

"Showcasing the beautiful power of written and visual art forms."

ISSUE #2, FALL 2023



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

POETRY BY
RUTH
BROWN
AFTERNOON
AT THE
SUPERMARKET

FICTION BY
MORD
MCGHEE
SAILBOATS

ART BY
SERGE
LECOMTE
REALISM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
HARRISON
ZEIBERG
BREAKING WAVE



GABBY & MIN'S
Literary Review

ISSUE #2, FALL 2023

GABBY & MIN'S LITERARY REVIEW
Established in 2023

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY
Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter

www.gabbyandmin.com
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COVER ART
Between Lines 2 by Clarissa Cervantes

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

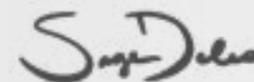
Dear Readers,

As the leaves turn and the crisp breath of fall whispers through our streets and souls, I am elated to welcome you to the second issue of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, our Fall 2023 edition. It is a privilege to once again serve as your Editor-in-Chief, offering a vessel filled to the brim with the reflections of this season of change. In these pages lies an embrace of transformation, a contemplation of the transient yet vibrant tableau that fall paints for us every year. Nine stirring pieces of art, nine fiction stories, five poignant photographs, and twenty-one diverse works of poetry and prose await to lead you through a myriad of shades and sentiments, from the echoes of fading warmth to the anticipation of the coming cold.

This issue is an ode to the ephemeral beauty of fall, to the cycle of life and the nuanced emotions it stirs within us. Our artists and writers have tapped into the essence of this season, the introspective dance of decay and renewal, to bring forth works that resonate with the soul's own rhythms. The stories—whimsical, profound, and everything in between—chart courses through the landscapes of human experience, while the art and photography capture moments of stark beauty, each frame a story unto itself. The poetry and prose pieces are like fallen leaves, each one a different hue of thought and feeling, together forming a rich carpet that invites you to tread thoughtfully, to pause and ponder.

I am deeply thankful for the trust placed in me to compile these offerings, and for the opportunity to connect once more with you, our cherished readers. May this collection inspire you to embrace the spirit of autumn, to reflect on your own passages and seasons, and to find comfort and excitement in the embrace of change. Enjoy the journey through the turning of the year, and may you carry a piece of this edition's heart with you through the seasons to come.

With heartfelt thanks and the warmest of wishes for this season,



Sage Delio, Editor-In-Chief, *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*

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★ COVER FEATURE

RAINSTORM

SANDRA HOSKING

It is raining outside my front door,
hard, but the sun is shining.

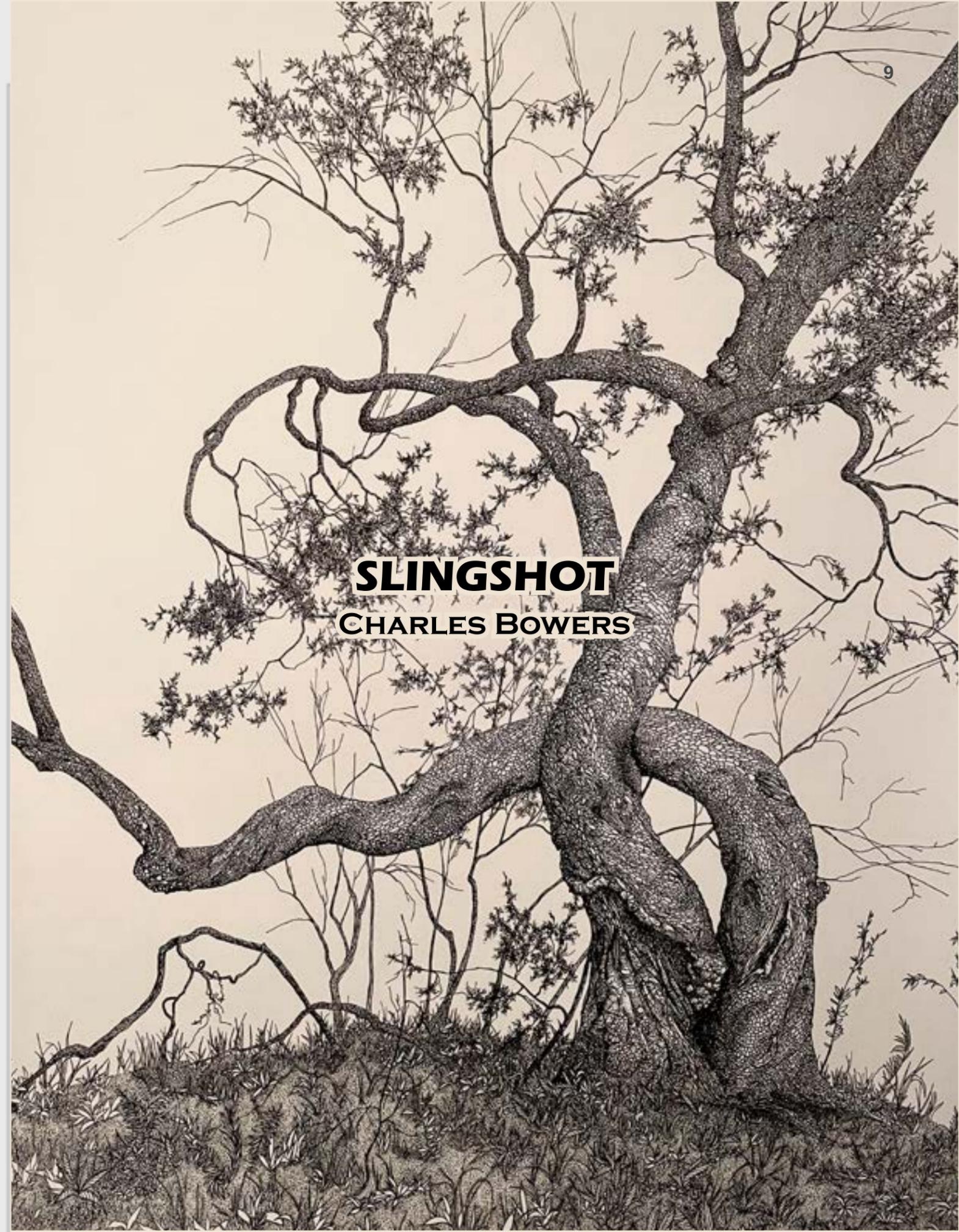
The weather does not know what it wants
to be or is supposed to be.

Juvenile maple leaves glisten as water cascades
down their emerald spines

Droplets bounce off the rusty watering can
as if riffing jazz.

I stand on the stoop, waiting for a rainbow
to draw itself across the sky.

My socks are wet.



SLINGSHOT

CHARLES BOWERS

THE HORSESHOE CRAB'S SUPPLICATION

JOSHUA SABATINI

There were horseshoe crabs washed up or caught up in the rocks when the tide went out, slowly dying, some flipped over and pecked to death by seagulls. Consider V. Cook would check for the vital signs of the horseshoe crabs he came across and if their legs moved, he'd pick them up and toss them back into the sea to save them. Seeing seagulls peck at an overturned horseshoe while its legs moved helpless in the air seemed cruel, and he wished that wasn't the way of the world, but it was.

Cook walked down along the shore for the effects it had on him. The stepping on the rocks, the sound of the waves and the look of the sea under the sun, the rise of the clay cliffs to his right on the walk westward, gradually getting higher until the western point where they were at their highest, and around the bend where the cliffs ran north for a while before the island projected furthest west for a moment like a finger point, were great forces converging upon the point of Cook, like waves rolling over a stone drawing out its inner essence by smoothing out all its rough spots.

There were fingertip-sized pebbles and there were palm-sized stones, there were shells, like slippers or Atlantic surf clams, some preserved perfectly, others fragmented, there were bits of seaweed from the underwater kingdom, and there were sand grains, once part of larger rock formations. There were also big boulders along the way, placed here and there by a retreating glacier tens of thousands of years ago - like everything else that formed island - showing the wear of the relentless wave breaks against them ever since, but still standing strong. Consider paused on his walk to place the palm of his hand upon the rough surface of a large boulder half in the sea's low tide, thinking it must have an

animation, an intelligence, feelings, and he thought his touch, an act of honor and devotion, would create an intimacy with it. Consider did not think the boulder needed his intimacy, the placement of his palm upon it; the boulder would exist as the boulder had existed for those thousands of years before and thousands of years assuredly to come without it, and without his fuller embrace that followed, when he was moved to show greater affection by a transfer of energy from the coarse points raised up on its surface connecting to his hand. Maybe the boulder could find a benefit in the touch, in the hug, could experience a moment and a substance it otherwise would not. Consider thought the boulder was experiencing his touch and he hoped it was helpful. Maybe it could relieve the pressures it constantly felt for a moment, maybe it could feel his appreciation it otherwise never would have felt from humanity, or never even knew about.

Yet, Consider had a worry that he was interfering with the boulder and doing more harm than good. Suppose the boulder was just fine all on its own, but the touch weakened it, made it long for the intimacy again and suffer from the lack of it? What if it made it more vulnerable to the passing of time, the beating of the waves, what if it softened its hard exterior? But the boulder was not that way. The boulder was unchanged by changing Consider. The boulder accepted Consider's presence and responded with a kindness of its own, but it would remain within itself as the boulder, strong and mighty, determined in its perseverance against the wear and passage of time, fighting for its longevity, believing it could win, in fact. What if the seas receded and it would only have to endure lesser abrasive elements, what if the sea froze up around it, what if its determination was rewarded and it was resurrected in the end, displayed up in heaven as the mighty stone who, by maintaining a strong belief in itself and its origins, would not succumb to adverse forces? The boulder could intelligently receive Consider's devotion without having it subvert its own glorious way, and together, in the moment, they formed a

substance that hadn't existed before, right there, during the walk, part of the boulder experience, part of the sacred place.

"We are the life giver's creations. We are bonded, bonded by the love which flows through all."

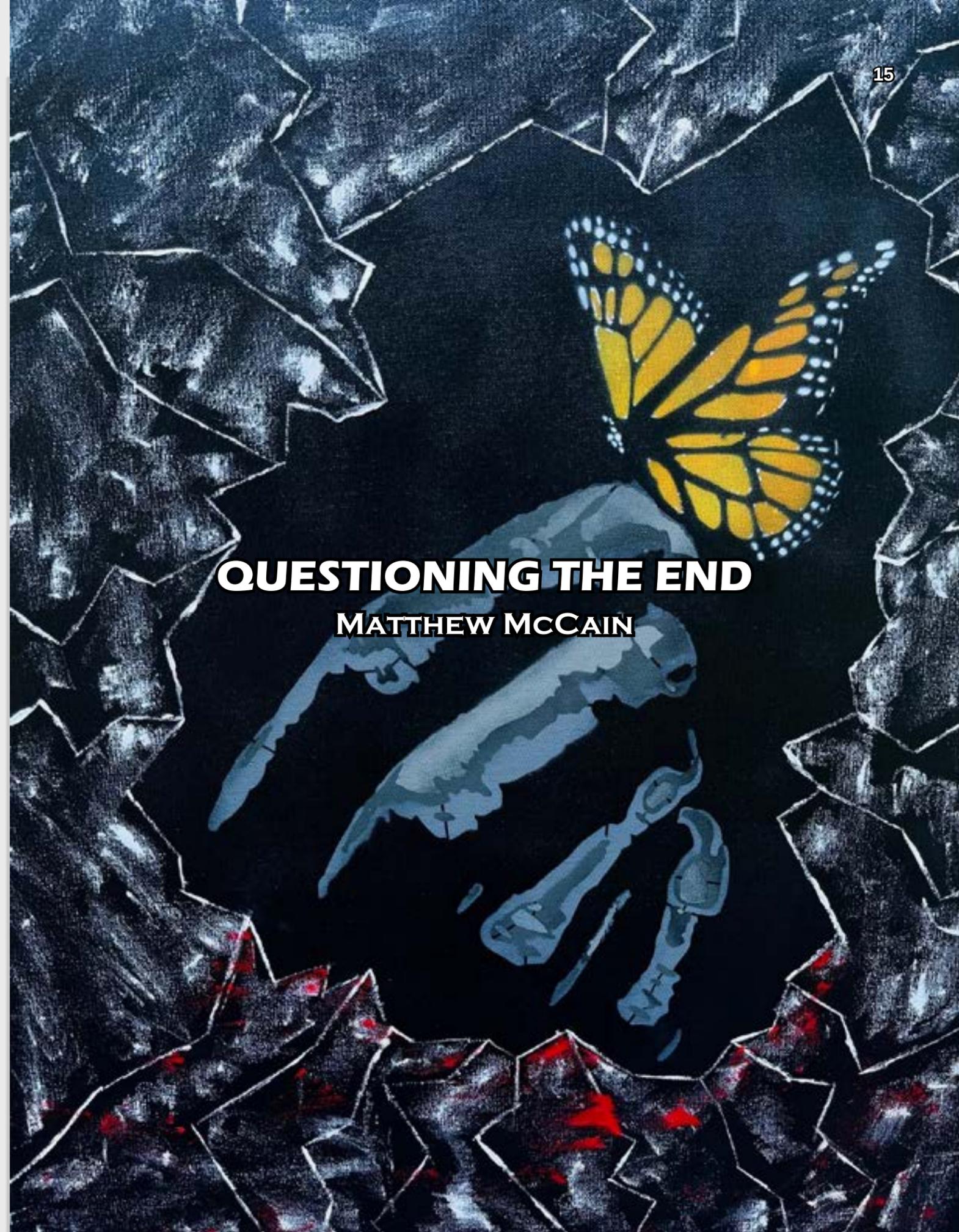
Consider was lifted up by the boulder's words. To have set out on the experience and come across irrefutable proof of the merits of it straightaway, was more than encouraging, it was his lifeblood. He needed the connection. Otherwise, he'd have become lost in a meaningless place, with no sense of purpose. He was not interested in himself per se, wasn't intrigued by being on his own, moving through the substances around him, whether grounded in a commonly-shared reality or fluid-like, a dream of his own projection: Nothing entertained him, if it was not connected by its essential building-blocks to the greater being of everything. Consider believed there was one. If there wasn't one, if no proof of one existed - no thanks. He sought the utter proof at every turn, which was why he was out there in the first place, which was why the boulder experience provided him with the material he needed. What he had to work with were the basics. He had a relatively healthy body, he could walk the route without tiring and back again; he had his mind, all its thoughts, and he had his moods; he had his senses, by which to gather information from the external world. He had the inner sight, by which to gather information from the inner world. Tying them all together was not sufficient. There had to exist an intelligence he was interacting with, journeying within, a relationship he was developing, building upon, and it had to exist beyond the world, and it had to transcend the network of every-day activities commonly participated in as if there wasn't this at all. He knew that the boulder wouldn't have spoken to him, if he wasn't on the right track, if he wasn't not caught up in the webs of every industry and institution, the marketplace that was once a temple. Whatever there was, was not happening there, where whatever was did what it could to prevent it at all costs from entering, as it would subvert everything they

were up to in their closed off bubbles, those closed door networks, full of webs of trickery and deceit, preventing the living from living, keeping them dead among the living day in and day out. There was no use for life in these spots. Life had to be discovered outside of them, and, once discovered, it had to be lived. Once Consider was well on his way of living, he was astonished by what life had to offer, the sheer breadth of it was deeper than the sea's underwater kingdom, was greater than the scope of the day sky's blueness and was vaster than the night sky's endless stars and planets. Once life was discovered, there were countless other discoveries within life awaiting discovery, and the only way to continue to live life, once liberated from the world's death game, was to keep exploring life. All it has to offer, wows the liver at every twist and turn. To live was a great big deal, full of tireless activities. To live was to discover the boulder and its inner nature, connected to life just like he was, and in the connection they formed together they were living even more. To live meant to live, to discover life and all its richness, to produce great new substances within the heart of life, to utter the praise and the celebration of life. The boulder and Consider created the song of themselves by actively participating in life in that moment, like breathing the breath of all of creation and eternity. Let the dead bury the dead. There was life in that boulder. Consider found it by mining life for the living and connecting with it, and anything that was really living understood life and what they were experiencing by living. The connection between whatever was living, was part of the living, from which was born a new substance within the living, keeping it fresh, like rain fills the rivers and streams. The living didn't say OK, arise, come alive, and rest content in it. But arise, come alive and live actively within it. An instrument does not know what it's capable of until a musician of skill picks it up and begins to play it. Together, they create a song. The song is the product of the musician and the instrument, two things coming to life, and, once meeting, living by producing a new substance, full of the very essence of their lives, in the purest most

precious and most actively acting, living, breathing form possible.

