

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

Issue #6, FALL 2024



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

POETRY BY
JENNA
MARTINEZ
GHOSTS

ART BY
ZOE
HUOT-LINK
SKULL AND
CROW

FICTION BY
HUNTER
PRICHARD
STALE BREEZE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
LEILI
NAJMABADI
FLOWERS



GABBY & MIN'S
Literary Review

ISSUE #6, FALL 2024

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COVER ART
Fall Leaves 2 by David Avila

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**A LETTER FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Dear Cherished Readers,

As autumn descends with its golden hues and crisp air, we're thrilled to present the Fall 2024 issue of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*. This season's edition arrives as an invitation to embrace introspection and the quiet intensity that fall inspires. We appreciate the anticipation leading up to this issue, and I assure you it was well worth the wait.

This collection is themed around transformation and memory, capturing the ephemeral beauty and contemplative spirit that make fall so unique. Within these pages, you'll find powerful poems, vivid artworks, evocative stories, and stunning photography—all selected to reflect the depth and mystery of the season. Each piece seeks to connect us, reminding us of shared experiences and unseen connections that emerge as leaves fall and nature recedes.

Thank you for your steadfast support and enthusiasm for our journey through art and narrative. Your passion fuels our vision, making each edition a true labor of love.

With warmest autumn wishes and heartfelt thanks,



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

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STALE BREEZE

HUNTER PRICHARD

It'd been a good night for sleeping with how the wind panted up from the bay. Todd dozed past when the blue separated from the black, but then the sun pressed through the front windows and he began to sweat under his wool quilt. He sat up and breathed in the chilly autumn air. It felt like he'd been out ten or fifteen years, and his head felt clean but empty. But he got out of bed before he could remember on what he'd dreamt on, stretched out his old, clumsy limbs, and went into the kitchen for breakfast.

He boiled water for coffee as he paced about the two rooms of his apartment, drifting purposelessly from the chilly tree-enshrouded kitchen to the big front room, where he both slept and worked his days, reviewing applications for the Rushmore Lone Mortgage Company. It was an alright job but they'd closed the office a year ago and it was getting to be an odd, lacking life to be sitting all day in this small, shabby room. The computer the company had loaned him sat upon a scuffed classroom desk he'd bought at Goodwill and the accompanying chair had a broken leg. Todd snorted a little as he turned on the computer. The machine made a whirring sound, hostile and guttural, like an old man groaning. Todd felt his fingers shake, deliberating on the email waiting for him. But it was earlier than he'd thought and there was no rush to get started yet. He dressed and made instant coffee in a chipped mug. He sat at the table staring dumbly out the small windows that looked out to the back alley of the apartment complex. Then he jumped up and took the coffee and a week-old Sunday newspaper out to the courtyard.

It was a navy-blue October morning, hard and brittle as a made-up woman. Todd stood tall in the center of the courtyard and stared down the street towards the water. He sighed a little, neither happy nor not, only wondering on the applications and a report he needed to write up for his manager. People left the apartment building around him and he nodded to some of them, trying to smile and act friendly-like. The residents here came and went all the time and he didn't now know most of their names. But they were alright, kind enough for a few polite words here or there. Todd drank the coffee with his other hand crossed over his front. From a distance, a train jumbled through and there was a dull horn of a freight from the harbor.

As he was walking down to the trash bins at the end of the courtyard, a windblow broke the newspaper from his grasp and stranded the pages about the yard. Todd shook his head as he went after them. He noticed that a little boy about five or six stood watching him from the doorway of one of the downstairs apartments. The child had shy sea-green eyes and a bowl haircut. He wore blue overalls and a red shirt underneath and his sneakers were clean and white.

"I can get your newspaper too," the boy said. "Can I help?"

"It's alright with me if it's alright with your parents," Todd said. He jumped after a page. When he'd stomped it to the turf, he saw it was only an advertisement and he laughed a little at his exertion. "Thanks for your help," he said, lumbering back up to the building.

The boy was running every which way, trying to track down the sheets. Most were just a little out of reach and he was red-faced with frustration when he'd brought back one of the pages and offered it up in a balled, shaking fist. Todd crouched down to put the newspaper back together. The newspaper was alright when he'd bought it fresh Sunday mornings but he only read it because it was something to do and he was starting to think that he had any interest in the world anymore. That

was a hard thing to admit because if there wasn't any more news to follow that would mean all he now had was himself and the mortgage applications.

"The newspaper is all torn up, isn't it?" he asked the boy. "Well, it's old news now."

"I know how to read," the boy said and pressed his face close to one of the pages. "I can't read this. The type is too small."

"You can take the newspaper to practice," Todd told him. "That's impressive that you know how to read already."

"My dad showed me how."

"Did he?"

The boy handed him the page he'd been trying to read, an article on a conflict somewhere in South America. "I would read it right now to show you but we must go soon. I need to go with my dad for our day out." He looked down at the newspaper again. "I wouldn't mind reading it while I wait. I don't read newspaper at all."

"That's probably for the best," Todd said and sat down on the nearby ledge that secured the courtyard from the street. "There's nothing in the newspaper that's new. It's only people fighting about things."

"I mostly like books about pirates and soldiers and things like that," the boy said. He peered down at the newspaper, his face scrunched and strained. "I can't read this good. I can't see all the letters."

Todd stretched out his legs. "You'll be able to read it someday." He drank the coffee.

"Will I?" The boy stared with honest wonder. "I don't know if I'll be able to."

"I couldn't read at all when I was your age," Todd said. He dipped his head back a little and looked down the street. The world was like a

plane of glass and he was already feeling tired and stuffy, knowing that when the coffee was finished he would need to go start his work. "You take the newspaper and have your dad read some of for you. It'll make for good practice."

A man looking and acting about half of Todd's age came into the courtyard from the street. He ruffled the young boy's hair. He was about medium in every way and the only thing noticeable was that his eyes became narrow and his mouth crimped nastily when the boy ignored his touch. The boy kept his eyes on the newspaper and the pages ruffled in his tiny grasp.

"Good morning, Bill," the man said, both his hand fluttering, somewhat hesitantly, upon the boy's shoulders. "What're you doing with the newspaper?"

"Trying to read it. The print is too small and I can't see the words."

"Well, you shouldn't reading the news anyways," the man said, trying to smile. "There's nothing good in that."

Todd was about to say that he agreed on the pointless, but he became distracted by a woman who'd come out of the apartment and stood before the three of them with her arms lightly crossed. She looked up and down the street and then at the man and Bill. She sighed, but she didn't appear so tired or irritated. Todd thought maybe she looked a little bitter, but that was all. He felt bad for her, but mostly because it was easier to worry on other people than himself. He only got to his feet, shaking his head, and trying to smile as he did so.

"Bill doesn't seem so happy to see me," the man called out to the woman. "What have you been telling him?"

"Nothing. We haven't talk about you at all," the woman said.

