permanent home there where they've been playing shows and recording albums ever since. In 2011 and 2012, Dubs released two solo albums on Frank Black's label The Bureau Records, and in 2013 he sang on 5 new Pixies songs. Jeremy has also played drums for artists such as Severe Severe, Rabbit Rabbit, Problem With Dragons, and Black Francis.

**Olive McArdle** is a vibrant 10-year-old with a passion for visual arts and nature who often combines these two loves in pieces that include animals. She has been creating art since she was just four years old, working to grow her understanding of both technical skills and different mediums, with a current preference for mixed media, collage, and acrylic paintings.

**Kathy McMullen's** short stories may be found or are forthcoming at Drunk Monkeys, Free State Review, Bridge Eight, Gravel, The Maine Review and Second Hand Stories. She often writes about the inhabitants of upper crusty Odin's Neck and its lower-brow counterpart, The Cinderblocks. These two communities comprise the two "arms" of Pleasant Arms, a fictional town north of Seattle, Washington. At present Ms. McMullen is busy on *Killing Clifford Gray*, a novel about a teenage girl who murders her rapist. **Rick Paar** is a psychologist who writes fiction, nonfiction, and essays. He has published in Meat for Tea, Blue Nib, Athelon, Voices, The International Journal of Play, and has been a columnist for Reminder Publications, Wayne Herald, and the Massachusetts Psychological Association Quarterly.

**Robert Peate** is a creative writer and English teacher in the Portland, Oregon, area. Robert believes that if something is important we should talk and write about it. Robert also believes that everything is important.

**Charles Rammelkamp** is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore, where he lives with his wife Abby. He contributes a monthly book review to North of Oxford and is a frequent reviewer for The Lake, London Grip and The Compulsive Reader. Rammelkamp had full-length poetry collections published in the plague year, 2020, *Catastroika*, from Apprentice House, and *Ugler Lee* from Kelsay Books. A poetry chapbook, *Mortal Coil*, was published in 2021 by Clare Songbirds Publishing. Another full-length collection, *The Field of Happiness*, will be published in 2022 by Kelsay Books.

**Mykki Rios** is a queer genderfluid Mexican-American poet, performer and multimedia artist. Raised in Chicago, and having lived many places across the globe, they strive to achieve clear, authentic communication and self-expression that strikes a chord with the human condition. Mykki has had work published in issues of The Minison Project, story twigs, and Welter, as well as Lupercalia Press' *Vulcanalia* anthology.

**Jim Ross** jumped into creative pursuits in 2015 after a rewarding research career. With graduate degree from Howard University, in seven years he's published nonfiction, fiction, poetry, photography, plays, and hybrid in 175 journals on five continents. Publications include Bombay Gin, Burningword, Columbia Journal, Hippocampus, Ilanot Review, Lunch Ticket, Manchester Review, Meat for Tea, Newfoundland, Stonecoast, The Atlantic, and Typehouse. Representative photo essays include Barren, Kestrel, Litro, New World Writing, and Sweet. He wrote and acted in a one-act play and appears in a documentary limited series broadcast internationally. Jim and his family split time between city and mountains.

**Stephen Sacco's** short story *Howard County Rapture* was published by The Rumpus and was nominated for the PEN America/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers and for inclusion in the anthology *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2020*. His short story chapbook, *The Williamsburg Stories*, is currently out on submission with publishers. He has also written plays, one of which received the B. Rodney Marriott Award in Playwriting. He has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Before that, he worked for ten years as a journalist.

As a longtime author playing around with words and genre in the Southeast US with his wife, daughter, loyal lab and crafty cat, **Patrick Scott** enjoys reading and battling for domination via board games in my house. His first novel, *Big Beasts*, debuted in September 2020 with Atmosphere Press. My second series kicks off with *Unburied*, set to release April 8, 2022. A short story titled *Play* appeared in Volume 9, Issue 3 of 'Meat for Tea: The Valley Review' literary magazine.