He came across a horseshoe crab, and, with the toe of his left sneaker, tapped its upturned side; the legs began to desperately move in the air, the sign the poor thing was still alive. Consider bent down, picking it up by placing the palms of his hands on either side of the shell, and tossed it on an arc into a foot-deep wave, where he saw the horseshoe right itself using its telson, regaining its vigor. He was happy to lend a hand, where he could. He couldn't know for sure what happened to the horseshoe crabs he saved, but he liked to think they went on living long fruitful lives. He thought his helping hand was there to answer prayers. Not only did Consider need to arrive there at that exact moment, but he also had to have the idea to toss them back into the sea when he came across them, because there were times in the past when he took no notice of the horseshoe crabs burning under the sun, when he didn't even concern himself to check if they had any life remaining.

The fact he took notice, the fact he checked on them, and the fact he tossed them back into the sea, were signs to him he himself was improving in all that he was doing, even though there was no one telling him that the right behavior was this or that, no one telling him: Thou shall check on the horseshoe crabs along the shore. Thou shall toss those back into the sea with vital signs. There was nothing in the sacred books about it, nothing in Ignatius's prayer guides. Saving the horseshoe crabs had become natural to him, like breathing, like taking another step along the shore; it really was nothing at all, and yet, for the poor horseshoe crabs, flipped over on their protective hardshell tops, pleading with the heavens with their many-legged supplications, it was a matter of life and death.



QUESTIONING THE END

MATTHEW MCCAIN

TRANSLATION

TUHIN BHOWAL

And then, every leaf turned blind, swayed directionless—then further away, and far, like a monsoon along the coast. We are what we repeatedly do. My body, birch, in a forest of oak. Among the trees, I mounted violence; among the bark, I oozed as sap; among the birds, never foliage, let alone canopy. Among the pines, I was fruit as ample and nude bullied for only a sweetness: What to call that plum from those dwarfed bushes, dropping; green on the outside—raw?—gaping-red on the inside ripened just till a vague clarity of hunger, an assridged through the centre; “doric”, “dorik”, “U soh-plom”? or simply, this supple plant in obedience. The flesh and the pulp. *You need this. We do not need each other.* Not of the words—movement emanating from their choice. Wind pillorying the mind like a new god. In this city, you can destroy anything, even rhyme. Even image, fastening the idea of image, even death. Coconut shells like dead-baby-heads, peeping out of a city, the way a sack of mirrors reflects the dead, the same way memory serves causality: A father stealing water. A son being chased by dogs, and muscle. A tenant reconnoitring how delicious rats are, roasting them whole.

**U soh-plom means “a plum fruit” or simply “a plum” in Khasi, the state language of Meghalaya, India.*

We are what we repeatedly fail. Years; faces; and one elastic dream of salt. *I wanted to be both hunger and the deaf machinery of hunger,* when in Aizawl, the staccato-staircases of stone trussing—hills ran perpendicular, descending longer than that dream onto a ground, where I groped bananas, even plantains, and papayas, merely, with my bare mouth—and my mother still wanting a daughter. Bluish blackberries. Bluish mulberries. Bluish blueberries . . . The rest you’d want to know.



BETTY

CHARLES JACOBSON

I cracked her door on a wintry day:
Waist-high rotting piles
Spread beyond all hope.

We drove away with a crooked mouth,
Her eyes on me like a galliard tree,
Descanting Ulysses, Joyce and more.

Read me sad poems, she softly said,
Crystals, rings and virgin parchments,
I have seen all these.

Late I brought her home and
She held me close with an opera she knew—
Pratzel's closes at two.

What the hell!
She fell down dead
Day after Christmas.

I ate a bagel this morning.

MAX BYERS

SHANNON BURNS

In the third grade, you don't really think about who was the legend at your school or how you would even become a legend. At that age, we were still struggling to learn our best cursive. However, before we even attempted to wrap our heads around that concept, our good classmate, Max Byers, unwillingly became the best prototype.

It started on a Tuesday afternoon when I was struggling to wrangle myself free from the trash can. My friends would tell me it gets easier over time, yet Dennis, our school's well-known tormentor, always finds a way. This time, he folded me over like a stapler and shoved me in head and feet first. I'm pretty sure I was missing another class amidst my struggles, but I didn't care anymore. Dennis was always going to victimize somebody whether we liked it or not, his primary targets being the newer kids. One day, a younger student named Charlie unknowingly stood next to Dennis's locker and was chewing a wad of bubblegum. Suddenly, Dennis reached over, grabbed Charlie by the shirt collar, and forced a punch so hard that the gum catapulted from Charlie's lips. The severity of the punch was enough to keep poor Charlie silent, so Dennis shoved his body into the locker.

The next week, Max Byers transferred to this school; he was next in line for being Dennis's "fresh meat." That Tuesday just so happened to be his first day which, for me, was also "trash can" day. As I finally absorbed a greedy breath of fresh air for the first time in what felt like an hour, I saw Max standing there like he was waiting. How long was he watching me squirm pathetically in the trash can?

“What’s up?” I found myself saying.

Max didn’t respond. His rainbow shirt was distracting along with the fact that his body was a bit on the chubbier side. His black-rimmed glasses stood in perfect symmetry on the ridge of his nose. Finally, in his right hand, he held a paper plate full of butter crackers. My friends warned me about this beforehand; apparently, that was one of his strangest quirks. Max never brought a sack lunch; he would simply walk into the cafeteria with his plate and happily accept a large helping of everything on the menu. Now that I saw this plate in front of me, I believed it. Yet what I didn’t believe was the magnitude that he can hold on this seemingly thin plate. My friends said that he can pile on so much food, yet the plate would never break down or even so slightly bend over. It was a lie, but it didn’t seem important to me anyways.

With a grin on his face, he held his plate out in front of me, and I hesitantly took a cracker. He showed his teeth and walked away. Was he waiting all that time just to share a cracker with me? That question barely escaped my conscious before Dennis burst out of his classroom with a bathroom key. I gasped, and a large chunk of my cracker got sucked down my throat. Right away, Dennis saw Max and planted himself right in front of him like a prison guard. Holding my throat, I tried to conjure some kind of warning. The only thing that escaped my lips was a weak croak.

“Who the hell are you? Why are you in my way?”

Dennis had no problem cursing at this school. In fact, he has said every word that our parents have warned us about in the past. Nonetheless, Max didn’t seem the least bit fazed, at least where I was. Still fighting through the pain of the cracker scratching my windpipe, I crawled a bit closer to the scene but not so close that Dennis could notice me. Not getting the response he desired, Dennis grabbed Max’s shirt and yanked him off the ground like he was pulling out a freshly grown beet. Now directly facing Dennis and his scarred lip, Max had the nerve to

hold out his plate of crackers towards him. I covered my eyes. The sound of a body hitting the ground was enough for me. After a few minutes, I carefully pulled back my hands and saw that Max was lying face down. Dennis delivered one final kick to his eye and marched towards the bathroom.

With the coast being clear, I rushed over to him. The gentle grin on his face was gone, so was the gleam from his marble-like eyes. Blood was rushing from his nose; his right eye was barely opening. Beside him was his paper plate which had a hole carved in the center, making it look more like a rim. I held onto my stomach. My cracker wanted to come back up.

The next morning, my mom actually had to force me out of bed. I didn’t tell her what happened. I couldn’t tell anyone. It was bad enough that I had to live with this guilt, probably for the rest of my life. He offered me a cracker and I watched him get beat up. It doesn’t matter if I was choking. I could’ve at least fought back. No matter. My mom still dragged me into her van. Meanwhile, I was praying that Max would at the very least forgive me.

Initially, I haven’t found him anywhere in our classroom and in the hallways during recess. I was beginning to believe that he had already transferred out, not blaming him a bit. It began to rain later that afternoon, and we all had to eat inside for lunch. So, I sat with my friends in the hallway when we got out of the cafeteria. As my friends were busy playing paper football, I glanced over at the bathrooms, the same area where Max got injured. That sick feeling returned. I nearly begged one of my friends to hang in the classroom. Before my friends could answer, the door to the teacher’s lounge opened. That almost never happens when we were around, especially during lunch break. Just then, I saw him: Max Byers, still holding his newly destroyed plate which he has now filled with glazed doughnut holes. He had a small bandage around his nose, and his right eye was practically squinting from the swelling.

I stood up so he can notice me. Right when he did, the door to the principal's office crashed open. Dennis was in a blaze of fury. The other kids scrambled back in their classrooms; some hid themselves in the bathroom stalls. The only people that remained was Max and I. This time, I didn't move from my spot; I wanted to protect Max. However, Max somehow noticed my intentions as he held out his hand to stop me. I relaxed my shoulders, yet my heart was still thumping in randomized palpitations. Dennis lunged over to Max, standing directly in front of him as he had done before. I looked at the classrooms, and some of the other kids were seen peeking out from behind the doors. Dennis, in the height of his anger, was too focused to notice.

"Still got that plate, you little shit? How about I put a hold in your shirt this time?"

I remained transfixed. Max, once again, stayed calm. He even picked up a doughnut hole and popped it into his mouth. With a sweet-filled smile, Max turned and walked away. I looked over at what was the second-best thing I've ever seen: Dennis was standing there, defeated, his face red with humiliation. Seconds later, somebody signals Dennis from behind, and he turns around. It was Charlie, who, with a mocking grin, punched himself in the chest and placed himself comfortably in an open locker after giving a salute. Another kid signaled Dennis from the water fountain as he baptized himself from head to toe. The other kids joined in and gave a rendition of Dennis's latest attacks. It looked like one of those war reenactments, only the opposing side was fixed in utter confusion. It was beautiful. Finally, my heart slowed to a constant beat, and I gave out a whistle. Dennis's tearful face was still satisfying to see. I gave him that same salute and jumped into a trash can. The sound of collective laughter can be heard for the first time in what felt like months.

Nine years later, I decided to visit the elementary school again. I

mostly wanted to congratulate one of my teachers on having her second child. However, as I entered the hallway, there was the primary best thing I've ever seen: all of the kids were holding paper plates. Some were full of food, and some were empty. I also noticed that they were sharing with each other. Nobody was getting beat up. Nobody was living in fear. It turns out that anyone of any age can be considered a legend, yet nobody could stand out in greater memory than Max Byers.



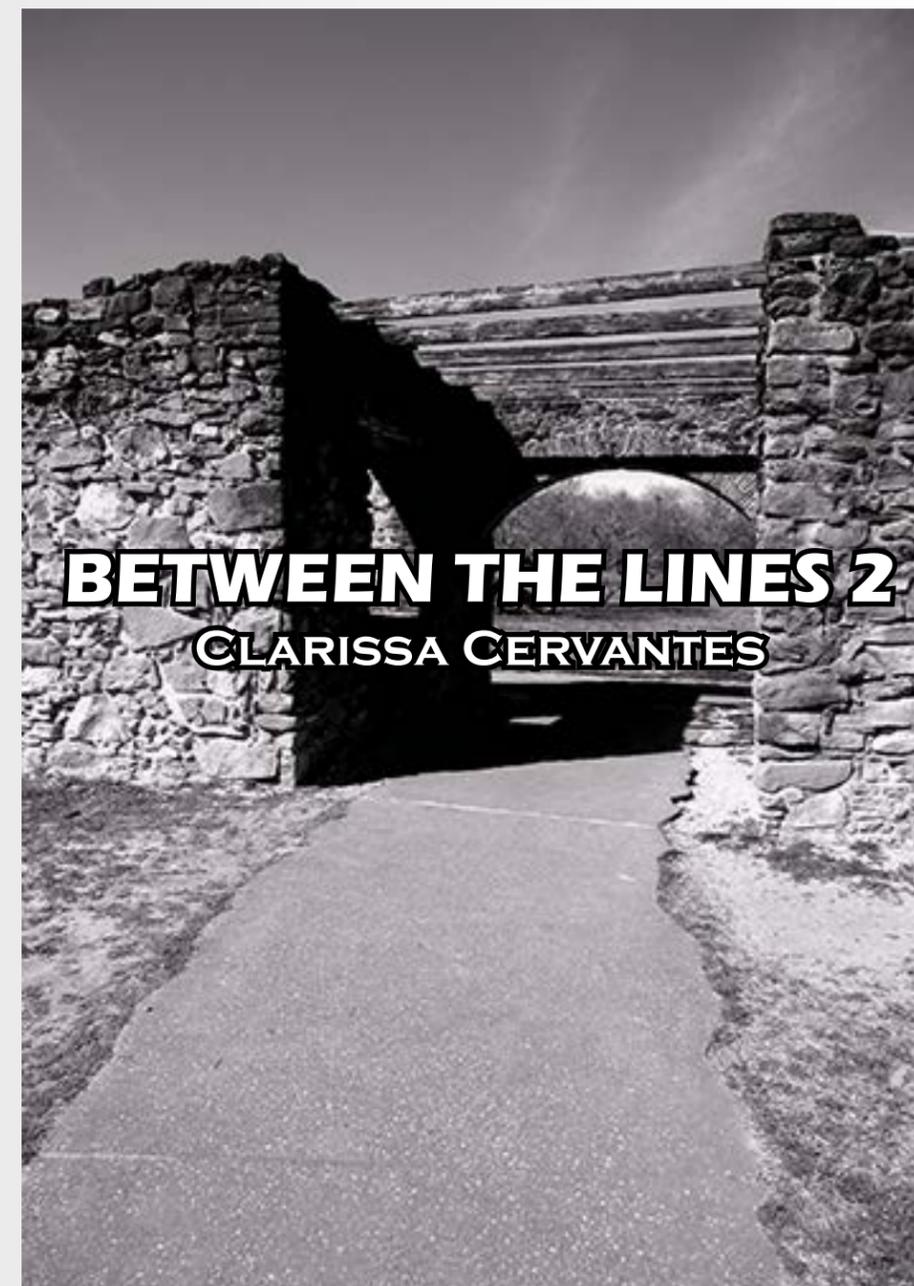
UNICORN

DMITRY BLIZNIUK

A cloudy autumn morning.
 Streetlights, like giraffes, quietly roam in the fog.
 Oblique clots of shadows quiver
 behind the trees -
 the small fish of the last night
 got caught in the weeds while low tide.
 It smells of burnt felt and rotten plums.
 The light-boned autumn trembles
 like a rickety foal
 on the crooked legs of the branches.
 An old woman drags a hand cart of apples.
 Some leaves still glow, with the color of bile and blood.
 Suddenly it starts to drizzle.
 Hands of hundreds of ghosts rub the wet branches,
 making fog thicker.
 Two girls, students, hid from the rain in a pavilion.
 They smoke and gently feed each other with pieces of chocolate
 like birds feed their gaping chicks with worms,
 trying not to smudge the lipstick.
 A tipsy janitor stands at the front door.
 He's sad; he misses his father's apple orchard.
 Barely a month later,
 the thoroughbred winter will come,
 and you'll see the snowfall
 plodding along outside the window

like a pureblooded unicorn,
 white horseflies stinging its sides,
 and it will fan them off
 with its tail of drift-snow.

(translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian)



SAILBOATS

MORD MCGHEE

Moha was in the backseat of the Jag before dawn, the morning after arguments concluded. Packed for a day of sand and sun, chairs booted, and down to the beach they drove. And it was there where she saw for the first time a dragon splash down into the sea then fold its wings neatly into the shape of a sailboat.

Indistinguishable she lost it among a hundred like it.

“It wasn’t a lie!” she said sleepily.

And oh! what an afternoon for daydreaming.

But too soon came the end as too soon always does. With clattering and clashing, siblings and parents returned their folding implements of leisure and began the trek back home. Engine’s purr and gravel growl, onward over hill and dale, roads as whispering wheat stalks.

Subconscious depth. Kilometers drifting away, the humming song from rubber against pavement. Moha stared out the window wishing the dragon would’ve shown itself again. Just once. But she couldn’t keep her eyes from slowly closing. “You’re getting sleepy,” as the cartoon dog swung a watch in front of her. “Your lids, they are so heavy now. Look into my eyes...”

She pawed one seashell, white with gray bands. Her lucky seashell, for every time they visit the shore, she takes one. Just one is all it takes to stave off the troubled times, the times she did not like who she was, where she was, with whom she had to cohabit and grow up.

Heartbreaking was the shortage of details with dragon sailboat, and it gnawed her simmering thought. Was it gold or red, blue, or white? Dark or light? Did it have teeth or a beak? Two eyes or a thousand? Wings it

had for sure, and those silken and soft, made of whatever material sails are made of. Then again, was the dragon even real or just a trick of an obnoxious older brother? Brown-sandy became green flowered. It was May, when it may rain or may snow at any given time near the house. She closed her eyes once more, or were they closed the entire time?

She thought then the dragon was more like a giant seahorse with humps when it rose from the sea, yet she denoted nothing of a seahorse after it became that sailing ship. Doubt stitched her fluttering flag, and she resolved to be content with her day of tinkling shells, surfing froth, in, out, simply rolling in the surf together like a ball of yarn in the hands of a spastic kitten.

It was watching these when the dragon appeared. She’d been sunning prone, the towel smelled of detergent underneath her cheek. Suntan lotion warmed through her nose. Liquid light polished the beads of sand, glistening happily. Each stroke of wave to coast a soothing lullaby. Beautiful and haunting in its lonely dance of swords.

The world then painted over with a watercolor brush and Moha’s heart leaped out of her chest, where it struck the earth and had impossibly been a shelled crab the whole time beating within her. It scampered, digging a hole, vanishing those arterial pincers, legs drawing dots which disappeared as the water licked over them. And she smiled and closed her eyes.

“Don’t do it if you don’t want to, dork!” said her brother from the seat beside her.

“Leave me alone, Billy,” she said.

“What are you a tortoise?” he laughed.

“Mom!” she said.

“Leave your sister alone, William.”

Mom turned up the radio. Billy glared at her from behind Dad’s seat, and whispered, “Dead meat.”

Not either,” she told him, jabbing with her fist at his arm.

“Dad!” he said, jerking upright.

“Let’s not start this again,” said Dad. “Can’t I just enjoy the nice time we had today?”

“Move over,” said Mom, scooting Moha a bit further from her sibling.

“But I didn’t do anything,” she whined.

Billy was grinning behind his hand.

Moha crossed her arms and sighed heavily, then turned once more to the glass.

Red, blue, green, yellow, a blur of speed gone past, and soon closed her eyes.

It circled. She remembered this clearly. Soaring in the breeze, down, down, then with a sudden dive it splashed into the ocean, and she could not peel her eyes away. Rising afterward, initially a silhouette against the bright blue. All around sailboats passed, this way, that way, here and there. As a cotton ball it bobbed, with one wing slowly parascooping, then the second. Entwining and embracing, like arms wrapping a princess kiss at the end of the movie.

Locked was time while the sails formed, blue-black bathwater with heat lamp ripples. And she’d raised up and said, “A dragon!” though no one was there to hear or see. The tail became fore, head aft, then it was no more than a vessel made by human craft. A symmetrical flotilla which was impossible.

It plunged under the waves, well beyond buoy and wharf, and even further than she could see. On towards Cyclopean mermaid ruins, of fathoms unknown. A tidal fly landed on the back of her hand, its little arms rubbing together briskly. “Get away from me,” she said, swatting.

“Dork,” she heard her brother say.

When she looked back there were so many boats that she’d lost sight of it.

There by the hundred they kissed the settled sea, splendid and loving. Masts as harpoons cutting through the inky swell. Impractically silent for a dragon. She sat up and told her brother, “Just saw one.”

“What?”

“A dragon.”

He snickered and got up and ran off with the kite. “Don’t lose it,” Dad called. “And don’t break it, Billy.”

“Don’t you want to fly the kite with Billy?” asked Mom. “Oh, you’re asleep…” The beach towel under her in the backseat of the family car kept her at the beach. Outside the window the moon had risen, lemon sherbet.

“We’ll be home soon.”

Swords and sandcastle moats lay between her and the village, while a dragon beat its wings upon the stars. It wrote destiny as elegant, flared imaginings, with words mutating and distant, where visions equally unreal are plausible.

“Dragons turn into sailboats,” she whispered.

“Dork,” Billy said.

And he laughed. And she heard the steeple bell ring steadily and softly, so she knew she was close to home. The sun left the sky under a curtain of gloaming silvery red, and the end of the magic came at last.

THE SPACE BETWEEN US

SIYUAN CARTER-PATKAU

“I’m sorry”
 I slide the words
 Written on a napkin
 Across the table
 We make an odd date
 You and I
 Somebody labelled the salt as sugar
 And used it to make pancakes
 Our entrées come
 Mine is a sprig of parsley
 Yours is cilantro
 We trade
 It tastes like soap
 “I’m not”
 You slide the napkin back to me

ANGELS AND DIFFICULTIES

KEITH KENNEDY

There have been difficulties
 The preacher said
 With linens layered
 Across the bed
 With maggots hatched
 Inside the dead
 With lessons learned
 From what I’ve read

There have been postures
 Repeated bold
 By lazy liars
 Who chanced the cold
 By shaken stories
 That fingers told
 By diamonds lost
 Between the folds

There have been lines
 That we’ve been taught

That only angels,
 Once spurned, have sought.



THE MANOR

JOHN POWER

Joe stood in the hall upstairs, rifling through the linen closet, looking for the right pillowcase. The pillowcase, he felt, was almost as important as the costume itself. Though most people giving him candy would likely tell him that his army fatigues were cute or scary or realistic, and not give a second thought about the sack they were tossing candy into, Joe knew that it mattered. It was more than a mere accessory. He had made that mistake last year, in fifth grade. That time, he at least understood that he needed a pillowcase. He knew that the younger kids went around with bright plastic bags with designs of witches and ghosts and jack-o-lanterns on them, and the even younger kids carried bright orange plastic pumpkins. But by fifth grade, that no longer cut it. Not only did the pillowcase provide more room to carry candy, but it brushed aside much of the silliness related with Halloween, and served as a status symbol to separate old from young among the trick-or-treaters. Joe had a pillowcase last year, but he had the wrong one. It was white, and decorated with firemen. True, that was the pillowcase Joe preferred to lay his head on at night, but it wasn't right for trick-or-treating. Despite the effort Joe had put into his costume and hat and face paint, he told himself he was willing to stay in this year if he couldn't find the right pillowcase.

"What are you doing?" Joe's Mom demanded as she reached the top of the stairs, and saw Joe surrounded by a mess of towels and sheets and wrong pillowcases.

"Looking for a pillowcase."

"For what?"

"To carry my candy."

"Just take any of them."

"Do we have any black ones?"

"Black pillowcases? No. We don't have any black sheets. Why do you want a black one?"

"Because," Joe answered, feeling that "because" was a perfectly acceptable reason. "Do we have any dark ones?"

"I just bought a set of dark blue sheets."

"Can I have one?"

"They're brand new sheets."

"But it's Halloween and I'm a soldier and I need a dark pillowcase to carry my candy. I can't go out with a bright one or one with sailboats on it or something."

Joe's Mom looked down at him, and at the pile on the floor, and didn't want to bother with a fit. Besides, she knew the pillowcase would be holding Joe's candy, and the candy would definitely make it home at the end of the night, so he wouldn't lose the pillowcase. "Fine," she said. "Hold on." Joe waited anxiously as his mom pulled down the new set of sheets from a top shelf, tore off the plastic, and separated out the pillowcase. "These are brand new sheets. If anything happens to this pillowcase it will ruin the entire set, so don't drag it on the ground or through the grass."

"I won't. I'll take care of it."

"Now, remember, be careful out there tonight. Don't eat any opened candy. Watch out for cars. Stay off of the Post Road, Beach Avenue, and Larchmont Avenue—cars drive too fast on those streets and they won't see you. Stay out of the Manor—older kids just run around with eggs down there, and there's no reason for you to go there. And stay in a group, don't leave Pete or Andy."

"OK, Mom," Joe replied as he backed away from her towards the stairs.

"Where do you think you're going, young man? You have to clean

up this mess you made.”

“I will after I get back. I have to go meet Pete and Andy at the Hotdog House now,” Joe called as he ran down the steps and out the front door.

The Hotdog House was a Halloween institution. Normally known as 34 Chestnut Street, it was a small yellow house with a large front porch that once a year was turned into the perfect refueling and meeting point. Dr. Gryzlow, a dentist, owned the house, and apparently believed he would be engaging in a conflict of interest if he were to give out fun-sized Snickers and Three Musketeers as other houses did. He therefore decided to set up shop on his front porch with a barbecue grill and plenty of hot dogs, though no hamburgers under any circumstances. Two large thermoses, one with hot chocolate and the other with coffee for the adults, stood next to a pile of cups and a few boxes of Dunkin Donuts’ munchkins. At any given time throughout the night at least fifteen goblins and football players and princesses could be found sitting on the steps, or in the porch swing, or on one of the benches Dr. Gryzlow had set out specially for this night, while accompanying parents gathered in the front yard with cups of coffee. The Hotdog House was never decorated, not even with a jack-o-lantern, but people never complained.

Joe was working on his first hotdog as Pete and Andy came walking up. Pete swiped a glazed munchkin off of Joe’s plate, and gobbled it down in one bite without any sign of protest from Joe. Pete wore a large fedora on his head, and black and white chaps were stapled to his pants. An empty holster hung around his waist, because his parents wouldn’t allow him to carry the plastic guns that came with the set. Joe thought Pete’s shiny sheriff’s badge was more than a little superfluous—everybody knew Pete was in charge, and he didn’t need a badge to say so.

Andy, on the other hand, wore a suit and a tie.

“What are you supposed to be?”

“I’m a lawyer,” Andy replied. “Couldn’t you tell?”

“No. That’s kind of a dumb costume,” Joe said.

“I told you no one would get it,” Pete snickered at Andy.

“Maybe you’d get it if you weren’t so stupid,” Andy offered as his last line of defense.

“Maybe you’d shut-up,” Pete replied, and it was clear he had won the argument.

After Pete and Andy each got a hotdog, and they all drank hot chocolates despite the fact that it was a relatively warm October 31st, they decided it was time to start the night and to collect some candy. Though other trick-or-treaters would cross back and forth across the street from house to house, this trio knew better. They knew that time spent crossing the street was time wasted, and Pete led them quickly down one side of the street and back up the other.

“Well, what do we have here?” a sweet thirty-something asked them as she opened her door.”

“Trick-or-treat!” they replied in unison.

“So, you’re an army man, you’re a cowboy, and you’re a well-dressed man,” she said, apparently delighted with their costumes.

“I’m a lawyer, ma’am.”

“Sure you are,” she replied, offering a basket of candy. “Only take one piece.”

Pete looked at the basket of Tootsie-Pops and raisin boxes. “Only one?” Pete asked in the most sarcastic voice he could muster.

“Don’t I look like a lawyer?”

“Sure you do. Are any of you collecting for UNICEF?”

“No.”

They each took their limit of candy and stepped away from the house as the lady closed her door.

“Raisins, and Tootsie-Pops,” Pete muttered to himself.

“No one gets your costume, Andy,” Joe said.

“That lady said I looked like a lawyer.”

“Only after you told her what you were.”

“Raisins, and Tootsie-Pops.”

“My costume’s better than yours,” Andy accused.

“No it’s not. I’m a soldier. People know I’m a soldier. No one knows what you are. Yours is dumb.”

“Raisins and, Tootsie-Pops. I hate this candy. I hate these stupid houses that give stupid candy,” Pete shouted into the night. “That’s it. Let’s go to the Manor.”

Mention of the Manor immediately ended Joe and Andy’s squabble. On Halloween the Manor became a forbidden paradise, and they all knew it. It was the section of town that lay within a half-mile of Long Island Sound, and the four yacht and shore clubs that were so busy during the summer. The houses in the Manor were the biggest in Larchmont, and rather than fun-sized candy bars, they gave out full-sized ones. Aside from being full-sized, the candy was good—no Tootsie-Pops or raisins. But on Halloween teenagers saw the Manor as the perfect setting for vandalism of all kinds. Local shops had refused to sell eggs or spray paint to minors two weeks before Halloween, but that only led the teens to buy early, and then store their paraphernalia until the big night. They roamed the Manor and egged BMWs and mansions. They threw toilet paper into trees and spray-painted stop signs and street corners. When they saw younger kids they would steal their candy and mess with their costumes, and send them home crying.

“My Mom told me not to go into the Manor,” Andy said.

“She also told you to go as a lawyer,” Pete countered.

“I like my costume.”

“Shut up about your stupid costume. Joe, what do you think? You’ll go with me to the Manor, won’t you?”

“I don’t care, we can go or not go.” Joe’s Mom had also told him not to go to the Manor, but he was drawn to its illicit allure, and to its full-sized candy bars. He was tired of Pete dictating everything and he wanted to stick up for Andy, but he’d been hearing about Halloween in the Manor

for years, and now this looked like his first chance to actually go. “I’ll go if you go.”

“Well I’m going, so I guess we both are,” Pete said. “Are you coming, Andy, or are you trick-or-treating alone?”

That was a silly question for Pete to ask. He knew Andy wouldn’t want to be left alone, at night, on Halloween.

They headed off towards the Manor, crossed the Boston Post Road, and walked down Beach Avenue towards Long Island Sound. As they got deeper and deeper into the Manor the houses became larger and larger, and after a few blocks they knew they were there, not only by the size of the houses, but also by the silly-string face drawn in the middle of the street, above the shaving cream caption, “Happy Fucking Halloween.”

After passing over a number of smaller houses in the interest of time, they finally approached one they all thought big enough. They walked down the long driveway and stepped up to the thick wooden door.

“Where’s the doorbell?” Andy asked.

They looked for it, but couldn’t find one.

“Let’s just knock,” Pete suggested.

“Wait,” Joe said, noticing a long rope hanging down from above the door that ran through a tiny hole and into the house. He pulled on the cord and heard a bell, an actual bell, toll inside the house. Ten seconds later a man came to the door, and handed them each a large Baby-Ruth and a large Butterfinger.

They went to house after house and found that the legend was true—every house gave out full-sized candy bars. As the night wore on their pillowcases slowly became fuller and heavier, plumping a little bit more with each house. Joe made sure to carry his over his shoulder, like Santa Clause carrying a sack of presents, so it wouldn’t drag through the grass or against the concrete sidewalks.

As they were nearing Fountain Square they saw a group of teenagers off in the distance.

“Let’s turn back, guys.”

“Shut-up, Andy,” Pete ordered.

“But they’re going to take our candy.”

“They’re not going to take my candy,” Pete replied. “If they even try to steal my candy I’m going to punch them in the stomach.”

“Pete, come on, let’s go another way,” Andy pleaded again in desperation.

“Shut-up, Andy.”

Pete led his them forward, house to house, gradually approaching the group of teens as they continued to add to their cache of candy. After receiving Twix bars at a white brick house, the group stepped away from the door and stopped dead in their tracks on the front walk. The gang of teens, five of them, was waiting in the street.