"That's too bad. I talk to him about you all the time." The man tried to laugh at his own joke, but it came out too scratchy and he cut it off.

“I’m joking, of course.”

“I don’t know why you would talk about me to him,” the woman said.

“I was joking.” The man kicked the grass. “You should talk to him about me, you know? He probably thinks you’re scared of me. Now he is too.”

“No, he isn’t scared. He’s all dressed and ready to go for your day out.” She smiled. “He was jumping at the door waiting for you. Then he ran outside even though I told him to stay in.”

The man looked at Bill with an ironic smile. “Now, are you disobeying your mother?”

“I was getting the newspaper,” the boy spluttered. “It blew all over.”

Todd drank his coffee. “He was helping me pick up the newspaper.”

“You shouldn’t be running off with strangers,” the man said.

“He’s not a stranger, Mr. Lattimore,” the woman said from the doorway. She hadn’t moved. “He lives right here in the building.”

“Do you?” Mr. Lattimore said and looked at Todd. He tried looking him in the eyes but something caught ahold of him, and his glance fell. “You shouldn’t be letting strange men I don’t know around Bill,” he told the woman. “Whether or not he lives in the building doesn’t matter. I don’t know him, and I don’t want him hanging around you or Bill.”

“I’ve never met him before,” the woman scoffed. “I don’t even know his name. He’s in the building. I only know that. He’s been here before we moved in.”

“You shouldn’t be letting strange men around Bill. I don’t like it, it’s not right for a boy.”

“I don’t have strange men around here and I can’t say the same for you,” the woman said.

“I don’t keep any men around my place,” Mr. Lattimore said with a laugh.

“I didn’t mean men, Mr. Lattimore. I mean strangers. I don’t have strangers here.”

“I don’t like you call me Mr. Lattimore – that isn’t a friendly way to act.” Mr. Lattimore stared dumbly at the woman. “You don’t be telling him about anyone staying with me. You’ve been to over there and you know for yourself.” He rapped Bill’s head. “Put down the newspaper and we’ll go off. We’ll have a nice day, go to McDonalds if you do what I say. How about it?”

“I don’t want to go to McDonalds.”

“You go with him,” the woman said.

“I don’t want to.”

“You have to.”

“I’m not going.” Bill hid himself behind the newspaper. But he felt his father, Mr. Lattimore, moving towards him, and he suddenly hopped and edged himself behind where Todd stood. “I rather stay here and read the newspaper. I like reading.”

“Get away from that man,” Mr. Lattimore said. “I don’t care what your mother does, but you stay away from him.”

“I want to stay with him. He’ll show you how to read the newspaper.”

“You already know how to read,” the woman said, gently, but with a nervy warble in the back of her throat. “You go with your father.”

Mr. Lattimore stepped forward, seemingly more rashly than he’d

intended. “You come out and look at me, Bill.”

“No.”

“I don’t care if he’s your mother’s boyfriend. You’re my son and this is my day with you.” Mr. Lattimore took another step forward and his hands made fists. But there was more the look of shame or fear in his eyes, rather than that of anger, and his lower lip trembled. “I came all the way here so we could have a nice day together.” Despite how hard he was trying, there was a whine to his speech. “I don’t care what your mother does when I’m not here. She can have her boyfriends, I guess. But that doesn’t mean you’re going to act spoiled.”

“He’s not spoiled, Mr. Lattimore. Bill wants to go with you.”

“I told you not to call me, ‘Mr. Lattimore.’”

“That’s your name, isn’t it?” The woman stared plainly. “Put the newspaper down, Bill.”

Mr. Lattimore looked at Bill and at Todd for a long while. “Here I am thinking I was going to have a nice day out,” he said aloud, partly to the woman, partly to himself. “I was going to get invited in and maybe you would come with us.”

“Why would I invite you in?” the woman asked quietly, and gently.

“But now she has her boyfriend here,” Mr. Lattimore went on. “And I’m the odd one out. Is that right?” he asked, the question directed towards Todd.

“We’re neighbors. That’s all,” Todd said. He felt the boy jittering nervously behind him and wanted to turn and rustle his bowl haircut, wanting the child to feel better. “I only met Bill here a few minutes before you came up. He helped me get my newspaper up.” He turned and looked up at the woman, finding her to be looking too tired and aggrieved for such a lovely morning. He wanted to take care of the woman too.

“Then let go of him,” Mr. Lattimore said.

“He’s only standing here looking at the newspaper,” Todd said.

“Nobody is keeping Bill away from you,” the woman said gently, as if she was speaking to a bad puppy dog. “Bill has been looking forward to McDonalds this whole week.”

“Have you?” Mr. Lattimore asked Bill, his voice highly pitched and fearful.

“You go with your father,” the woman said again. “He came all this way here and he wants to spend a long day with you.” She tried to grin. “You love McDonalds, don’t you?”

“You’ve been telling him things about me,” Mr. Lattimore said, wearier than before.

“No, I haven’t.”

“Yes, you have.”

“No, I haven’t.” The woman, sensing the childishness of their back-and-forth, paused, swallowed, and said, “Bill has been looking forward to going out with you. He was up before I was this morning, and he didn’t eat breakfast because he was so happy for McDonalds.”

“Were you?” Mr. Lattimore asked again.

“Can I get a milkshake if we go to McDonalds?” Bill asked, looking at his mother.

“Of course, you can,” Mr. Lattimore said. He sighed. “McDonalds is better than sitting around with old, strange man and reading newspapers?” Mr. Lattimore said it too loudly, looking around, as if he expected them to all to start howling with laughter. He stepped a little back. “Go and get into the car now – it’s ‘round the corner.”

“Go on, Bill,” his mother said.

“Do I have to?” Bill asked aloud, giving her a sudden, wary look.

“You’re lucky your father wants to take you places,” his mother said. “Have a good day.”

Bill nodded and walked down the path away from them. Todd bent over the ground and tried to organize the newspaper the best he could. He sensed the other two standing around, watching each other without making it clear, dumb as they waited for another to speak first. The interaction over their son hung in the air, and not even wars and political corruption and sports scores could put it right.

“Bill will be alright once he’s spent some time with his father,” the woman said gently.

“I know,” Mr. Lattimore snapped. “You don’t need to tell me that.”

“And he didn’t have any breakfast because of McDonalds.”

“I figure he didn’t.” Mr. Lattimore looked around. “You shouldn’t let him out of your sight, talking with strangers in your building and – there’s a lot of violence in the world, weirdos and –” his voice trailed off as he turned and walked down the ways to his car.

Quick pattering footsteps and a door slam made Todd stand up fully. He looked back at the door and wished he could’ve said something kind and clever to the woman. She’d been nice looking, and not so old. Sitting there messing with the newspaper, keeping himself out of the way as Bill walked down the ramp towards his father’s car, as Mr. Lattimore and his wife tried to exchange a few well-mannered words, Todd had started to dream up something ridiculous, that he’d beaten up Mr. Lattimore for getting too nasty and meanspirited towards his son – then Mr. Lattimore promised them he wouldn’t be a bother, and Todd and Bill and Bill’s mother lived a long, happy life together. It was only them, Todd buying for them a real home, where he watched Bill grow up, teaching him about the world.