After some successes as an undergraduate and graduate poet nearly sixty years ago, **Peter Tacy** spent his working years not writing, but as an independent-school English teacher, Headmaster, and regional administrator. When he retired, he deliberately returned to writing, and published two nonfiction books.

More recently he's been writing poems. This latter development has been very much encouraged by his new wife Jane Yolen, whose own poetic output (a poem a day) has never abated since the 1950's, when they first knew each other. They live in Hatfield, Ma., Mystic CT, and St. Andrews, Scotland. His father grew up in South Hadley, and his mother's family first arrived centuries ago in Hadlyme, CT. He has a new chapbook of poetry with Peter Tacy entitled *The Black Dog Poems* (Meat For Tea Press, 2022). **Rosanne Ullman** is the owner of WriteMyMemoirs.com and the author of the children's picture book, *The Case of the Disappearing Kisses*. Her observations appear on SixtyAndMe.com, Motherwell.com and the late BoomerCafe.com.

**Mireya S. Vela** is a Mexican-American creative non-fiction writer, storyteller, and artist in Los Angeles. In her work, Ms. Vela addresses the needs of immigrant Mexican families and the disparities they face every day. She tackles issues of inequity and how ingrained societal systems support the injustice that contributes to continuing poverty and abuse. Ms. Vela received her Master of Fine Arts from Antioch University in 2018. She is the author of *Vestiges of Courage*, available through Amazon. Ms. Vela is also a visual artist.

**Jennifer Weigel** is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

**Karen Willard-Ribeiro** is a queer renewable energy expert, interpersonal communication scholar, and advocate for worker ownership and land justice. She has published the self-care InnerFortune journaling tool and the book about how to face the Karen phenomenon, *Beyond Karen: emerging from the depths of an epic epithet*. Western Mass is where they were born, educated, and raised a family. Karen's active hope is for the global healing of the effects of misogyny.

**Gerald Yelle** is a member of the Florence, Massachusetts Poets Society and lives in Amherst, Massachusetts. His books include *The Holyoke Diaries*, and *Mark My Word and the New World Order*. He has an e-chapbook at Yavaneka Press: *Industries Built on Words* and a chapbook *No Place I Would Rather Be* from Finishing Line Press. *Dreaming Alone and with Others* will be published in 2023.

Last year **Jane Yolen** won the Massachusetts Book Award in the Young Adult category for a Holocaust novel, *Mapping the Bones*. One of the two main characters is a fourteen year old Jewish poet, so she got to write his poems for him. Or with him, as it often seemed. She has a new chapbook of poetry with Peter Tacy entitled *The Black Dog Poems* (Meat For Tea Press, 2022).

**Frank Zahn** is an author of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. His publications include nonfiction books, articles, commentaries, book reviews, and essays; novels; short stories; and poetry. Currently, he writes and enjoys life at his home among the evergreens in Vancouver, Washington. For details, visit his website [www.frankzahn.com](http://www.frankzahn.com).

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- AUG 17** ANDY FRASCO & THE UN
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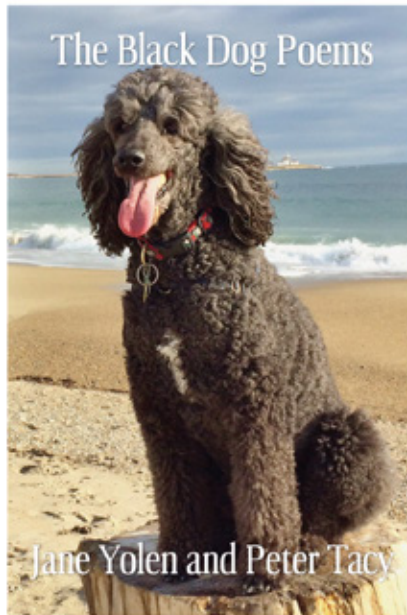
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