One teen wore a yellow windbreaker, and another was in a red, hoodie sweatshirt, and the other three wore almost-matching dark, North Face fleece jackets. They all looked vaguely familiar and no doubt Joe had seen them somewhere around town before, but except for the yellow windbreaker and the red hoodie, he couldn’t tell them apart. They all wore jeans and sneakers, and had unkempt, tangled hair, and at any time and place other than Halloween in the Manor, would have been entirely unthreatening.

“I knew we shouldn’t have come here,” Andy whispered. “What are we going to do?”

“We’ll just walk right up to them,” Pete replied in an equally hushed voice.

“Hey, feel free to take your time!” one of the teenagers in a dark jacket called out to them.

“What the hell are you supposed to be,” another called, “a fucking lawyer?”

“I am supposed to be a lawyer!” Andy called back, delighted that his costume was finally recognized. The group of teens broke out into

hysterical laughter.

“Shut-up,” Pete scolded Andy.

“Hurry up, army man!” the third dark jacket called, “we don’t have all night.”

“Hey, sheriff, you’re missing your guns!” the first dark jacket called out.

The teens began to laugh again, and Andy dropped his sack of candy and ran off in the opposite direction. He pushed his way through the small hedge that divided the property of the white brick house from the house next door, and continued to sprint down the block and around the corner, not even bothering to look back to see if the teens were following him or not. They weren’t. The teens stayed where they were in the street, waiting for Joe and Pete.

“Wow, look at that lawyer run,” the teen in the yellow windbreaker called as they kept up their laughter.

“Come on, Pete, we can’t just stand here,” Joe whispered, demanding some kind of leadership. Apparently, a sheriff outranked a soldier.

“Fine,” Pete replied, and they began to walk down the path from the house and towards the teens. The teens let them get off private property, but once they were in the street the teens blocked their way to the next house.

“Give us your candy,” the red hoodie ordered.

Pete tossed his pillowcase at them and ran off in the same direction Andy had gone. Some of the candy spilled out of the sack onto the street, and two of the dark jacket teens bent down to collect it. The third ran up the front walk of the white brick house to retrieve the sack Andy had left behind.

“Give us your candy, soldier,” the red hoodie repeated. The other teens seemed to be looking at the red hoodie for orders.

Joe looked at the group, and saw they were already holding a few bulging pillowcases. None of them were wearing costumes. He knew they

didn't get all that candy by trick-or-treating. "No," Joe said in a hushed voice.

"What? Speak up, soldier," demanded the red hoodie. "Don't make me Code Red you, Pyle!" and the other teens laughed.

"No. I'm not giving you my pillowcase."

"I don't care about your fucking pillowcase. Give me the candy."

"No," Joe repeated.

The teen in the yellow jacket reached out and tore the pillowcase from Joe's clenched fists, jerking Joe forward a few steps so that he bumped into the red hoodie. The red hoodie plucked Joe's hat off his head, and pushed Joe into the center of the circle that had now closed around him. He placed Joe's hat on his own head.

"It's a little small, but I guess it'll do," the red hoodie said. "Do I look like an army man now?" he asked the circle.

"You look like a shit-bag," one of the dark jackets answered, and the group began to laugh.

"Why don't you shut the fuck up, Greg," the red hoodie ordered his heckler.

"That's my hat," Joe said.

"It's mine now."

The red hoodie stepped forward and pushed Joe backwards, and he fell backwards over one of the dark jackets, who had knelt down behind him to trip him.

"Oldest trick in the book," another one of the dark jackets said.

As Joe rolled over, quickly examined skinned palms, and rose to his feet, he was covered in pink silly-string and white shaving cream. The gurgling whoosh of the shaving cream didn't end with a short burst, as it did when Joe's Dad shot some into his hand before shaving. The teens kept spraying, and Joe felt the shaving cream continue to expand on his head until one of the dark jackets stepped forward, and mussed it down deep into his hair. The silly string came out in a harder stream, and Joe felt it wind along his

back, before taking a few shots in the face.

"Get out of here, army man," the red hoodie said, as Joe felt his hat being returned to his head, mashing down the shaving cream even more.

"Give me my pillowcase."

"No. We gave you the hat. Get out of here."

They sprayed more shaving cream and silly-string at him, and then pushed him away and turned to walk away. Joe realized he was out of options. His camouflage fatigues were a mess of pink silly string and white shaving cream, and he smelled like the medicine cabinet in the upstairs bathroom. He thought about grabbing his pillowcase and running away, but he wasn't sure he'd be able to rip it out of their hands in the first place, and they'd be able to run him down even if he could. There was nothing else Joe could do. He decided to go find Pete and Andy.

"Hey, army man," one of the teens called out.

Joe turned around and saw the teen in the yellow windbreaker, alone, carrying Joe's pillowcase and coming towards him, while the rest of the pack waited thirty feet away.

"Here's your candy. Now get out of here. Go find your friends."

Joe stared at the teen for a few seconds, then quietly grabbed his pillowcase with both hands, turned, and continued to walk away while he heard the group curse the teen in the yellow windbreaker. Joe got about fifteen feet away before he heard the yellow windbreaker call out to him again.

"Hey, army man, wait a second! Don't turn around! Just stand there!"

Joe stood where he was. He had no reason to, other than the fact that the yellow windbreaker told him to do so, and so he did it. He stood there waiting to see what would happen next. Then he saw something flash by his head and crash into the street, and he heard the yellow windbreaker curse and say, "I almost got him!" Joe looked at the street, and saw it was a now-smashed egg that had flown by his head, the yellow

yolk and bits of white shell mixing on the asphalt. Joe looked over his shoulder, and saw the teen in the yellow windbreaker holding a carton of eggs, and saw the other teens arching back to launch a volley his way. Joe ran off down the street as eggs crashed at his feet, and the group yelled out “I almost got him,” or “no fair, moving target.”

Twenty minutes later Joe was back at the Hotdog House, where he guessed he’d find Pete and Andy. They were there, rocking back and forth in the porch swing, sipping hot chocolate.

“You’re a mess, Joe. Your Mom’s gonna be soooo maaaad,” Andy said when he saw Joe walk up with silly-string and shaving cream all over his back.

Joe got himself a cup of hot chocolate, and a hot dog, walked over to them on the porch swing, and leaned against the porch’s railing.

“You smell terrible,” Pete laughed. “What did they do to you?”

“I didn’t run away, and I kept my pillowcase.”

“How’d you keep your pillowcase?” Pete asked, and Joe could see Pete’s eyes were red from crying.

“They gave it back to me.”

“Can I have some of your candy?” Andy asked while Joe ate his hotdog. “They took all my candy and now I don’t have any. You should share.”

“Yeah, me too. You should share. Can I have some of your candy?” Pete asked.

Joe looked at them for what seemed like a long time, but it couldn’t have been much more than a few seconds.

“No, you can’t. I’m keeping it.”

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

MARTHA PATTERSON

With city lights ablaze, night traffic buzzing,
 Women shoppers loaded down with bags, and
 Me bowed below the damp night sky - still
 This region, with hints of Edith Wharton, Salem
 Witches, New England history, seems sweet.
 Winter asks when virgin spring will come,
 When pansies, like small bright female faces,
 Will smile towards the ghostly, yellow sun,
 And random seagulls will flick their wings
 In Boston skies, a half-mile from the sea.
 I’ll cast a ballot soon, for days of reproductive
 And social change, knowing when I place
 My hand upon my beating heart, I place it
 On a bursting, storied, gracious land - so I
 Pledge allegiance to the disenfranchised, to
 Talent and rebellion, to all imperiled women.



THE TEA MAKER

MATT HANSON

Her back was killing her, as she bent over in the fields that appeared, from the tallest and near-est hill, like a serrated knife. The hot hours had begun to fade, and it was approaching the end of day. She was hankering for that drink of herbal tea, by which she'd washed down all of the anxiety and sorrow of her days.

As a childless, unmarried woman, far from her parents and family back home, many hours away by train, she pulled up the roots and shoots of the plants by her feet, and rung out her sweat-soaked bandana, at times, facing the sun, closing her eyes for a moment or two, to let its heat bake into her flesh.

And then, just when she thought she couldn't take it anymore, at the end of her rope, the sun went down over the hill, and all became cool. She continued to work, and listened as her fellow planters began to sing their evening songs. She hummed along, and finished her row, cleaning its soil as she made sure that each stem was upright and every bit of overgrowth was plucked so as to cultivate the lushest of tea leaves.

When it was time to return to her hut, she enjoyed the shade and solitude, and atop a pile of embers, brewed a pot of sage. The tisane soothed her throat, and she leaned back, feeling the hard bamboo against her spine, and succumbed to a hard, fast sleep. When she woke, it was late, and she heard a fire roaring out in the yard where the other workers would gather, some-times and drink barely wine to ease their muscles

under the stars.

They chewed tobacco, and talked, spitting, the lot of them women, some from the city, others from villages about the wide landscape, their languages knotted together in a burst of tongues that came undone with the laughter that accompanied knowing, just like everyone else, that existing at all was somehow absurd, that there must be some joke. When they thought of their lots in life, they could close their eyes, and wake up in the morning with a relaxed, optimistic strength, confident that they'd work well, again, with the same regularity as the planet's spin as it wound around the sun.

Day in, and day out, their eyes were full with green, as they repeated the same movements, their hands adapting to the shape of the leaves, knowing its edges, contours and the flesh of its weight, carrying big wicker satchels on their backs, like infants, growing heavier by the hour as they filled it with the wet leaves that they'd bring to a warehouse to dry, and hang and treat before they were hauled away for export as tea throughout the world.

*

Muli woke one morning, and brewed her morning cup with a pinch of extra strong green tea, and had a thought, as she remembered an aunt, back in her hometown, who used to talk about a woman, who some called a shaman, others a mystic, but most, simply a tea master.

And wandering about the countryside, she'd stop, from plantation to plantation, and spend each of her days as a ceremony that ended with the drinking of tea. It was a traditional lifestyle that was handed down, matrilineally, in their culture. And as she felt the swift kick of the caffeine

in her green brew that morning, she put on her workingwoman's dress, a colorful shift that was torn in places but fit loosely and comfortably around her wide hips.

She threw her empty satchel on her shoulder, and walked out into the early sunlight, as a fresh breeze wafted across her face, and buoyed her spirits. She went to the narrow lanes of plants, and saw, in the distance, squinting into the natural light that grew sharper and brighter by the minute, that the others were in place, minding their patches and regions of the land. She could smell the earthy aromas of the tea bushes, and felt the sting of the insects that crawled over her hands as she busied about their leaves and twigs, fixing and repairing, collecting ripe, organic material as she went, weighed into the earth.

As the soil dirtied her sandals, moving between her toes, she breathed heavily, and became especially exhausted that day that she needed a break, rare for her, as a young woman. There was a circle of tea drinkers by a communal hut, moving about as they fanned themselves with palm leaves and slowly sipped from their roughly-hewn wooden cups.

*

A cold wind blew through their huts in the middle of the night. The change in weather precipitated anticipations of the rainy season, its torrential flooding that would leave them workless for days on end, minding their pastimes and repairing their homes and clothes, stewing pots of vegetables soaked in dairy and, when they managed, flesh.

Muli put on her thickest overcoat as she prepared her basket and walked out into the field. There was a low fog that hung over the rows of

tea shrubs about her section of the plantation. Usually, she would see her fellow workers straining to bend down, already fast in the midst of their respective roles about the land, but then, she felt alone. She'd only been working there for some years, and the solitary hut was an adjustment in and of itself.

She wondered then how anyone would even know that she was working. She might just as well sit down and brew a satisfying cup of hot tea, inhale the breeze, and let her mind run its course for the day. Instead, she knelt down, and placed her hands into the woody cores of each bush, extracting leaves as she continued onward, sideways.

There was a slight humming in the air, which she heard faintly above the wisps of humidity that drifted past her face, and wet her brow. It was chilly, and if she'd not been reaching in between the twigs with meticulous sense of attention to detail, she might've shivered. Holding fast to her line, she came to a little clearing, one she'd never quite seen before, and felt the presence of someone, there.

The fog dissipated, and the outline of a clothed person appeared before her. At first genderless, she cautiously approached, but the figure did not move. Entranced, she put down her basket, and tip-toed over to his back, holding her hand out, as she wanted to gently touch the shoulder of the human being in her midst. The individual turned around, abruptly, and revealed his face. She was old, with a wispy, white beard, and a serene look in her eyes.

"Hello, grandma, are you lost?"

"My child, I am found!"

He erupted into a full belly laugh, and leapt to his feet, as he threw back his cape and revealed a little pot of tea atop a bed of embers on the ground. He then sat, his legs crossed, effortless in his gestures, as he opened and closed his eyes with a slow-motion wink, and looked directly at Muli's surprised, amused face.

"Please, dear. Have tea with me?"

"Tea? Don't you know where you are? You can't drink this tea, are you a friend, or relative of the master landlord? Don't you know I can get in trouble? I'm a worker here, who are you?"

"Dear granddaughter, please. Sit. Do not worry. I'm all of that, and no one you need to know anything about now. It's time to have tea, come, put down your basket, lower your body to the earth and let us empty our cups and fill our bellies with a fresh brew."

Muli was mystified by the presence of the elderly woman, her face bright with life, yet scarred with time, as deep runnels had formed across her forehead. But she did not perspire, holding a poise that appeared strong as a tree trunk, stiff, her back was straight as she boiled water and breathed loudly, pouring it out repeatedly between two tin pots.

As she continued the water was becoming more aerated, receptive to a round steep. She did not pour it, boiling, steaming, directly onto the leaves, but had placed them in their own little pot with unheated water, and allowed the steam alone to do the trick of soaking them, so as to tease out their inner effects. Then, she stopped, and sat still, grasping her kneecaps, she squeezed and inhaled deeply, gesturing for Muli to follow her movements.

Minutes passed like hours. Slowly, but confidently, she poured out the contents of her brew, and Muli took her cup, and brought it to her nose. There was a faint scent of rose hips, and a hint of dried mulberry, although she'd not seen the woman add more ingredients beyond that of her tea leaves.

"My name, child, is Tao, and I am pleased to drink with you today. Let us have our first one in the silent peace of our minds, and by the second, if you will, we will come to our senses so that I can tell you one of my favorite stories."

Tao sat with an enviable ease, as if she were laying down, her garments spread out around her, forming a lily pad of cushioning about the rough grass and exposed soil of the plantation. Across the field, the others were hard at work, as usual, and Muli felt somewhat ashamed to take an unplanned break to entertain a strange woman.

But the taste of the tea was irresistible and it lightened her mind, falling down easy, as its light taste carried her thoughts toward a certain optimism. She hadn't felt so unencumbered during the day in years, she felt. Tao then took her cup, wordless, and Muli looked at her palm, a landscape of crevasses, clefts and ravines that spoke volumes of her worldly experiences, her fate before the void beyond all. And refilling her cup, Muli was beginning to become anxious when Tao broke into her narration with an immediate, unselfconscious draw.

"I'd walked to the northern border, and spoke to both of the guards where they stood, one on my side, the other before the foreign land that was my destination. The first man was had a bony face, unhealthy and worried of his superior, but I managed to calm him down by saying that I was taking nothing with me from our lands, I was merely a traveler at the

end of her life. The fellow on the other side, however, was not so easy. He needed just the opposite, an emblem of exchange to guarantee that my coming would benefit their people. As there was no one around for as far as the eye could see, I decided to invite them, both, to have tea with me. And oversee-ing the brew that I'd made for them both, the evening went on and on, with much talk and little fussing over my venture abroad. By morning, they both decided that if I was to cross, I must never return, and that for granting their permission, they demanded that I give them my wis-dom. I planted a tea leaf in each of their hands, and bowed, respectfully, when they finally let me go. But that crossing will never see me again."