Todd shook his head as he walked the newspaper over to the trash receptacle at the front of the courtyard. As he did so, a small car with Mr. Lattimore and Bill and a red-haired woman roiled slowly around the corner and down the street. Mr. Lattimore drove with both hands on the wheel. His head was bent to one side. Bill sat still and upright, staring out the window. The woman was talking loudly, and all of her was of joy and charisma. Her laughter hung in the air long after the car had disappeared, the echoes stinging Todd’s ears as he washed his face in his bathroom mirror, then shaving off the gray-flecked stubble before striding to the computer.

RENDEZVOUS

ANNETTE YOUNG

Dandelions carelessly exploded all their delicate tendrils to the wind in frustration. Now seeds disperse loss of their time with Summer. All that remains is fertilized white-noise chatter spinning in fury with anger eaten by a growing faint howl tapping on the shoulder of the wind. Sweaty molecules in denial, that hung in clusters hoping to be fanned by Summer's intermittent cool midnight affections, acquiesce and retrieve wind breakers and wrestle with the true color of their fickle lover. Pursuers that salivated for those popsicle kisses of staining colors and sticking memories of steadfastly rejecting the imminent Fall, fall. Yellows, Purples, Reds, Browns, all expertly conspired the whole time in luscious greenery: emerald illusions of stillness were inked by their under-bladed handiworks. Now—it's their turn to be loved—by another season.



FALL LEAVES 2

DAVID AVILA

DIVERSITY HIRE

SARAH TABBERT

It was sweltering. They jammed too many people into the smallest boardroom on the hottest day so far this year. The air felt stagnant. An unpleasant smell was starting to emanate throughout the room, filling the space so it was difficult to breathe through my mouth.

My hands were sweating, so hot they felt like they were on fire. The discomfort was nothing compared to the collar of my blouse which kept chafing my neck, making it impossible for me to focus on the shiny smiling presenter at the front of the room.

With all the stealth of a sloth I inched my hands off the table and pretended to smooth down my skirt. The fabric thankfully wiped away the sweat, but it couldn't do anything to combat the heat.

There were at least thirty of us clustered in a space barely bigger than the custodian closet. Half were standing against the walls and in the two doorways since there weren't enough seats. I shot an envious glance at the senior account manager whose body was half outside the door. I should have been late like Steve.

Being in my second month of work I didn't have many responsibilities yet so there was only so much pretending to be busy that I could do before I caved and went to the boardroom for the only meeting scheduled in my day. It meant I got one of the few vinyl-covered chairs. The material kept suctioning onto my cellulite. Every time I shifted my skin peeled off the surface. It was loud enough that it drowned out the peppy voice of the presenter.

Martin beside me kept glancing at the bare skin each time I succumbed to the need to readjust. He didn't seem to notice my wince at the sound, only my meaty thigh that was the source of the interruption to the singularly boring update on company synergy.

Never again was I wearing a dress to work. I didn't care how warm it was, long pants from then on. Martin's fascination may have compounded from never seeing a bare female leg in the workplace.

Of all the people in the room, I was the only woman. The presenter was a contractor from a corporate psychology firm, so I didn't include her. She was there for the length of time it took to show off her presentation that relied heavily on the use of clipart and then she would fly away to her next appointment. I swore the reaction would be worse if I dropped a tampon than if there were a mouse scurrying across the table.

Thankfully, Martin's eyes never travelled higher than the offensive two-inch band of flesh showing. He was sleep deprived from the arrival of newborn twins, so I didn't take offense to his lack of interest in my femineity. Most days Martin kept going by drinking endless cups of coffee, he didn't have the energy to do much of anything. It was funny that I simultaneously felt suitably uncomfortable when I was ogled at work, while the innate sting of inadequacy when a male coworker obviously didn't find me remotely alluring managed to prick at the edge of my subconscious. Such was the complexity of my unreasonable mind.

"That is why corporate culture is imperative to employee happiness and wellbeing," lectured the presenter, raising her voice slightly to command the attention of the crowd she'd unknowingly lost ten minutes ago on her slide about change management. I loved being told what makes me happy by a stranger.

I thought her name was Missy or Sissy. Something that sounded like it was made up by a four-year-old. She looked perfectly put together in a pastel power suit. The only thing that was less than impeccable was

her hair. The mounds of hairspray she must have applied in the morning to make it poker straight was starting to lose its battle to the humidity. Peeking out from behind her ear was a blonde bouncy curl that was so at odds from the rest of her appearance I kept focusing on it when my self-discipline won out and my attention returned to the front of the room. There it was, starting to bend even more to become a fully formed ringlet. If I ran up to the front and pulled it straight again, I wondered how long it would end up being.

Stop it, I instructed myself. But there was no denying that this PowerPoint was lasting an eternity. We'd already been there for an hour with no sign of the woman reaching the end.

In the corner, James from operations kept bobbing his head when it slipped sideways and lost the support of the wall. A few people were covertly checking their phones. Each hoped they would get an emergency call or email that would rescue them from the torture.

The next slide of impossibly happy people flashed onto the screen. The woman checked the image that gave the skewed depiction of an unrealistically diverse workforce and sniffed her approval. Then she read out the words like she was speaking to a group of kindergarteners.

"Your company has committed to increasing the diversity in their workforce. The numbers don't lie." She shot the laser pointer that was built into clicker at the only number shown. "The total percentage of underrepresented parties has grown from five to six percent. In the last quarter in particular we noticed an impressive improvement in giving opportunities to candidates of unique perspectives."

It took a few seconds for her words process in my sluggish brain. Once they did, I felt heat flood to my cheeks. I was the last person hired. The only person hired in the last six months.

Fervently glancing around at the rest of the group, none of them appeared to register the meaning of the slide, or perhaps they just didn't

care. It was simply another statistic to them.

In no other setting was I a part of the minority. I was almost annoyingly average. But in the sea of dress shirts and ugly khakis, I stood out like a flaming beacon. How naive I'd been to think I'd gotten this job on my own merit. When I received the offer, I couldn't believe they'd chosen me for such a competitive position. It wasn't because of my merit. It was for a statistic.

My shoulders slumped forward. I let the weight of my embarrassment pull me down in my chair. Peeling away from the adhesion to the vinyl, the movement let out the most impressive screech yet. Everyone turned. It was so deafening that even the presenter stopped mid sentence to look at me before regaining her composure and forging on through the slides of unintelligible corporate jargon. I knew without looking in a mirror that my cheeks weren't just pink anymore, they were scarlet.