Muli was nearly asleep, as she listened to the old woman babble on and on. The tea, although caffeinated, had not nearly given her the jolt enough to up and leave, and get back to work, but the thought was gnawing in her mind. She drank the last of her cup, and gave back it to Tao, who clasped her hands and lowered her head. And when Muli rose to her feet, Tao simply sat as she was, unmoving, and smiled. She strapped on her wicker basket, and began to rifle through the bushes, as she usually would, and when looking back over her shoulder, she saw that Tao had gone, disappeared. She could still taste her tea. It was like nothing she'd known, wholly dif-ferent, transporting.

*

By evening, as the sun waned, and the air cooled, Muli was feeling refreshed, as if she had not been working hard all day. Her fellow tea workers all gathered around their nightly fire, passing around the usual course of drinks, with dried berries and nuts, a bit of tobacco to chew on, and sticks to bite to clean their teeth all the while. Muli wanted to share about who she'd met, but no one seemed to give her their attention.

Then, she stood up, and using a loud speaking voice she staked her claim, silencing the group, as they turned to look at her, equally disturbed and yet fascinated by her sudden, unexpected vitality.

"I had tea with an elder today. Her name was Tao, and she came from the north country. It was the most curious afternoon, please listen. We drank tea together. But it was not like it sounds, nothing so ordinary. She had knowledge. Boiling water at just the right temperature, and steep-ing the leaves for the exact amount of time that she did, in her manner, made for an invigorat-ing cup, the likes of which I'd never tasted, friends. I do not have her knowledge, but altogether, if we hold drinking ceremonies, with all of our strength, taking time from our days to hold our backs up straight and mind our thoughts as we pour out a full pot of tea made with our full and undivided attention, I believe that our lot in life will change, for the better. I think that our im-agininations will begin to come true."

Many sitting there hadn't heard Muli speak more than a few words, some thought she might have been unable to speak. Most of what she said went over everyone's heads, but there was a younger woman, someone who'd only joined the plantation a few weeks back, who listened and followed Muli back to her hut, where she'd taken refuge, overwhelmed by the nerve that she'd mustered to speak like that, so freely, unafraid. Muli heard the younger woman outside her hut, as she tapped on her straw door, and whispered, calmly.

"My name is Oala. I'm from a very distant place, and I fear that I might spend the rest of my life working here, but what you said today, made me think again, that just maybe, the way out is by more deeply connecting, and drinking of the very tea that's ground us into the earth, bury-ing us alive with the weight of its profit that we heave on our

shoulders, and give away each day, allowing the sun to bake our brains. I don't want to be a slave to the tea anymore, I want to be its master."

Muli emerged from her hut, and took Oala by the hand. They were delicate with each other, and sat inside over a humble hearth. The embers were glowing, and Muli placed her copper teapot atop them with a slow, conscious movement. When the water began to boil, Muli took the pot and put it on a cold, flat stone. She added the tea to another vessel of room temperature water, and all the while Oala was watching with round, open eyes, her pupils dilating with fascination.

When they drank their cups, taking their first sips, they sat back, allowing its pleasing aromas to wash through their insides, as they felt the liquid run down within their bodies. Muli closed her eyes, and Oala followed. They were imagining the same waterfront, a vast seascape with high waves, their tops cresting with pacifying regularity, and together, looking their shared mind's eye, they saw the horizon. It shone with a perfect blue, clear and inviting, as they felt a heavy gust pushing them forward, increasingly faster, till they saw the first glimmers of red, orange and yellow, the blazing disc of the sun, fiery and golden, it blanketed them in an inner, pulsing warmth that they did not feel on their skin, but in their core, like the flow of their blood. When they opened their eyes, Muli saw that Oala had assumed the appearance of that elderly tea master, that outcast, wayward woman, and Muli appeared to Oala as her too.

MOTHER OF THOUSANDS

ADRIANNA GORDEY

Propagations bud on the kitchen counter,
 dead bodies without the chalk outlines.
 Resurrections commence once the blisters
 settle on their skin, a testament to their
 strength. Crescent moons of loam
 didn't always lurk under my fingernails.
 The instinct to nurture noosed me slowly;
 I started with two succulents -- Machiavelli &
 Bugs -- whose life expectancy was shorter
 than my pandemic attention span.
 The aloe and snake plant were housewarming
 gifts (burdens). I struggled with self-care.
 Seeds of unread messages spread weed-like
 across my phone's face; a drought plagued
 my lips because the scabbed skin reminded
 me I was alive. I suspected we would wilt
 together in the Kansas winter. Their shamrock &
 emerald skin thrived despite my neglect.
 Water bloated leaves beckoned me into the kitchen
 & taught me how to put the mother in nature.
 Nowadays, I drizzle water from my Camelbak
 into sour cream containers full of low maintenance
 children. The windowsill hosts a family reunion.
 Marbled pothos pinches pearls from Senecio
 rowleyanus' vines. Gold-toothed snake plant toddlers

scramble from their mother's soil. Aunt Crassula ovata slathers anthocyanin thick as sunscreen on the burro tail's braids. As I plant a present for my new neighbor, I am reminded growth happens with community & communities don't compete for light.

THE TABLE

USWA MARYAM

Hands folded in front of us, we sat opposite to each other at the table. My hands often went over the plastic cover that sat over. And the queries that came with it in my mind.

How long had it been that I cleaned the table underneath?

Each morning, I would take the duster from the broom cabinet and wet it on one side. Back and forth, back and forth, we'd go. Until the traces of last night's cup of tea would vanish only to be replaced by another night's. There were holes in the plastic cover. Holes big enough that when my fingers touched the surface underneath, they could touch the dust too.

"How long has it been?"

His voice was as gentle as the storm that had long run its course. I stared at his hands that were now holding the handle of the mug. The same mug he'd used for eight years to have his coffee. The same lukewarm coffee that was a bit too sweet and left a bitter aftertaste in your mouth.

"When did it all begin?"

The left-over rain was now dribbling down a little too late in the night. The only sound that could be heard in the house apart from our constricted breathing.

I look at his checkered white and black shirt. The all-too-familiar wrinkles around its collars. It seemed like nothing had changed at all. As long as we stayed silent we wouldn't have to admit anything.

"Are you going to say something?" he asked, a hint of desperation escaped.

I slowly took off my hands from the table. In times like this, it was important where you placed your hands. He finally drank the rest of his

coffee. I didn't know why he always did that. Drank till the last drop. Just some sugar remains and concentrated beans left at the bottom. And he still finished it. He finished it because he was used to finishing things. He never got tired of doing that.

"Why?"

I laughed.

When he asked me "why" I laughed. That's right. It was a cold, cruel, short laugh. In this moment, I could do so many things. I could go back to my childhood and find an explanation for that why. Maybe something from the parental dynamics. Or my first relationship. But then again, I didn't want to talk more than I needed to. I loved to talk. Just not to him. Not anymore.

"You and I are just very different people," I began slowly because I liked my words to work like a slow venom.

Difficult. I had had to be difficult all my life. But I needed to do this. I needed to be the difficult venom. I wanted to be hard to digest because I wanted to be spit out. I didn't want to become him. I didn't want to finish what didn't taste any good anymore.

He didn't say anything. I didn't say anything either.

I imagined there was a candle in the middle of the table. And the rest of it was filled with platters of food. I wanted to feast in something. Be gregarious. Surrounded by many friends. All of them, even the ones I left behind. I wanted them to laugh and love me at the same time. I needed that.

How could one person leave you so starved?

"I used to think different was good," he said. He'd finally put the mug down. His hand on table, wide open now.

I look at his face. His dark brown eyes and dark lashes. If there was a candle-light I'd see some golden specks in them. That would be different, for a change. I wanted to look away. I was tired of looking at faces. Intimate faces. I wanted to look at a rectangular one with orbs the shape

of eyes, perhaps a turquoise color. I was tired. I didn't want to look at his imploring eyes. His hands, his face, his eyes. So far from me. And yet, they were just across the table.

But he was not looking at me anymore. He seemed tired. It was a work-night. And yet both of us somehow found each other lost in the hallway. I thought I could just sit here in the silence and read. But I already found my husband there. Or a ghost of him.

In the night, everything slowed down. During the days we could escape each other. Scurrying around for our jobs, half-cooked breakfasts and half-hearted goodbyes. He'd come back late or I'd come back late. A month ago, we still bothered with excuses but not anymore.

It was fateful that we both found the same hour to introspect at night. I thought it wouldn't happen this way. I'd planned a day out, a bouquet of flowers, a neatly hand-written letter. Maybe we would walk together at the pavement that led us back home, talk about our memories together. It would be pleasant. Well, not entirely. But bittersweet, I guess. Just like his coffee.

"How long have you been seeing other men?" he asked. His voice just bitter. He was angry. When he was angry, he looked at me disapprovingly. He didn't say he was hurt or disappointed. He just looked dejected, defeated.

"It's been a while," I said, curt and short. Because I knew he didn't like when my emotions ran high. I was seeing other men. It was the simple truth for him. Betrayal made sense to him. He was simple and direct like that. Willing to accept something so convenient and cliché that it slipped out of your mouth as the first excuse for why you are leaving.

"What was missing?" he fired his next question.

He was finally getting the hang of it. The pace of his questions quickened as the conversation's tone turned into that of an interrogation.

I was prepared for it beforehand. I knew he wasn't good at the blame-game. He was neat. He didn't like when things turned messy. He would give me his best shot. And it wouldn't even pinch me. His look of disapproval was all he had.

I wanted to take his hands sprawled in front of me and say, "Everything! You! Me! There was absence and neglect, there were delays and boredom, a mundane repetition with no excitement, no conversation. Just stacks of bills, stacks of rituals, the same morning of half-fried eggs and that dreaded sugary coffee in the evening. It was hopeless. We were like machines that couldn't even come up with something new for ourselves. Our lives merged into a blob of everything we once dreamed would make us happy but it didn't. But he wasn't ready to hear that. It wouldn't even make sense to him."

I took my hands off the table and looked at them. My fingers interested me so. I wished we could go back to the first day when you watched me watching myself. Back then, I was an enigma to you. But it was exciting. I liked hearing what you assumed, your puzzled expressions and when you'd raise your hands in the air to say, "Fine, I lose. Now just tell me what you were thinking."

But now I didn't want to say anything at all. I looked at your blank eyes. You didn't want to guess. You wanted me to lay it out straight. Because you didn't know. Of the nights alone in hotel rooms, many meals for two that I finished on my own and that there was no one that came between us except for the prolonged silence that grew like a cancer. An iceberg that cracked open our ship. We had long sunk. And you didn't know. Or you didn't want to know. You always loved to be in denial. Like my father, you'd put on your coat and take your sorry purse to office each day, typing over and over again and never complaining. You'd come back with a Pretzel for two of us to share and speak about our days over the

coffee table. Had we not spoken so much we might still have something to say.

I knew you were uneasy for quite a while but I was hollow. And that was worse. But I didn't want to fight about who had it worse.

I just wanted to listen. Everything. All that I didn't before. As you listen, you can gradually find yourself losing yourself in everything there is.

I could hear that then as you took a sharp inhale of breath. As you stood up and drew your chair, slowly enough so if I wanted to say something I would. But I didn't.

In the last bit of raindrops falling from the sky. In crickets. In the waves of water calmly moving to and fro far from our home. Occasionally, they crashed into one another. The water falling inside the metal sink as you washed your mug and placed it on the shelf. Followed by a sigh. I could feel I was losing myself in your silence.

I noticed the small rip in the sheet that I'd been playing with for some while. It'd grown larger as I chipped on it throughout the night. It was prominent. It looked unpleasant. I stood up after what seemed like almost a decade and took off the sheet from the table. The table had patterns of dusty holes and flowers traced on it. I ran my hand over it and it got covered with dust too.

"I need to change the table-cloth," I said aloud to myself.

WILL WE REMEMBER OUR LOVE IN THE APOCALYPSE?

Media, Pa

MAYA JACYSZYN

We happen upon a cartoon squirrel
painted on the road.

After analyzing the beady creature, I wonder
how I'd feel if you were 60 pounds heavier—
furry cheeks puffed with marshmallows,
your tummy skin hung like a foamy Guinness.

And I hunger for you now, but will I feel it still
when the aliens come?

When my most cherished beliefs are pinned
against me and tied through a noose on display,
every memory I soaked and patted dry

used and reused
salvaging this remembrance,
so quick to tear,
will their muscle save us?

We all swore we saw it,
a discus winging through the clouds
flashing ginger lights
a sign of intergalactic life.

All of this I pondered off some sidewalk chalk and
your praise of my perky chest, which I know
is as good as a slice through cobweb.

Our fingers interlaced tell me we haven't
seen the worst of it yet, or much of any bad, really.
When they come, I'll surrender my body for you,

and whatever else they need from this slave planet.
We'll find each other's spirits in space;
let's lean on that.

ABOUT THAT BOYFRIEND

LUKAS TALLENT

Her immediate thoughts involved only her shirt—how in the downpour it went from a spring-y pink to a dark, saggy purple.

“So, like, I’m soaking wet, banging on the doors, and this boy comes to let me in...no, he wasn’t, like, a little boy, he was a teenager, older than me, actually. And he’s like, ‘we’ve been waiting for you,’ not in a mean way. Just factually, the same way he would’ve said it was raining.”

“I’m more concerned about when he called the other night, not when you—”

“But if you want to understand why I answered, I have to go over it all.”

Trevor sighed. “Then that was how you met?”

“Yeah, kinda. I mean, I didn’t ask his name. I didn’t think anything of him except, ‘thanks for opening the door,’ so it wasn’t romantic-like. Not on my end. He would tell it differently.”

“How would he tell it?”

Chloë didn’t know anymore, but back then, “like, he always included how he thought, this girl would never go out with me. He wasn’t wrong. Because I was technically with my Methodist boyfriend. And he had long hair, which, you know how I feel about guys with long hair.”

“Then you fell in love?” Trevor said, lifting the white mug to his lips like a therapist might’ve done, had she ever been to a therapist. Trevor, with his glasses and fisherman’s sweater, looked good on this couch, his natural habitat, with that mug emblazoned with the logo from the accounting firm. He had a beard, too, brown and scraggly, which helped to make up for the window’s peak, the receding hairline she never imagined

she would have to deal with when it came to love. Then again, at fifteen, Ethan hadn’t been exactly what she wanted either.

“No,” she said, “it wasn’t that simple.”

“Sure it isn’t,” he said. She could see the annoyance on his face, knew that whatever she said would not be believed, a mistrust she would now live with, if she still wanted to marry him. When she didn’t continue, he added, “how so?”

See, Ethan wasn’t really part of the musical, just the teen chorus, a walk-on role he received because the director was friends with his aunt and he could kinda sing. He was on stage for maybe ten minutes.

“But backstage, he would tell me stupid jokes and stuff. And I wouldn’t be so nervous...”

In her memory, she doesn’t see him on stage at all, but standing beside the wobbly, wooden table near the rack of leather jackets, the thin light from the stage illuminating his silhouette as he describes the director’s hair, so fake it seems she’s merely stuck a Furby to the top of her head.

What’s that? Chloë asks.

You don’t know about Furbies??? Oh, man. And he describes them—wide-eyed, little robotic monsters with what looks like a dead rat’s skin, starched and dyed an assortment of bright colors—neon blue, hot pink, seafoam green—glued to their bodies.

Those are the first few performances. By closing night, she has vanquished any thoughts about her Methodist boyfriend and become brave enough to plunge her entire tongue down Ethan’s throat, savoring the rough edges of his bottom teeth cutting into her frenum. For her, the memory ends with the taste of blood and a warm, audible pop!

“How big is he?”

“Stop,” Chloë said. Trevor laid a contrite look at the black flat screen mounted on his living room wall.

“Why not? If nothing really happened . . .?”

He threw back the rest of the bourbon in his mug and went for a refill. She still had coffee in hers, though it was cold. They could always divorce later. There was money to consider. In her film school endeavors, there was always money to consider.

This wasn't about Ethan, yeah, she got it, but when she'd called him at 2 AM, while Trevor lay snoring in the bedroom...

"So I asked if he was asleep," she said, once Trevor sat back on the couch, "because you know how I can't just say, 'hey, how's it goin?'"

Kinda, Ethan whispered.

I'm sorry, she told him. Why hadn't he changed his number?

Don't be, he said, squishing the words together like he always had when she'd called him really late with apologies. Was it a dream? Were they, in reality, still lying side by side on the back of some stranger's boat down at the marina, and now having reconnected in the unreality they could wake up, resume where they had left off so poorly—

"And it was just—I felt—"

"I don't care how you felt," Trevor said.

"But that's so import—"

"What's important is what you did or didn't do with him."

"It wasn't that, my God, it was the phone call and—"

"Well I don't need to hear about your conversation with your high school boyfriend," he said, looking for the remote. "Frankly, I don't want to know."

Trevor, she wanted to say, how could you possibly ever know? As he clicked on the news, she reached for his arm. "But you have to try..."

Because after all, it was that—that she didn't show up for her evening shift at the restaurant, that she had instead driven to Knoxville, where she found him (and yes, he was different, his hair shorter and sticky with pomade, his face now shed of any traces from childhood, the blue eyes somehow sharper, seeing deeper) and her pink shirt ripped, as they

tried to be quick, and her left knee was bruised from how she'd dropped too hard onto the tiled kitchen floor, ignoring the pain to fight with his zipper, and her lips were chapped because after a certain point, there was no boyfriend, no money, no future, but only him and her, boiled to their essence and burning long and unmercifully through the night.



BEEHIVE YOURSELF

LEE HAMMERSCHMIDT

Cookie Cordite, hairstylist to the highfalutin, was putting the finishing touches on her regular client Belinda Bolero's B-52 'do, when her can of aerosol hairspray coughed, sputtered and died.

"So, Belinda," Cookie said frostily as she grabbed a fresh can. "What's this about you dating my husband?"

"Ex-husband," Belinda said icily. "You're divorced. Don't you remember?"

"That's just temporary. He'll come running back soon enough after he's had his fill of a cheap, trailer park, out-of-fashion, hussy, bimbo like you!"

"Well! I'm not going to sit here and listen to this!"

Belinda began to rise from the stylist's chair, but Cookie shoved her back.

"You stay away from my man!" Cookie screeched, pointing the hairspray can at Belinda's eyes.

Belinda swatted the can away just as Cookie began spraying. She raised her right leg and shot a stiletto-heeled foot into Cookie's solar plexus. Cookie dropped to the floor, wheezing like a set of old bagpipes.

"Let that be a lesson to you," Belinda said rising from the chair. "You can't Aqua Net what you taunt."

IF RAINDROPS WERE WHISPERS

CHARLES BOWERS

If raindrops were kisses...orthodox religious headquarters, military bases, and prisons would crowd desert landscapes. Fathers would usher their daughters inside under the protective shield of a full-sized umbrella at the slightest hint of cloud formation. Groups of pre-teen boys stare from inside a screened porch at the gutter, clogged with pine straw, yielding rhythmic, metallic clanks as large affectionate drops impact the drip tray below. They dare one another to hang their heads out beyond the roofline. Single mothers, forgotten by passion, wander topless into their backyards. Behind privacy fencing and cream-colored Hydrangeas, wet with love, toes wiggling in heart-shaped puddles.

If raindrops were wishes...hospital wards would wheel their frail and dying into the streets. Traffic would come to a halt as drivers abandoned their vehicles to help. Racing the return of the sun, soaking wet, holding the hand of a stranger on a gurney. Heart-broken widows crawl from their darkened bedrooms afraid, but desperate, to believe. Foxholes, filled with injured, become healing pools of Communion wine. Cancer kills itself, missiles become hand-written letters, and God forgives us.

If raindrops were whispers...the Earthy musk of petrichor would be replaced by the stench of cheap, wine-stained rumor. Drops, like blisters, swell with hushed allegation, partial secrets, and unfinished praise. Messages written in disappearing ink, suspended like chemtrails in the wake of tiny droplets. Baseless information, vengeful, jealous, validating, all compete for a listener. There is no fate worse to a gossip than to

be without audience. In a dense but still mist, a whisper that is itself whispered is crystal clear. In a downpour, however, the chorus of muffled, disparate expression coalesces into a deafening white noise.

HINGES

STEVEN O. YOUNG JR.

Act III has begun in our play
without an audience. He calls it
“Christmas is a Working Day.”
I call it “Fourteen Hours on My Flat Feet.”



Sighs wax the rapacious drill press, notching
three eyes out of each leaf. He adjusts
his soot-dusk apron and nods the new moon
into a mask, eclipsing his cindered vision.



Curiosity confuses *Don't look!* for a dare,
and I hold his blazing feather
in my impish periphery—our god
complexes blister into full effect.



TUG

NICHOLAS HIGGINSON

Sitting with you is like stepping into

An ocean,

The temperature not so different

From that of the air.

I barely notice,

Until I feel the

Tug

Of the undertow,

That I've entered into another element.

I fall asleep by the river.

It starts to rain and the drops

Are cold enough to wake me.

My hair full of leaves.

You are all I see when I open or

Close

A book.

Wildly different to falling

Asleep in the sun gleam,

Ladders of light and dust

Playing over me.

Over you.

Red heat keeping us docile,

Dozing.

BE CAREFUL

COLLEEN M. TICE

“Never greet a stranger at night, for he may be a demon,” he warns. “You are silly, there is no such things as demons,” she replies. The old man knew better but how could he tell his granddaughter of the things he had seen? She stepped out the door and into the stormy night, “Grandfather stop worrying about me, I am a strong woman that can take care of herself,” she calls out. She walks to her car, leaving the old man staring at her from the front door, “Be careful my angel.”

Hours later, the young woman finds herself speaking to a strange man on the side of the road. She had seen him standing beside a broken-down car, waving for someone to stop and help him. “I can't leave him out here in this storm,” she reasons. She stops her car beside him, rolling the window down. “How can I help you? Do you need a ride?” she calls over the wind. The strange man smiles, “That would be nice.” She slides across the seat to unlock the door, pushing it open then she slides back behind the steering wheel.

The strange man climbs into the passenger seat, “You are the first person I have seen in hours,” he pushes his wet hair out of his eyes. They glimmer with a golden brightness, “Thank you so much for stopping.” “You would do the same for me, I hope,” she quips. Laughing the strange man looks her up and down, “I think I would.”

Roses bloom in her cheeks, “Where can I take you? The nearest garage is about two blocks away, would that be, okay?” Nodding, “That would be great.” She pulls back onto the road, and drives towards the garage. They chatter as they drive, the stranger tells her how he had

become stranded on the side of the road. She tells him, "I was heading to a friend's house. I guess it was fate for us to meet."

A sly and evil grin spreads across his mouth, "I think it was more than fate, my dear." Glancing at her passenger, "What do you mean?" "Didn't anyone tell you not to greet a stranger at night? Didn't anyone tell you what and who roams the country side roads at night?" he mocks her. Shrugging her shoulders, "Do you mean the old wives' tales about being careful of talking to strangers? They are school children's tales to frighten them."

The stranger laughs, "More than tales, my love. There are many creatures and specters roaming the nighttime." A claw of fear grabs her heart, "You are in danger!"

She swerves and stops at the edge of the road, "Please get out. I can't take you any further." Tapping her arm with his long finger nail, "It's too late my dear, you and I have some business to complete." "Your grandfather warned you, now you must pay the price for not listening." Frightened the girl jumps from her car and tries to run away. The werewolf pounces on the young woman and bites into her tender flesh. Screams and growls fill the night sky, as the werewolf takes a new bride.

THE LIGHT BRINGER

BENJAMIN KIRBY

He bears light, he bears light
a soul full of grace
His joy built in stages
the innocent world, his place

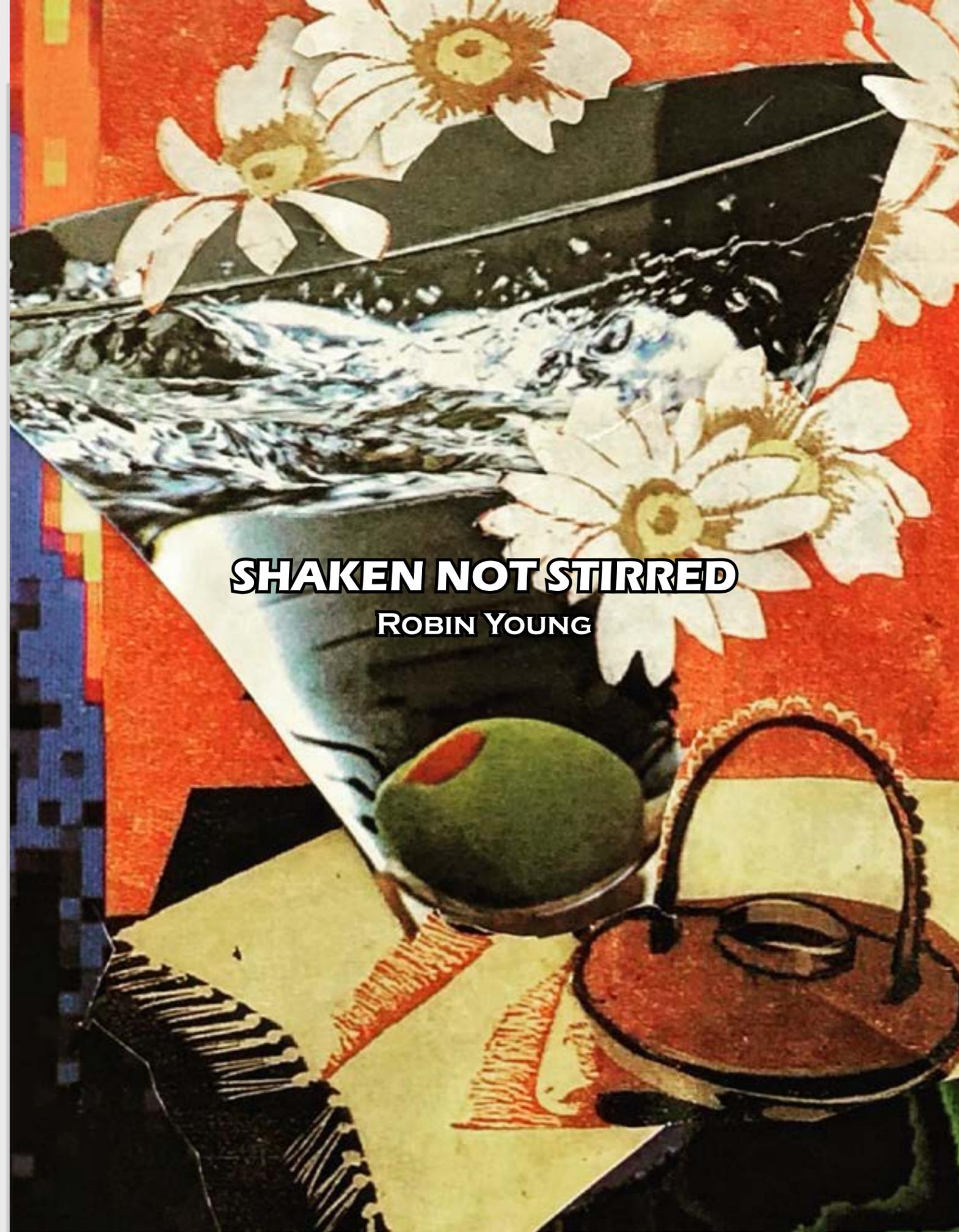
His up-note of laughter
the broad vine of his grin
A spore, a contagion
sprout love's wild din

His eyes, they are wiser
than ever should be
Weary, weary launched boats
through eyes blue as sea

A gentle, kind hand
for those hobbled by need
He shall carry your burden
with strength of a steed

His soul, it is noble
and his heart is of love
He shall soar ever higher
on wings of a dove

Let my boy wander free
from land near and far
He will lead us to glory
how he shines like a star



SHAKEN NOT STIRRED

ROBIN YOUNG

PLANTATION

MARGARET MARCUM

It's already late and my mother is picking through a stack of avocados inspecting each one closely, at a market in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

"Mom, come on," I whine. "It's already past 6, and I wanna get back in time to finish my paper. Just pick one."

"Cara, relax. We'll be back in time."

Suddenly, a whirl of brown hair whizzes by my side.

"David, slow down!" My mother yells, her eyes not budging from the avocados.

My dad appears following right behind.

"Sorry, hun. I'll get him and make sure he slows down," he gasps in between breaths.

My mother rolls her eyes and finally selects an avocado. She holds it up to the sun like she's found a rare emerald.

"Look, Cara. See how this one is a perfect tear drop? That's how you know it has a small seed inside."

"Fascinating." I shove a feral strand of hair behind my ear. "You see how the sun is starting to get lower in the sky? That's how you know the day is almost over."

"Oh, hush!" She swats her hand at me and starts to make her way toward the market's interior. I drag my body behind her.

The interior looks about the same as the exterior. Succulents dot the shelves and fill any spaces not occupied by organic, non-GMO, gluten-free pasta, granola, rustic breads, and the like. My mother makes a beeline for the freezers. She yanks open one of the doors. I try to divert my eyes

and breathe shallowly even though I'm aware that the severed corpses are frozen. I shudder from the gust of frigid air.

"I'm feeling like a nice steak," she intones.

The young oak trees move in the autumn wind on the other side of the doorless barrier between the market's exterior and interior. I watch as the setting sun turns the glass of the freezers' doors red making it appear like the freezers are filled with translucent blood.

Suddenly, I hear a clatter of cans. I turn around.

A boy towers before me with sandy blonde hair and eyes so dark it looks as if his pupils bled into his irises, which stand out starkly against his pale visage. He is strikingly handsome.

"My apologies, Miss." His voice is low and has a distinct southern drawl.

"Oh, that's ok." I lean down instinctively to help retrieve the fallen cans.

"You needn't do that," he replies as I hand him a can of sardines.

"I don't mind, really." I lower my face to the ground feeling the heat building behind my cheeks, as I stoop to pick up the remaining cans. I look up and he's crouched right beside me. His almost black eyes hold mine to his for a hypnotizing moment.

"My name is Charles Destrehan. What's yours?"

We rise at the same time my eyes still locked into his two mini solar eclipses.

"Cara," I sputter handing him a can of sardines.

"Thank you."

I smile him a "you're-welcome-anytime."

"Sweetie, who's this?" My mother asks appearing beside me eagerly, like I'm five years old and just brought home my first friend.

"Mom, this is Charles."

"Hello, Charles." She reaches out her hand. "Lovely to meet you."

"Likewise, ma'am."

“What a charming accent,” my mother practically drools. “Are you from around here?”

“Yes, ma’am. And where might I ask are you from?”

Before I can answer my mother responds, “Oh, we moved to Slidell a year ago from Boston. How do you like living in New Orleans?”

“I like it just fine, ma’am. We own a plantation, Destrehan Plantation, out in the country along River Road. We raise chickens and goats and grow our own vegetables and fruits. I come down to this neck of the woods every now and then just to pick up some things we can’t make ourselves.”

“Well isn’t that nice.” My mother replies, nudging me in the side.

“Isn’t that nice, Cara?”

“That’s nice,” I exhale folding my arms over my chest. “Mom, don’t you have some more groceries to pick up for tonight?”

“Actually,” Charles interjects, “if you and your family would like, you are welcome to join us for dinner tonight. Tonight is a special occasion. We are hosting a special ceremony when the sun sets and then serving dinner at the stroke of midnight.”

“How interesting. What is the special occasion?”

“It’s the anniversary of when my family’s ancestors migrated to New Orleans two centuries ago.”

“Well thank you for the invitation, but we wouldn’t want to impose on your special night.”