It was agony sitting through the rest of the presentation. I felt a few sets of eyes stay trained on me and I did my best to school my features into a neutral expression. At least I could blame the temperature in the room for my colouring if anyone brought it up later. It was exactly the sort of thing one of forty-year-old dads would ask about, thinking that they were being considerate instead of mortifying.

The minute the woman gave her toothpaste commercial smile and asked, "Any questions?" To the unresponsive crowd, I shot to my feet and started the stampede towards the door.

"Thank you," one of the managers practically shouted over the din while he let himself be swept up by the tidal wave of bodies.

My gaze stayed firmly fixed on the floor while I allowed my feet to take me to my desk that was tucked behind the photocopier in the makeshift office I was assigned.

I sank into my chair and let my forehead rest on the wooden

surface, hidden from view by the mammoth industrial copier. It was such a waste since no one ever printed anything anymore. Documents were all read and signed digitally. Now it sat idly day in and day out in its sleep mode, adding more dust to its protective layer. A fitting fortress as it recognized one of its own.

At least its neglect meant that I didn't have to worry about anyone witnessing my shattered sense of self-worth at work. No one ever checked in on me. If they did it would mean I was important. That my opinion mattered. Apparently that day would never come. My hopes of being fulfilled and purposeful in my professional life dashed.

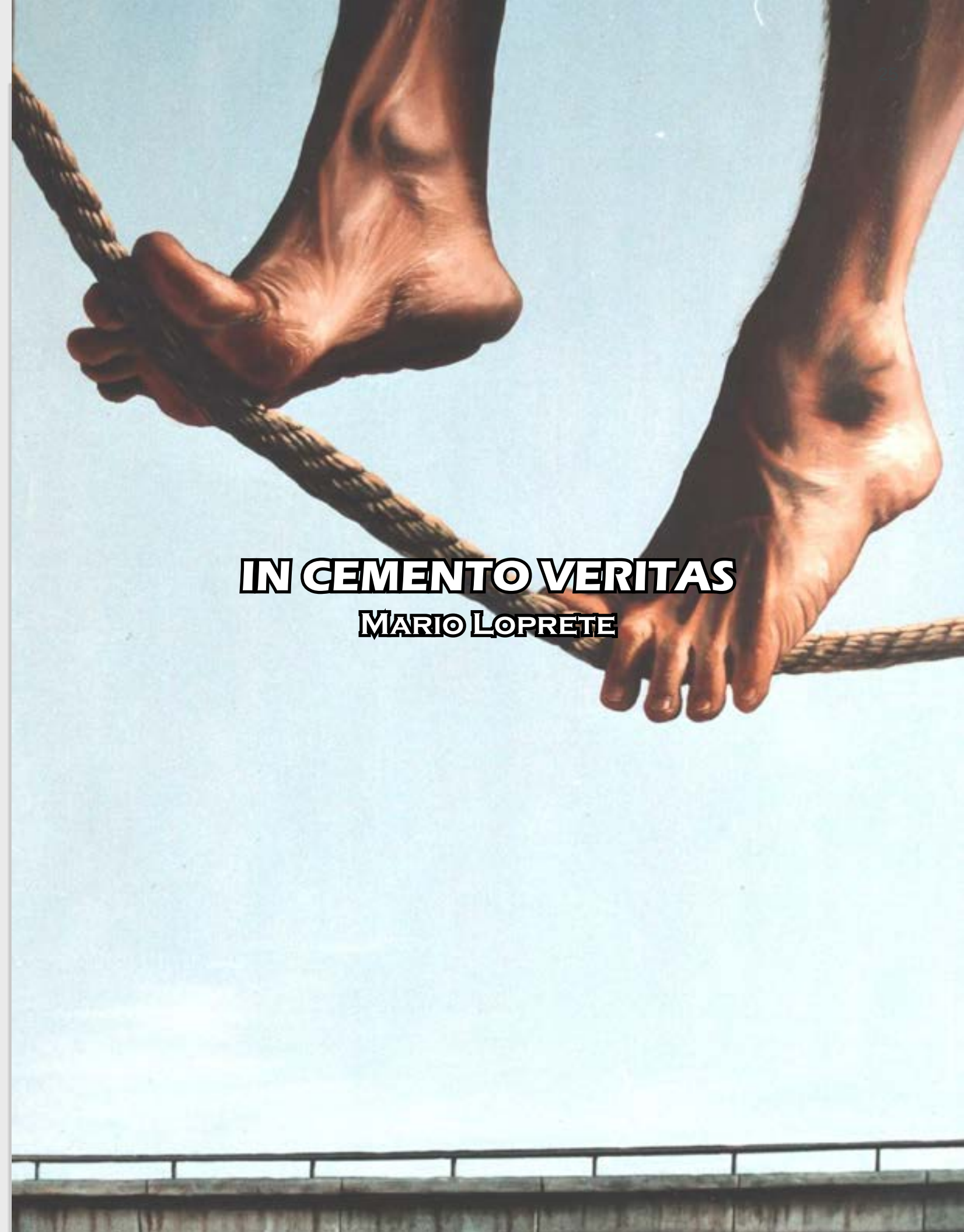
I was appalled that my lower lip began to tremble. Immediately my teeth clamped down on the inside skin, almost drawing blood with the slicing grip.

In my heart I'd always known I didn't belong here. Trying to fit into this male dominated field that I'd fought to be a part of since I started my course at university. Foolishly, I thought I made it. That they saw I was good. They didn't. All they saw was an extra x where there was normally a y.

"You will not cry," I firmly instructed myself. With Herculean effort I inhaled through my nose and puffed the breath out of my mouth in a loud wheeze that wasn't anything close to a controlled release. At least it made the stinging in my eyes ease off.

I slowly lifted my head high enough so I could see my computer screen and dejectedly wiggled my mouse. The generic blue background lit up my monitor.

Devoid of any enthusiasm, I clicked on my email and opened a new unread message. My mind floated around the words, barley bothering to internalize the email I'd been copied to out of obligation. I was forced to see my reality for the first time. Diversity hire, forever stamped on me for the world to see.



IN CEMENTO VERITAS
MARIO LOPRETE

APPLE CIDER SHAKE

DANIEL BARRY

A playground of books,
my South Philly bookstore.
No, I don't own it,
but I've been
squeezed past
mismatched carpets,
between Victor Hugo (Mary Oliver)
and his (her dear) European friends
and the lavender scented shelves
too many times.
at the poetry section,
I whisper to the shelf cat.
it's a nice touch,
you didn't have to
include him,
you didn't have to
startle me with the rare
turquoise find, this new book,
the unexpected goal.
There's a tall, daft window,
and I'm under it for...
I can't tell, isn't that
whimsical? And we're
met with that sometimes,
the unknown, like the

friendly stranger,
like the monster with
a new angle
who we just can't suspect.