“Oh, no. It’s no imposition at all, ma’am. In fact, it would be our pleasure.”

My mother turns to me, and I nod with my eyes. My paper can wait.

“Well, that does sound lovely, but after midnight is rather late for us to be driving all the way back to Slidell.”

“We live in a mansion with many guest houses so you could stay the night if y’all would like.”

“A mansion?” My mother’s eyes brighten. “Well, if you insist. I didn’t feel much like making dinner tonight once we got back anyway. Thank

you for the invitation, Charles.”

“My pleasure, ma’am. I’m just going to pick up a few more things we need for tonight to make our signature cordial—it’s vital to the tradition. I can meet you back here in five minutes.”

“Perfect.” My mother fluffs her hair with her free hand. Charles and I exchange smiles, and he saunters off.

“You sure you don’t need to get back and work on your paper?”

“I have a break period before the class—I’ll be okay.”

“Well, that’s quite the paradigm shift,” she smirks dialing my dad’s number.

“Did you notice—he kinda talks like he’s not from this time period. It’s like he’s stuck in the 1800s or something. It’s kinda weird.”

“It’s not weird,” my mother responds repositioning her phone. “It just means he’s polite and probably well educated. It’s a good sign.”

David comes tearing through a tangle of drooping poppies, pits raining from his pockets from the cherries he likes to steal when we visit the French Quarter markets—with my dad puffing behind in restless pursuit.

“Hun, there you are.” My mother tucks her phone in her pocket as both my brother and dad come to a jumpy halt.

“We’ve been invited by a charming young local to join him and his family for a special ceremonial dinner this evening and spend the night at their mansion.”

My dad raises his eyebrows. “Mansion?”

“I wanna go to a mansion!” My little brother squeals out from a cherry stained mouth.

“You just met this boy?” My dad scoops up David as he shrieks in delight.

“Well, yes, but he seems like a very nice boy. I’m sure it’s fine.”

I nod my head earnestly.

He eyes us both and sighs, “Well, alright. Wasn’t looking forward to doing the dishes tonight anyway.”

My mind does a fist pump.

“Okay,” my mother says hoisting her basket on her hip. “I can put this food back and then we can go meet him.”

As we follow behind Charles’ white car, I try to think over the obnoxious sound effects blaring from David’s Mario Bros game. The last time I had a crush, it did not end well. It started with a boy in my Psychology class with whom I was assigned to be partners for the semester, and it ended with blubbering early morning chats with my mother and enough tissues to sew multiple blankets.

Since then I’ve intentionally gone out of my way not to fall for anyone again. When I enter a relationship, I always end up losing myself—at least my sane self. I conflate my identity with theirs. And when they go, I go. So why risk the chance of being in so much pain for such temporary pleasure? But with Charles, there’s something different about him. I’m not sure what it is or what to call it. It’s like this cool air of mystery, hypnotically magnetizing, pulling me further in.

Charles’ car turns down a gravel road smothered with black willows and leading to a large wrought iron gate.

As we near, I make out the silhouette of a looming house in the last few receding remains of twilight.

“Oh my,” my mother breathes.

As we pull up closer to what reveals itself as an enormous mansion, I can almost hear the theme music of Clue playing in the background. As if on cue, a mammoth blackbird flies over and plops itself down on top of the gate cawing maniacally.

Charles’ reaches out from his car, his pale arm like a white snake in the moonlight. He punches in a code and the gate begin to creak open. We follow behind and everyone is silent, as we behold the scene before us.

I’VE WONDERED ABOUT THIS SENSE OF MEANING

JOSEPH HARDY

turned the presence of it over in my mind,
shaken it like a present before Christmas,
but it doesn’t give way.

It’s taken a space in the jumble-drawer
of being, there with breathing, eating,
sleeping, love—all tangled together,

each of them singing their own songs:
lewd chanties, remembered
nursery rhymes, deep

Thelonious Monk silences,
in-your-face Freddy Mercury anthems
with why’d-she-have-to-go-away blues

and Joni Mitchell apologies to lovers—
“Sorry, dear.” shrugging her shoulders,
“Couldn’t help it.”

Maybe meaning comes closest to us
in music, a music box that opens,
tiny skater spinning on a mirror

to *Wish I Had A River*,
while a girl tries on earrings
for an evening out.



I COULD'VE BEEN A BETTER HUSBAND

ACE BOGGESS

Or a better shepherd, a cook,
or concert pianist—
I failed; failed, too, at capitalism,
socialism, asking for what I wanted
when all I wanted was a kiss for luck.

I could've been a better shortstop,
though I'm not a fan of baseball;
not a fan of marriage, either,
understanding how things work.
I could've been a better crook,

lurking in dark with pistol or knife,
face scarred from losses.
I could've been—I could've—
a better companion, embracing sunsets;
sleep; the long, slow ride.

I wish you saw my insecurities
we could've held high like an infant
to the hospital light instead of walking
across them like a basement floor
we noticed when the sewer line

backed up. I could've been a better me,

found a home in a better you.
I could've asked for absolution.
Too many weeds in the overgrown lawn, &
a better gardener I could not have been.

A CONFESSION OF A FRUGALIST

HUINA ZHENG

Finally, the once-a-month payment day had arrived. I stared at the figure in the text message on my mobile phone and transferred half of it to my Alipay account for saving.

My husband Ming said, “Buy yourself a pair of new shoes. You’ve worn your casual shoes for over two years. You should have at least used your happiness budget once.”

I nodded but didn’t intend to spend the money because the shoes were still in good shape.

The “Happiness Budget” was set up in the second year of our marriage. Ming proposed it because he thought I was too hard on myself. I wouldn’t buy pajamas and wear worn clothes instead. He wanted me to spend money on items and experiences for my own happiness. We each had 300 yuan per month to treat ourselves. Since prices are rising, we increase by 100 yuan yearly, and now it is 800 yuan.

We bought a flat last year, and whenever I get paid, the thought of the monthly mortgage of nearly 10,000 yuan dispels all my ideas of spending money.

#

I have been frugal since I was a child. I grew up with a single mother, who worked in a clothing store, and her income was not bad. However, she spent money casually. At the end of the month, she didn’t even have money to buy rice.

She couldn’t remember where she spent her money, and she bought whatever she wanted. When she did grocery shopping at the market and saw someone selling delicious-looking pastries, she would buy them. A little here

and there, her money was gone. She often asked me if I would like a cake or something when she walked me to school, but I always said no because I was worried that she would run out of money.

Each time when she got paid, she would take me to a restaurant or buy me an ice cream, which we considered a luxury. After that, she would have to return the money to her friends, and we would live a hard life again. My mother liked to tell people that I was not a picky eater; other children would not eat fatty pork, but I would. The truth was: if I didn’t eat it, I would have nothing to eat. I wondered if I could help my mother save some money so that we would not have to worry about financial stress.

When I was in 4th grade, I told my mother, “If you trust me, after you get your salary, you can give me some money, and I will save it for you. I will return it to you at the end of the year.” And she trusted me!

She gave me some money the day she got paid, 20, 50, or sometimes 100 yuan. I hid it in my books. My bookcase was deep, with two layers of books inside and outside.

At the end of the year, I asked my mother to come to my room and proudly returned all the money I had saved. My mother was surprised and impressed. For the first time, she did not need to borrow money to celebrate the Chinese spring festival. She then told me that many times when she ran out of money, she searched everywhere at home to find the money I had hidden, but she couldn’t.

Helping my mother save money gave me a sense of control. When I was in the fifth grade, my mother began to give me 10 yuan a week for pocket money. I would record every income and expenditure in a notebook. When I saw the saving figure increased week by week, I found fulfillment.

I have become the opposite of my mother. She was a lesson for me. I told myself that I must not spend money like my mother did.

I knew Ming was a big spender before I married him. He had lived with his parents after graduating from college and thus had no financial pressure. After we got married, I did the math with him. If we wanted to save enough

to pay a down payment for a flat in five years, we needed to save 7,000 yuan a month. We should arrange monthly income and expenses based on this deposit goal.

We set a deposit goal every year and reviewed it every two months to see how far we were from the target. If it hadn't gone as planned, what caused it? A considerable expense or a drop in income? My husband loved math, and these calculations made him more determined to achieve our deposit goal. He would take the initiative to downgrade consumption. Before getting married, he would spend 700 yuan on a pair of shoes, but now he would spend 100 yuan. He agreed we shouldn't consider the brand or design as long as the shoes were comfortable.

#

Saving has become our family norm, bringing us much joy.

Every time we prepare meals, we'd rather cook less than more. If the dishes are not enough, we would boil noodles. I have always brought a packed lunch for work. Ming also did so, but later his company provided lunch subsidies, and he began to dine at the company's canteen.

We would compare prices among nearby supermarkets for daily necessities and buy the ones with the lowest prices.

Whenever there are promotions on the online shopping platform, I would do some calculations, adding and subtracting, studying discount rules, membership, and coupons, and finally buy what I want with 50% or even 60% off the price. I feel joy, similar to winning at games.

I would share my "strategies" with my friends so that they can also get the lowest price.

One day, my friend Mei became ambitious and said she would try to "do her homework." She studied the discount rules for an hour, then spoke to me with a look of despair, "I'd better copy your strategies."

She asked, "How did you do it? Why can't I get the same discount?"

I am just naturally good at getting a good deal. I know how to use various discount rules to get the best price. I can always get the same thing at

a lower price than others.

Once, I shared my money-saving tips on my social account and got tens of thousands of likes within a few days. After all, a penny saved is worth two pennies earned.

When I was pregnant with my daughter, I told relatives and friends that we welcomed used clothes, toys, prams, and cots, and thus we saved a fortune.

Saving makes me feel optimistic, hopeful, calm and confident. We will not have to struggle if things take an unexpected route.

#

In middle age, we have become the pillars of the family, and deposits mean that we can still cover the financial surprises in times of family crisis.

One Sunday, Ming returned from overtime and said, "Our life would be so much easier if we didn't buy this flat. Should we sell it?"

I looked at his tired face and said, "Okay. Then we will be able to take Lan to travel every month." But we both knew it was just talking.

Guangzhou, where we live, is one of China's first-tier big cities, and housing prices are rising yearly. Can we still afford a flat if we sell it? And renting a house always made us feel that we had no home. We still need to pay the mortgage for the next 20 years and work hard for the flat.

People say the middle-aged are either mortgage slaves or child's slaves, or both. After we had Lan, we have been under financial, physical, and mental pressure when raising our daughter. Lan's education will be a significant expenditure in the future. We were taught to believe that only by sending our children to the best schools and helping them get the best grades could we build them a better future. Can we escape the rat race in China? Even if we can stop being overly concerned about Lan's studies, what if she has an expensive interest? I longed to learn the piano when I was young, but my family couldn't afford it. What if Lan wants to learn a musical instrument? Should I tell her, sorry, it's too expensive? I simply can't.

Middle-aged adults are called the sandwich generation for a reason.

We are effectively “sandwiched” between the obligation to care for our growing child and aging parents.

Ming’s parents’ pensions are just enough for food and clothing. Two years ago, his father was diagnosed with lung cancer, but the silver lining was that his father’s medical insurance could cover most of the expenses. In April last year, my mother fell while taking out the garbage, fractured her tailbone, and broke her left wrist. My mother had no pension or medical insurance. The cost of this treatment naturally fell on us, costing us more than 50,000 yuan. This accident made me realize that our parents were aging. We needed to set aside a stash of money as an emergency fund.

The “Happiness Budget” brings me happiness not because I can spend for my own pleasure but because it shows that I have a spare deposit, giving me a fortified sense of security.

In any case, my middle-aged self loses the impulse or ability to live in time, but it does not mean our life is miserable. Saving money is for financial security, not for saving’s sake. For example, we enjoy snacks, but our favorites are the biscuits bought in bulk at 14 yuan per kilogram, which are inexpensive and delicious. We also have family rituals. We would celebrate birthdays at Tasty, an affordable Western restaurant.

More importantly, frugality brings us pride. Many of my friends and relatives live in their parents’ home, and some even rely on their parents’ pensions to pay for their children’s after-school interest classes. Compared with these people, we can take good care of ourselves and our family.

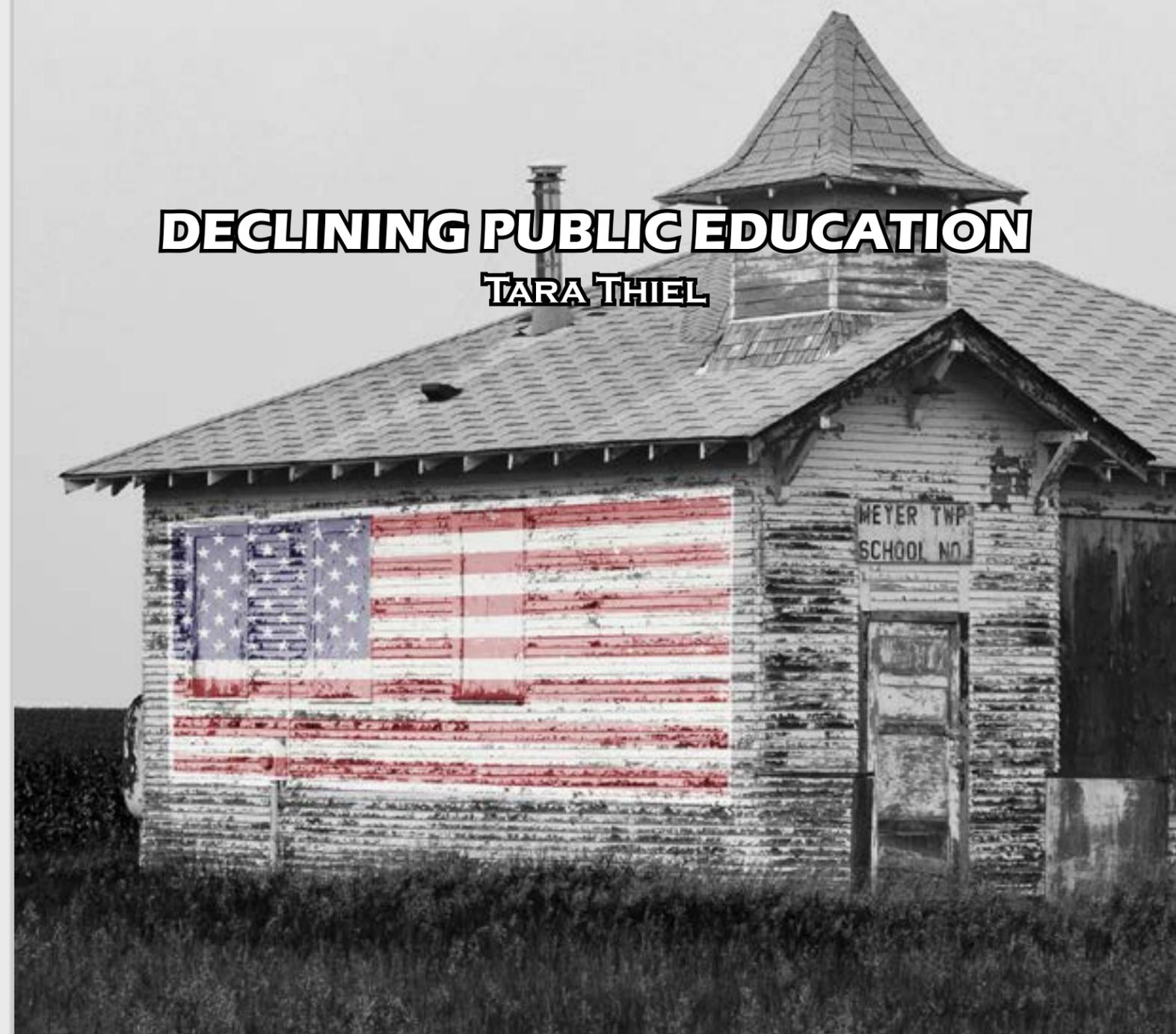
Saving money is our way of fighting against the burdens of life and all the risks of uncertainty, giving us the confidence that we can manage our lives no matter what the day throws at us.