GOODY WRIGHT OF STRADBROKE

EMMA WELLS

They've started to bring their dead to me – to my herb-rich grassland. A pile of quicklime-licked corpses wink at me from the kitchen window, overt as unsheathed blades, stacked in a macabre pile next to the village dung heap. A dung heap that steams with the stench of disregard. I cast away, frown, allowing sadness to soak into places where hollows echo. Holes of me that resist companionship, loyalty from the living or due deference for my skilled trade. All are absent – barred for the likes of me. A village witch. An oddity.

I have lived on the periphery of Stradbroke in Suffolk since my birth – born in the very countryside hovel that I still abide within. Moving is tricky, dangerous. There are always others tracking my path, listening for dark whisperings in the night, hoping to know of any planned stirrings from my unofficial post. I'm both wanted and repelled as a cunning woman: called for in times of life and death but ostracised at all others.

When villagers bumble along contentedly, which is the most part of life, not requiring a healing poultice nor herbal tincture to ease their suffering and woes, I am unseen, a mute. I live both inside and outside of this life, yet they would hate my leaving of them for another county. For, I am shunned, worthless in the judgement of the majority of villagers, until utter need alerts them, urging them to my door.

Need comes pressingly when it calls, exactly, especially for the birthing of awkward babes. Breech – the position all mothers fear as an inverted Christian cross hung upon a door, advertising the practice of devilment within a building's unholy walls.

Lamentably, I have lost count of the eggshell blue faces of babes that I have cut loose from dying women, hanging on peripheries of life; purplish bruised cords hoping to strangle free breath from fragile, tiny and brittle throats as quivering fledglings. Breech births are an enemy to my practice. Too many eye me with disdain, questioning if I have brought doom to village doors with my misunderstood methods and perceived webs of darkling art – this is always the case if mother and babe cannot be saved. Both lives are crushed quaking grass, purplish flowers, papery, trembling upon slender hair-like stalks.

Fathers are useless, viewing birth as “women's work”, absenting themselves from homes to local inns until the wailing stops – sometimes sounds stop perpetually on their eventual return, when I cannot turn misplaced, adamant feet of babes in time or if the mother has already bled out, dying crimson what were once bleached white sheets, kneaded by dutiful wives or maidservants, purging linens of sinful human smears.

I know that these blood-drained women will beckon soundlessly at my cottage door when they have been brought here as deadened sacks on a cart, for they are building a cemetery out of my herb garden. Once, only wheat fields punctuated with wildflowers, was my horizontal view: ox-eye daisies, yellow rattle, fairy flax and birds-foot trefoil. A place of nature. Peace.

Village dwellers being too far off, pleasingly so, care not at all for my peripheral placement on the edge of other's livelihoods. They think

I'm stupid and have yet to quicken with the thought that the church graveyard in the village overflows, and that they seek wider, unclaimed land to bury their dead, twining with the soil as ivy. Nobody has asked for my permission. Nobody cares to do so. My voice, even if uttered, will be soundless, mirroring the chill that tightens around decaying corpses as a wispy shroud whilst winter months trudge onwards, completing a seasonal journey.

Comparable to harvest, as the farmer ploughs the fields of wheat, separating wheat from sheaf, my head too wobbles on a precarious stalk. I feel a steely scythe whisper to my flesh, ready to behead, cutting my remedial knowledge clean from this world, in one fell swoop of a sharpened blade.

The latest scandal is that I am trading the Devil's imps for payment. Village talk is that I will hang and then burn in Bury St Edmunds for my crimes. It is said that I keep toads as familiars, the Devil's spirit animals, in clay pots which I release in the abyss of night to curse my enemies within the village: maiming skin with wasting diseases; blighting cattle; and cursing newborns with disfigurement. They envision me foraging along ditches for henbane to poison, carrying death back in jars, quick to stopper breath of enemy villagers.

Elizabeth Greene is my current accuser. Mere tittle-tattle aggrandises itself until the likes of Mathew Hopkins rotates my name in his unhallowed mouth as an unspent sovereign. It is utter lunacy – nothing more, but regardless, a fever sweeps East Anglia with Hopkins at the helm of the crusade against so-called witches. A hologram of misjudged malevolence stalks his each, and every, footfall.

Elizabeth's real issue is that the sale of her husband's charms to protect against witches make a sharp decline when I manage to cure an ailment;

turn a stubborn breech babe, save its mother or heal afflicted skin. For those that meet me, call for my aid, invite me into homes, discern for themselves, that in truth, I am no witch.

Her husband sells Bellarmine bottles to guard off "the Devil's whores", filled with human hair, iron nails, urine, pointed sticks and nail clippings. My healing, when I am not accused of witchcraft, has caused their power to deplete, and so they, both husband and wife, want me killed so their heathen charms can be sold more lucratively. They are willing to trade my life, the life of a wise healer, for a screwy bottle of piss that will do nothing to keep the likes of the Devil at bay.

True evil, the truest form, lies in the eyes of Matthew Hopkins who rounds elderly women as withered sheep deemed fit for slaughter. Evil lies in the mind of the Greenes, my false accusers, and in the gaze of a man's eyes who thinks it is right to force himself upon the flesh of a woman. Evil resides within twists of the knotted noose that shall silhouette my head – that is evil, all are so, but not I. Never I.

Stradbroke gossip chitter-chatters of my impending doom. A noose is strung and ready to be tied in Bury St Edmunds which is where I shall meet my final breath. A ticking clock is a siren call to my demise, mirroring the drooping, fallen heads of ox-eye daisies, once large ochre discs turned to dying suns.

As drab curtains close upon my final days and nights alive, a new malevolence creeps its vines within the makeshift cemetery that grows around my cottage. Grave robbers. Keen-sensed they have snuffled out a new charnel house for the local dead and come here in steely night to thief corpses for high doctor's fees. No Bellarmine jars of protection or buried dead cats or witches' circles shall protect the dead from their hungry, money-grabbing fingers. This is evil. Not my cures. My midwifery. My tinctures, creams and salves. None kill.

That is not, nor was ever, my purpose.

Pallid, rotting corpses continue to be tossed in a heap above my herbal garden, crushing cures, pressing petals to useless pulp underneath the heavy weight of decay and curdling rot.

*

Wintery morning arrives of my trial and foretold hanging, and I bid farewell to my herbal kitchen, brim-full with tonics for the sick. Each healing jar blinks away a sharpened tear, hot, metallic, like the slash of an executioner's axe. As my lame, weathered feet shuffle to the door, I eye two familiar but deadened faces from the heap of the newly arrived dead. Molly, and her stillborn babe, breech, cursed in the womb by an unseeing God. I could not turn her baby boy in time nor stopper the determined river of scarlet from between Molly's quivering legs.

Both were lost to God only a few days ago in the village. Their shuttered eyes bid me on to meet them – on the other side of this unfair, cruel and blinding life that dims for me by the minute. I nod silently, agreeing to their silent call, in an unknown place, where perhaps our souls can be saved and our hope redeemed. As I cross their path, I pick a clutch of forget-me-nots, placing the small floral heads on the mother's chest – the darkling blue matches her breathless skin. Shuttering away emotion, I traipse on, to face my accusers.

One waits for me on the high road.

Hopkins.

As he scans me coldly, Hopkins jumps from a horse-drawn coach, eager to lock me within his ghastly hunt of wrongful condemnation. A brew that is red-hot, burning to the touch, scalding innocent skin laid bare. His long cloak swishes in the November breeze, and as it does so, I see the devil-thronged tail of his sins, licking like a devilish tongue, poking freely from the cloaked folds of sable sheep's wool, too eager to savour the taste of my death. A devilish smirk wrinkles upon his face, as his pendulum forked tongue, swings back and forth, counting out my remaining days and hours alive.

The coach speeds onwards, enclosing me in its shrinking walls, as I hear church bells toll below a skyline of stormy slate. The bell is a summons to greet death, face-to-face, as I finger a plaited weave of cowslip in my quaking fingers, praying it is my key to heaven, and St Peter will welcome me into his spectral flock. I shuffle awkwardly in my seat, knowing that this is only the start of my torment.

Stealthily, the coach ploughs on, effacing my existence with each turn of its clanking wheels. I glance down, accepting my fate: the blighted fate of an accused "cunning woman".

WINDS 1
RACHEL COYNE

WINDS 2
RACHEL COYNE

FOREST BATH

SAM HENDRIAN

Wandered into the woods
To lose what I had grown tired of finding:
Stale reflections
Upon rectangular mirrors.

Suddenly I felt nothing
Except everything,
The kiss of communion
With all that's ever been.

What once was a muffled conversation,
The unintelligible gossip of a cafe patio
Became clear beyond the limits of clarity
As birds chirped out syllables and trees sang lullabies.

Though there seemed to be an unspoken rule
That one can only taste eternity for a moment
Before putting down the plate
And letting someone else try.

Still the omnipresent stillness
Eradicated the existence of time
Plus all other properties
We use to give meaning to our lives.

Had to stay,
But what was staying?
Couldn't leave,
But what was leaving?

The in-between bewitched my forehead
Accustomed to foresight and hindsight and what-if situations
Instead of tuned into intangible presence
Which is somehow more tangible than anything I've ever touched.

Knowledge and confusion
Appeared as estranged sisters
Dancing barefoot in the backyard of their childhood home
In an effort to heal old wounds.

Consciousness dwelt in subconsciousness,
The steadfast transience of a runaway dream
Flashing its eyes long enough
For you to recall what it looked like.

And so the ephemeral ecstasy of uncertainty
Rained down from the grayish blue sky
While assumptions and conclusions
Lost every ounce of pending relevance.

Soon arrived back where I started
Except it was also where I ended
And where I would continue going
For countless more setting sunrises and rising sunsets.



DREAM(E)SCAPE

DYLAN HOOVER

You were running in the dream I had last night

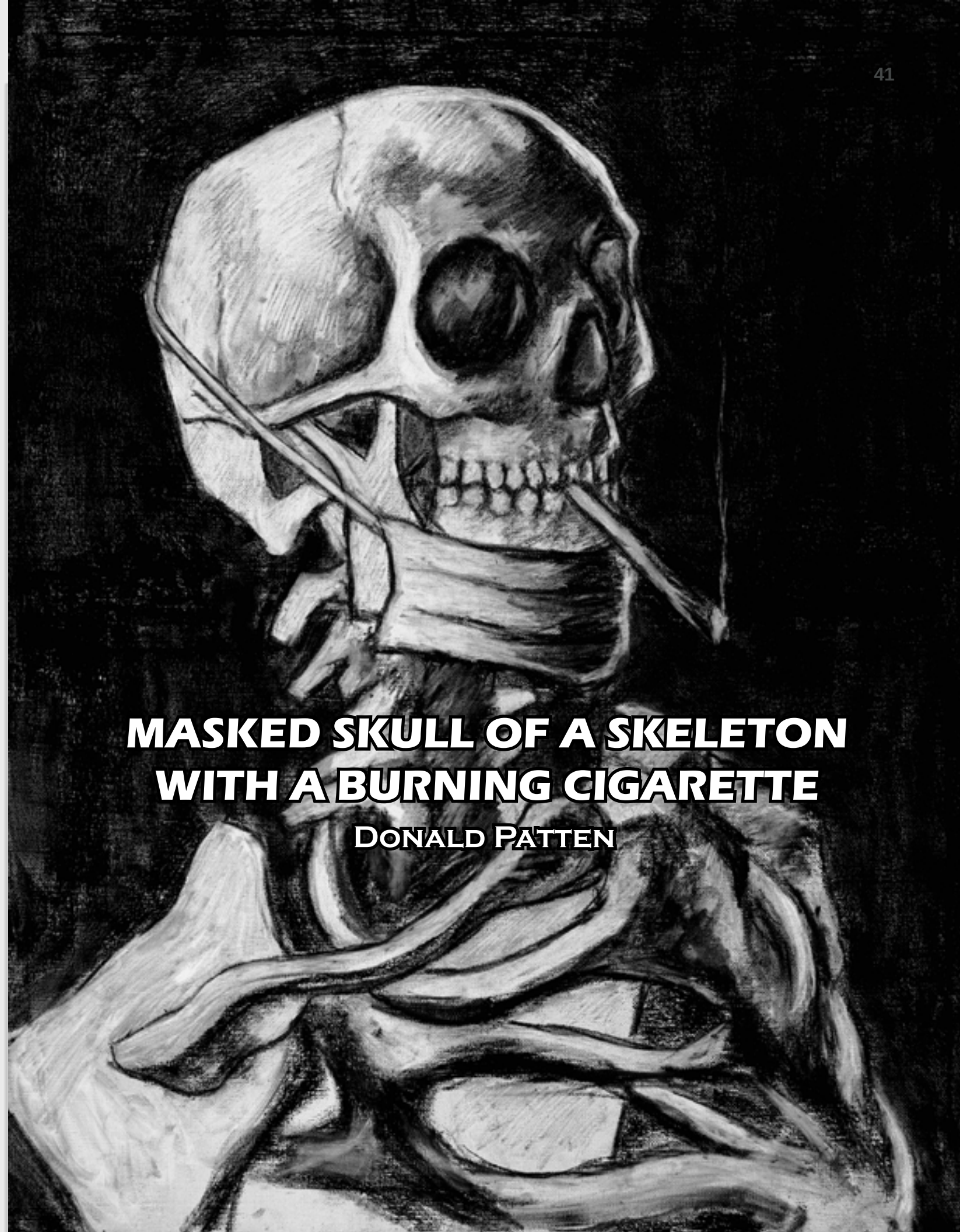
Not away from me, but down my rainy street,
whose lines are faded, whose drivers know
no outlet, they upon discover
long after it's too late.