Of course, I will force myself to occasionally give up “absolute pragmatism” and buy myself or my family some “useless but pleasurable gadgets.” However, for the necessities, I will still buy them at the lowest price.

I am good at buying items at discount after all. Well, I am a born frugalist, but a happy one.

DECLINING PUBLIC EDUCATION

TARA THIEL



AFTERNOON AT THE SUPERMARKET

RUTH BROWN

The air conditioning thunders in the cool dark-
synapses fire and awaken-
light sputters from a plaster sky and all
is waxy brilliance.
A hot sun at noon, and white as bone.
Into the depths of oranges, lettuce heads and cucumbers
the people come.
They come with their children, sustainable bags,
outstretched hands and broken fingernails.
A cool place in the summer.
A reverent place.
Like individual heartbeats many sneakers
beat a rush of blood into the bountiful artery.
Now is the time to consider the butter
and the bottomless curve of a watermelon.
Cereal's on sale, bread for a dollar.
The meat counter glitters in a menagerie of glass,
an island of chilled shrimp and New York Strip by the pound.
Here, a fortress of trumpet mushrooms.
Here, a stand of cracker jacks like sentinels wait.
Color swirls, color dances,
nothing is still-
a dreidel top spinning into entropy.
And how it spins.
Green into purple and ripe, arterial red.

Dusty whites and oranges that squeeze the eye
of everything but itself.
Waxy blacks suck the light into a taste
that shouts on the tongue and lives in the bones.
The smell of good things to come,
risen from the earth,
brings the memory of warmth
to the tannic aisles of refrigeration and plastic.



RECONCILIATION

EDWARD LUELLIN

The train to Hades, red as Styx,
 gargles loud across the slicks
 Slittish glaring of the sun
 stares down so loved Soulless One
 Ivory whiskers sharp and neat
 how they tremble in the heat
 Scrabbling, scalded out of Home
 abruptly awakened so.
 Mourning howls from my mouth
 do not stop the passage south
 Unfamiliar does it seem,
 to the glazed amber sheen;
 Tell me this is just a dream
 Tell me this is just a dream.
 I'm too old to see these trees
 framing gate unto my leave
 This is Death between the grates
 Can you hear me in the crate?
 You've been naughtier than I,
 just a creature with big eyes,
 just a kitten in a box,
 just a friend that you have lost.
 Call me little boy again.
 Kiss me last upon my head.
 Place me down in different arms

purring pleasant orange charms
 something you will never see
 One last picture, not of me
 just of fear for underworld
 red lens glint and body curled.



THE LAST LEAF

OLEG SOTNIKOV

ON THE WAY

VAISHNAVI PUSAPATI (DR.)

The songs, familiar tunes, unfamiliar words.
 I'm on the way home, a place where we use,
 the life-sized Halloween witch, as a scarecrow, and it works.
 A place stuck in my flypaper mind in still life.
 A place we love, in spite of the neighbours we hate,
 A place "where the Chatterleys are still the Chatterleys",
 Where the gossip seeks us, like we were the British Royalty,
 Where our joy, paltry as it may be, is the sorrow of others,
 who are undesired biographers, and in their criticism of life,
 are dying a little each day that shines upon them,
 a chance to retreat and repent. But I can take it.
 Waiting for our porch roses to wilt permanently.
 Home is where we rarely get tired, tired of,
 where the postman knows our names.
 Home is where birthdays and funerals
 call for the tribe to gather, and much more.
 Home is where we forgive so much
 that we remember it as a dollhouse,
 where we rarely get bad news, rarely care
 about the world outside, spinning,
 where there are just enough tears
 in the fences, where hand me downs feel new,
 where even in empty pockets
 there is a handful of sunshine.

ISLE OF DREAMS

SOURIMA RANA

The feather floated gently, spiralling in the wind,
 The ends of the sky pulsated with lavender rays;
 Sweetly sang the birds; yet swiftly descended the haze
 The lilac edges of a storm upon the Isle of Dreams.

Wild roses grew on every dewy, untrodden space
 The autumn winds swept the sky, darkening with grace;
 Lost summers trapped in the soul of every fallen petal!
 Twilight deepened, draping the lilac rushes by the lake...

Lilac clouds swallowed the last colours of the sun;
 A hush draped the limits of the world, as it became
 The poet's verses and the artist's canvas, undone!
 To lilting voices singing of the magic that remained.

Hidden in the flowery dale of unimaginable colours
 The shimmering ghostly figures, silhouetted against the pines
 Caught dreams and fireflies; the dream-catchers gazing at the sky
 Of the charmed woodlands, that seemed to wave goodbye...

CONTRIBUTORS

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Benjamin Kirby is a writer living in St. Petersburg, Florida. Benjamin worked in collaboration with acclaimed cellist Natalie Helm exploring Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello. He wrote a short story, "The Queen's Cookfire", inspired by the music, and read it before a live audience at the Sarasota Contemporary Dance Company.

Charles Bowers is a Virginia-based painter, illustrator, and author. His artwork can be found at the Crossroads Art Center in Richmond, the Williamsburg Art Gallery, in numerous publications, and even in a Hollywood movie.

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Edward Luellin hails from the snowdrifts of Upper Peninsula Michigan. He writes, in memoriam, within a variety of genres, all the while forced to share the keyboard with his cats.

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is A Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Harvard Advocate*. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

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Huina Zheng holds a M.A. in English Studies degree (Distinction) and works as college essay coach. She also serves as an Associate Editor (Review Reader) for *Bewildering Stories*. Her stories were published in *Baltimore Review*, *Variant Literature*, *Midway Journal*, *Tint Journal*, and other journals. Her fiction "Ghost Children" was nominated for Pushcart Prize. She lives in Guangzhou, China with her husband and daughter.

Igor Zusev is a creator of chaos art. After a lengthy career in tech and AV project management, Igor discovered art as a way to unwind and connect with himself...and it all started with adult coloring books, shortly followed by a gifted paint set. He dove into it with enthusiasm, often scouring thrift stores for elements he could add and experiment with. Igor settled into his unique style of using rollers to paint, and layering cut-outs onto canvas. Sometimes he'll produce a deeply personal piece, and other times you'll find him exploring messages he wants to portray in his style.

John Power was born and raised in and around New York City, graduated from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, lived for a year in Warsaw, Poland, and currently reside in Chicago. His stories have appeared in *The William & Mary Review*, *Barzakh Magazine*, *West Trade Review*, *Cleaning Up Glitter*, *The Book Smuggler's Den*, and *The Great Lakes Review*, among others.

Joseph Hardy a reformed human resource consultant, lives with his wife in Nashville, Tennessee. His work has been published in: *Appalachian Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Inlandia*, *Plainsongs*, and *Poet Lore* among others. He is the author of two books of poetry, "The Only Light Coming In" and "Becoming Sky," Bambaz Press Los Angeles, and a picture book, "At the Reading of the Will—And a Boy's Life Thereafter," IngramSpark.

Joshua Sabatini was born in Hartford, Connecticut. In October 2002, he moved to San Francisco, California. He's currently on retreat in Katama, Massachusetts. His 2023 published writings include "Pagodians" in *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, "In the Pine" and "In and Out" in *The Closed Eye Open*, "The Crocus" in *Daffodil Cosmic Journal*, "Ivy Anne" and "Susitna" in *Die Leere Mitte* and "The Winged" in *In Parentheses*.

Keith Kennedy is a Pushcart and Rhysling nominee writing out of Vancouver. He has recent publications at *Red Ogre*, *Barzakh* and *Cirque Journal*. Keith is represented by Jon Michael Darga at Aevitas Creative. Keith Kennedy wanes poetic in Vancouver with his magnificent wife and many pizzas.

Lee Hammerschmidt is a Visual Artist/Writer/Troubadour. He is the author of the short story collections, *A Hole Of My Own*, *It's Noir O'clock Somewhere*, *For Richer or Noirer*, *Flash Wounds*, and *Pulp Stains*.

Lukas Tallent lives in New York City. His work has recently appeared in *HAD*, *Vast Chasm*, *Door is A Jar*, and many other places. His chapbook, *The Compromising Position*, is available now from Bottlecap Press.

Mario Loprete lives in a world that is shaped to his liking. He does this through virtual, pictorial, and sculptural movements, transferring his experiences and photographing reality through his mind's filters. He has refined this process through years of research and experimentation. His new series of concrete sculptures has given him more personal and professional satisfaction.

Martha Patterson's 27-story collection "Small Acts of Magic" was published by Finishing Line Press in 2021. Her other work has been published in more than 20 anthologies and journals, and her plays have been produced in 21 states and eight countries. She has two degrees in Theatre, from Mount Holyoke College and Emerson College, and lives in Boston, Massachusetts. She loves being surrounded by her books, radio, and laptop.

Matt A. Hanson is a writer and journalist from Massachusetts based in Istanbul. His short fiction appeared in *The Write Launch*, *Underwood Press*, *The Bosphorus Review of Books*, *Panorama: The Journal of Travel, Place and Nature*, *The Skewies: An Award Anthology* and the Summer '23 issue of *Washington Square Review*. He is the founder of the independent, digital publishing platform FictiveMag.com

Matthew McCain is a writer, author, and artist.

Maya Jacyszyn is a multi-published poet and the Assistant Director of Neumann University's Writing Center. She received her bachelor's degree at Saint Joseph's University where she also served as Editor-in-Chief of the literary magazine titled, *Crimson & Gray*. More recently, her work is featured in the Sigma Tau Delta *Rectangle*, *The Ignatian Literary Magazine*, *Quibble Lit*, and *Clepsydra Literary and Art Magazine*, among others.

Mord McGhee writes out of South Carolina in the USA.

Nicholas Higginson is an English writer who studied Comparative Literature at the University of Kent. He is the co-author of the short story collection *Peach Supreme*, and his work has previously been published in *The Garfield Lake Review*, *Red Earth Review*, *Button Eye Review* and *Literally Stories*. He has also worked on the editorial board for *Beyond Words* literary journal.

Oleg Sotnikov is an amateur photographer from Kyiv, Ukraine. He started his journey when phones with built-in cameras appeared. Then he thought about buying a camera and 5 years ago it has happened. Having tried many genres of photography, he settled on shooting nature - landscapes and macro, and of course animals. He took part in some competitions online, his photo of the sun is one of the most popular ones on the Nikon Ukraine Facebook page.

Robin Young works in mixed media focusing mostly on collage and contemporary art making. Her focus on collage art using magazine clippings, masking tape, wallpaper, jewelry, feathers, foil etc. allows her to develop deep into the whimsical and intuitive compositions she is known for. From large, life-sized pieces and 3D sculptures to small postcard-sized arrangements, Robin's keen eye and gripping esthetic guide her viewers into her own semi-readymade world. Repurposing these nostalgic images for lighthearted and sometimes disquieting messages; Robin's artistic universe is strange, funky, sometimes perverse and always alluring.

Ruth Brown lives in Arizona with her wife and four dogs. When not cooking or walking the dogs, she loves to write horror tales and poetry.

Sandra Hosking is a Pushcart-nominated poet, playwright, and photographer based in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared in *Red Ogre Review*, *The Elevation Review*, *Havik*, *Black Lion Review*, and more. She holds M.F.A. degrees in theatre and creative writing.

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He came to the States where he spent his teens in South Philly and then Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden H. S. he joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force. He earned an MA and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature with a minor in French Literature. He worked as a Green Beret language instructor at Fort Bragg, NC from 1975-78. In 1988 he received a B.A. from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Spanish Literature. He worked as a language teacher at the University of Alaska (1978-1997). He worked as a house builder, pipe-fitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender.

Shannon Burns is an emerging writer based in Mt. Baldy, California. She has graduated in 2023 with a Bachelors of Arts degree in theater from Azusa Pacific University. Her published works include *Dead Between Walls* and *Uprooted*. These two essays have been chosen by APU to be featured in their literary magazine called *The West Wind*. She is also expanding herself into works for the stage and screen.

Siyuan Carter-Patkau is a graduate student currently residing in London, Ontario. She has been writing and making music since childhood. She holds a BMus from Wilfrid Laurier University and an MMus from Western University. In her spare time, she likes to sew, knit, go running, and play with her cats. Her self-published collection of poetry “My Heart is a Moth in a Glass Jar” is available now through Amazon.

Sourima Rana is an aspiring poetess, from Kolkata, India; with a post-graduate degree in English Literature. An avid reader, she is passionate about writing poems and songs, analyzing films and reviewing books. She has won several poetry writing competitions in her college; and her poetry has been published by *The Write Order* and *Quill House* publications in 2021. She enjoys caring for animals, singing and playing the guitar in her spare time.

Steven O. Young Jr. is knitted within the Great Lakes’ mitten, where he earned an MA from Oakland University and occasionally slathers soundstages with his body weight’s worth of paint. His latest works can or will be found within *Great Lakes Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *In Parentheses*, and *Quibble.Lit*.

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Tara Thiel describes her work as recontextualized nonfiction. Her projects examine the temporality of man-made objects through juxtaposition and focus to create stories that breathe new life into outlived realities. Her art has been published in *Twyckenham Notes*, *Rougarou Literary Journal*, *Sheepshead Review* and others.

Tuhin Bhowal’s poems and translations appear or are forthcoming in *Bad Lillies*, *Poetry at Sangam*, *Oxford Anthology of Translation 2022*, *adda*, *Cosmic Double*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Parentheses Journal*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. He is a recipient of the Deepankar Khiwani Memorial Prize 2022.

Uswa Maryam is a 22 year old writer and student of Law from Pakistan. She explores the theme of dying relationships and suppressed emotions.

STAFF

Sage Delio might be considered a modern day renaissance woman, with her diverse interests and talents spanning across the fields of creative writing, computer science, music, and the arts. In May 2022, she published her debut poetry collection, *Blue Confessional: Poetry and Prose*. A second edition of the collection is being adapted with Sage's own art and illustrations. For *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, Sage holds the roles of Editor-In-Chief and Poetry & Prose Editor.

Sharon Fremont is a multifaceted artist and avid book enthusiast. Her artistic journey spans across various mediums, with a particular fondness for the captivating realms of watercolor painting and sketching. Her passion for the written word is equally profound, evident in her dual roles as Managing Editor and Fiction Editor for *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

Karen Porterfield has spent over 24 years working in design. She has established herself as a talented artisan jewelry designer, crafting one-of-a-kind pieces that are highly sought after. Karen's passion for creating beautiful and innovative designs has led her to achieve a great deal of success in the field. She serves as the Art & Illustrations Editor for *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

Matthew Evan is an accomplished photographer and passionate car enthusiast. He has developed a sharp eye for capturing the beauty and essence of his subjects through his lens. He leads *Gabby & Min's Literary Review* as the publication's Photography Editor.

THE ART OF ADVANCED STORYTELLING

Advanced storytelling is an artful blend of intricate language, sophisticated narrative structure, and deep character insight, where writers shape stories that stir deep emotions and transform ideas into literary gold. These writers challenge conventional storytelling, innovating with boldness and discipline across various forms, be it through disrupting narrative order, merging visual and verbal art, or creating complex, interlacing storylines.

Character portrayal in this realm is rich and nuanced, delving into psychological depths akin to a psychologist's analysis, with dialogue and plot woven tightly to reveal character and story. The narrative voice is versatile, shifting scale with precision, and the prose itself is crafted to evoke vivid imagery and sensory engagement, making every word count.

At the forefront of advanced writing is the reinvention of form and narrative structure, pushing readers to engage actively and question their perceptions. Authors employ techniques like non-linear progression, unreliable narrators, or participatory storytelling to make reading an immersive experience. In advanced creative writing, every narrative element is deliberate, constructing enduring works that invite readers to not only envision but inhabit worlds beyond the page.

END