The dream doesn't have to be a warning,
though you will beg it be forgotten,
along with me, too. All for
your grandmother's pumpkin cheesecake.

Let's start fresh?
Tomorrow morning.

MASKED SKULL OF A SKELETON WITH A BURNING CIGARETTE

DONALD PATTEN





A CURSED PORTRAIT

RICHARD EDDIE

Arthur Solomon was the Henderson antique store finalizing with the manager about a rare African grandfather clock he had ordered for his annual ball. “Well, Mr. Solomon, it looks like it will be delivered ahead of schedule; I have been on the phone with the manufacturer all day, and I have stressed the importance of its priority for you,” said Mr. Henderson.

This was to be the final for Kingston to shine before the spring season, and it was Arthur’s time to retire from many jobs he obtained from writing, being an English professor and his ultimate passion, a classical pianist. He wanted the ball to be absolutely perfect with no loose ends, and he began to organize it in early 1922. Arthur owned several homes around the world, but his pride and joy was his mansion in Kingston, reminding him of the French Riviera overlooking the ocean.

“Good Morning, Mr. Solomon, I just wanted to tell you that everything has been completed and is in readiness, and I am confident that it will be to your utmost approval,” said Ms. Thompson, the executive secretary. Arthur had planned a treat for his entire staff at the Kingston country club to express his gratitude for all of their hard work. There was still a few hours left before the ball was to take place. The housekeeper did the inspection from top to bottom and made out her report to Arthur.

The staff was all gathered in the east wing hall awaiting Arthur’s arrival as they were nervous and dying to hear what he had to say. “I just want to let all of you know that I am forever thankful

and humbled for your tireless efforts and strength to make tonight an unforgettable evening that will be talked about for years to come here in Kingston and all over the world.

This year, 1922, will be a year never forgotten and as a token of appreciation, I have arranged for each and every one of you to be treated like royalty at the Kingston country club.” The staff was floored to hear such wonderful news and clapped in excitement while some cried tears of joy in their souls. Arthur was extremely wealthy and hailed from an influential family in California and was an only child and heir to a villa in England. Just before the ball, he decided to have drinks with a longtime friend at the Kingston racetrack lounge. “I have tickets to the opera next week if you want to attend, that very talented young fellow by the name of Jonathan Higgins will be performing,” said Arthur.

“Wouldn’t you like to go with a lady friend instead of me? Seriously, Arthur, you should date more often and maybe even settle down. I do not know where you find the time plan this ball along with everything else you do,” said Benjamin Foster. They watched the race, but the race was not Arthur’s mind; he was thinking about a letter that he had received from England two weeks prior.

“I guess that I should get back to the house and prepare myself for the ball. I shall see you in a few hours, Benjamin.” More than anything, he wanted the ball to be over. While driving home, he stopped at an Art Gallery to think about the future. “Good Afternoon, Mr. Solomon, it is good to see you, sir, although I am surprised to see you here,” said Max Hughes, the gallery owner. “I thought that I would take a look at your new arrivals, nothing for tonight, of course, just to glance.”

There was a beautiful portrait that captured his attention. “That painting was flown over from London, and I simply had to have it, and I waited six months to get it.” The background scenery is captivating, I must say of all of the paintings that I have, this is the most articulate and

yet mysterious. I have to be going home, and I do hope to see you at the ball tonight,” said Arthur. He went directly to his bedroom to change into his tuxedo when the image of the portrait entered his mind.

He heard the doorbell ring as the ball was beginning. “I have got to get that painting, no matter what the cost is.” Increased people were arriving all in a matter of minutes. The ambiance was undisputedly the envy of balls in the history of Kingston, filled with beauty, grace, and sophistication. “Ladies and Gentlemen, please pardon my tardiness and welcome to my last ball!” The crowd had clapped eagerly due to his appearance when Arthur came down the stairs, shaking the hands of his guests, even some he could not or did not recognize most of them because of the strange masks that they wore. He felt twenty pounds overweight and flustered with an overwhelming headache.

Arthur did not want the guests to be deprived of a marvelous time, so he eased through the crowd into the kitchen to get a glass of water. “Mr. Solomon, I want you to know that there is not a thing to worry about, the evening will go just as you wished,” said Ms. Kelly, the head chef. Arthur had swallowed two aspirins with his back turned to Ms. Kelly trying to hold his composure.

“I am not worried, Ms. Kelly, and I trust that this evening will go smoothly.” He searched for a safe place to hide. He re-joined his guests following his hydration. Everyone was happy to be at the ball as if it were a need to feel special and accepted, but half of the people were friends and associates of his were not as rich as he was. “Excuse me, Mr. Solomon, there is a telephone call for you, sir,” said Thornton the butler.

Arthur took the call in his study. “Good Evening, Mr. Solomon, my apologies for disturbing you at this hour, but my name is Sebastian Drummond, and it was brought to my attention that our fathers knew each other for many years. It took me approximately four months to find you after I had visited California and passed through Kingston.

The reason I am calling you is because my father has passed away, and I came across some important papers along with society clippings in his office pertaining to your family, mainly a rare portrait that is worth millions of dollars.

To make it plain, Mr. Solomon, the lady in the painting was my grandmother and she committed suicide years later.”

Ever since Arthur had left the art gallery, he could not get that painting out of his mind, and to him, it seemed that it was fate for him to have it. “I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Drummond, but what does any of this have to do with my family?” The crowd had gone outside into the garden to watch the fireworks. “Mr. Drummond, I do not mean to be rude, but I am in the middle of entertaining guests, and it will be best if you call at another time, perhaps during normal business hours!”

Arthur told Thornton that he would not be accepting anymore phone calls for the night. “You look rather pallid, sir. May I bring you anything?” He ignored the butler by walking to the terrace to be alone and smoking a cigar. The guests were having fun dancing, eating, and drinking while others gossiped about the Kingston elite. “I utterly do not understand why Arthur is being so reclusive tonight, I have hardly seen him at all, and he is horrible host,” said one of the gossiping ladies of the elite.

Arthur called the butler and asked him to send a bottle of champagne, and he stayed on the terrace. Thornton was not at all surprised by Arthur’s behavior and neither was the entire staff; he was very shy and quiet despite his popularity. It was six o’clock the next following morning, and he had fallen asleep on the terrace couch with an empty champagne bottle, thankfully without a hangover.

“I am so glad that this is over with, you should be ashamed of yourself for being so rude to your guests, but the ball was a grand finale,” said Arthur to himself. It was a wintry morning, and he was

covered in perspiration. He went to the garden to get a glimpse of the ball aftermath, which was soon to be cleaned after countless wine glasses, expensive silverware, and plates.

Feeling somewhat nauseated, Arthur was near the fountain and as he held his head over hoping not to vomit, he saw what seemed to be an expensive necklace at the bottom of the fountain. Arthur did not rush to remove the necklace while waiting for his nausea to cease. The butler and Mrs. Thorwald, his assistant, kept a close eye on him from a distance and he picked up the necklace. The necklace was shiny and heavy with diamonds. He took the necklace into his study and put it in the drawer of his desk.

Mrs. Thorwald knocked on the door, but he did not answer. She helped her employer by writing “Thank you” letters to the attending guests in the drawing room, and sending them out, even though she knew he would take care of it, but she also wanted to make sure that he would keep his promise to the staff by treating them to the country club.

Twelve o’clock had approached and Arthur had to awaken, and he felt exhausted and half-disappointed in himself for hiding out on the terrace. He showered and dressed in not much planned for the day but to prepare for the radio broadcast on his murder mystery show he did once a week. The necklace and the portrait stood out in his mind, but he knew that the necklace was too valuable for someone to leave in the fountain.

Mrs. Thorwald had spent the night voluntarily as she usually did for big events, such as the ball, and some staff was ready to be pampered at the country club. “Mrs. Thorwald, there are only four of us going after all,” said the housekeeper. Mrs. Thorwald took it upon herself to take the four women to the country club without double checking with Arthur. Arthur had decided to wait for the necklace owner to call and claim the necklace, when over four hundred people attended.

He went back to the gallery after waiting for a phone call that

did not take place to inquire about the painting. “I know that this is strange, but I would love to purchase this painting now, if possible,” said Arthur nervously. “I am afraid that it was sold and is in the process of being shipped out today; I had just got off the phone with the buyer before you arrived.” Arthur looked purple in the face with his legs shaking, halfway losing his balance. “I am willing to pay top dollar for the painting, the cost does not matter to me, and since I am one of your best and respected patrons, I should be given the utmost consideration!” said Arthur.

“I understand that you want to buy the portrait, but the sale is final, Mr. Solomon. Please accept my apologies,” said Max Hughes. Arthur refused to take “no” for an answer. “I will pay three times the price; you do not understand how important it is that I have the painting. You know that I am one of your best patrons if not the best. If you do not sell it to me, your gallery will go under!”

Max Hughes walked to the back office with a defeated and confused look on his face to call the first buyer. Arthur felt tightness in his chest while he viewed the painting. “You don’t have to worry about delivering it to my house, Mr. Hughes, I can take it with me,” said Arthur after Max returned. He began to feel guilty about the way he bullied Max and quickly got over it.

“The mail had just arrived with a telegram for you, and I wrote down the telephone messages in the study and some of the servants are at the country club with Mrs. Thorwald,” said the butler. Arthur placed the portrait on a large coffee table in the foyer. “Please leave the portrait here, and we will find a place to hang it up later,” Arthur replied. The fireplace was lit as he entered the study on a cold afternoon, and Arthur would normally spend long hours reading first editions and making long distance calls across the world.

MR. SOLOMON WHEN I CALLED YOU WERE NOT NICE

AND I FIGURED THAT IT WAS BEST THAT I SEND YOU THIS TELEGRAM STOP THE PORTRAIT THAT YOU HAVE STOLEN FROM ME AT THE GALLERY IS VERY IMPORTANT AND I CANNOT EXPRESS ENOUGH THAT I MUST HAVE IT STOP I AM SURE THAT WE CAN COME TO AN AGREEMENT OR MY LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE WILL BE IN TOUCH.

Arthur threw the telegram into the fireplace and reviewed his story for the broadcast that he started to prepare for. “The staff had a wonderful time at the country club. I do not know if you have read the newspaper, but the ball is the highlight of the season as we knew it would be, and you should be proud. If you do not need me for anything else, I will be going home to eat chocolate,” said Mrs. Thorwald. At eight o’clock, Arthur made it to the radio station to rehearse before going on the air.

“Mr. Solomon, would you like something to drink?” the station manager asked him. Arthur did not respond to the question, and he kept rehearsing. “A now, our mystery show begins with Kingston’s beloved, Mr. Arthur Solomon,” said the announcer. “Good Evening, my dear and loyal audience. Tonight, I am going to tell you a different story. It all begins with a beautiful portrait, very priceless, and so is the woman in it.

She posed for a man she thought was madly in love with her when she was young, and she was equally in love with him. He promised her that he would marry her after their children were born. She was hated and disowned by her mother due to the fornicating that she had done with this man. The man she dearly loved and waited for a fabulously painter from Kingston. I guess you could say that this story is a confession from me because of a generational curse, but you see, the wealthy painter was my grandfather.

My father told me this horrible story when I was a young lad, and I have been fascinated ever since. Unfortunately, the lady committed

suicide, and I extorted the portrait from the son of the lady. I am sad and relieved to say this will be my last broadcast. Thank you for listening and goodnight.” The radio station was in silence. “It was a pleasure collaborating with you all. After this broadcast, you shall never see me again, and it is time for me to join my place in hell.

GHOSTS

JENNA MARTINEZ

I don’t believe in ghosts.
My fuzzy socks are keeping my feet from going numb.
I wish something existed to make me not feel numb.

I feel sad when I should feel happy.
I feel angry when I should feel sad.
I don’t often feel happy,
even when I know I should.

I don’t like to wear shorts
because I don’t like to see the scars.
I don’t like attention or recognition.

Sometimes, I picture myself melting into a puddle of nothingness.
I wonder what will happen when I die.
Will I simply cease to exist?
Or will I become a ghost?



HARAJUKU DOLL [LANNET]

DEE ALLEN

How a Goth looks, sauntering, hanging out
 In Harajuku: Victorian Age
 Funeral wake vestige: Petticoat
 Shaped like a chapel bell, ruffled dress shirt,
 Rose and ribbon pinned on hair tumbling down
 In coils, long stockings, Mary Janes on feet,
 Folding fan in one of her gloved hands.
 All silk and lace. Stone Bible black. Coffin rest
 Ideal. The shoppers have E.A. Poe's long
 Lost Lenore brought to life among their ilk.
 Modern-day Tokyo—an interesting place
 Where all have seen her, but none know her name.
 The fashionistas gave her this cute one:
 Lolita.

W: 8,8.23

Lannet: A 14-lined poem, like a sonnet—without metre or rhyme.
 Devised by Laura Lamarca.

Harajuku: A shopping district in Tokyo, Japan. Similar to Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, Fremont in Seattle and Little Five Points in Atlanta.



SATURN DEVOURING HIS SUB

DONALD PATTEN

FALL LEAVES 1

DAVID AVILA

THE FALL

ORESTE BELLETTO

The blue awning of the café on Third street
would rather be green. I feel it through
the seat, which is also blue. The numbness of the chair slides
past my pants and into the legs. I
am over-sympathizing, imagining the season would
rather keep its auburn leaves—but this is Fall.

The descent's sudden. Conversations fall
from customers, words from shocked stems. Rustled into the street,
they clump, sounds fading with color. Would
that I knew how to prune them. Cut them through
and they'd be braver for it. So I
don't speak. Rain promises to slide

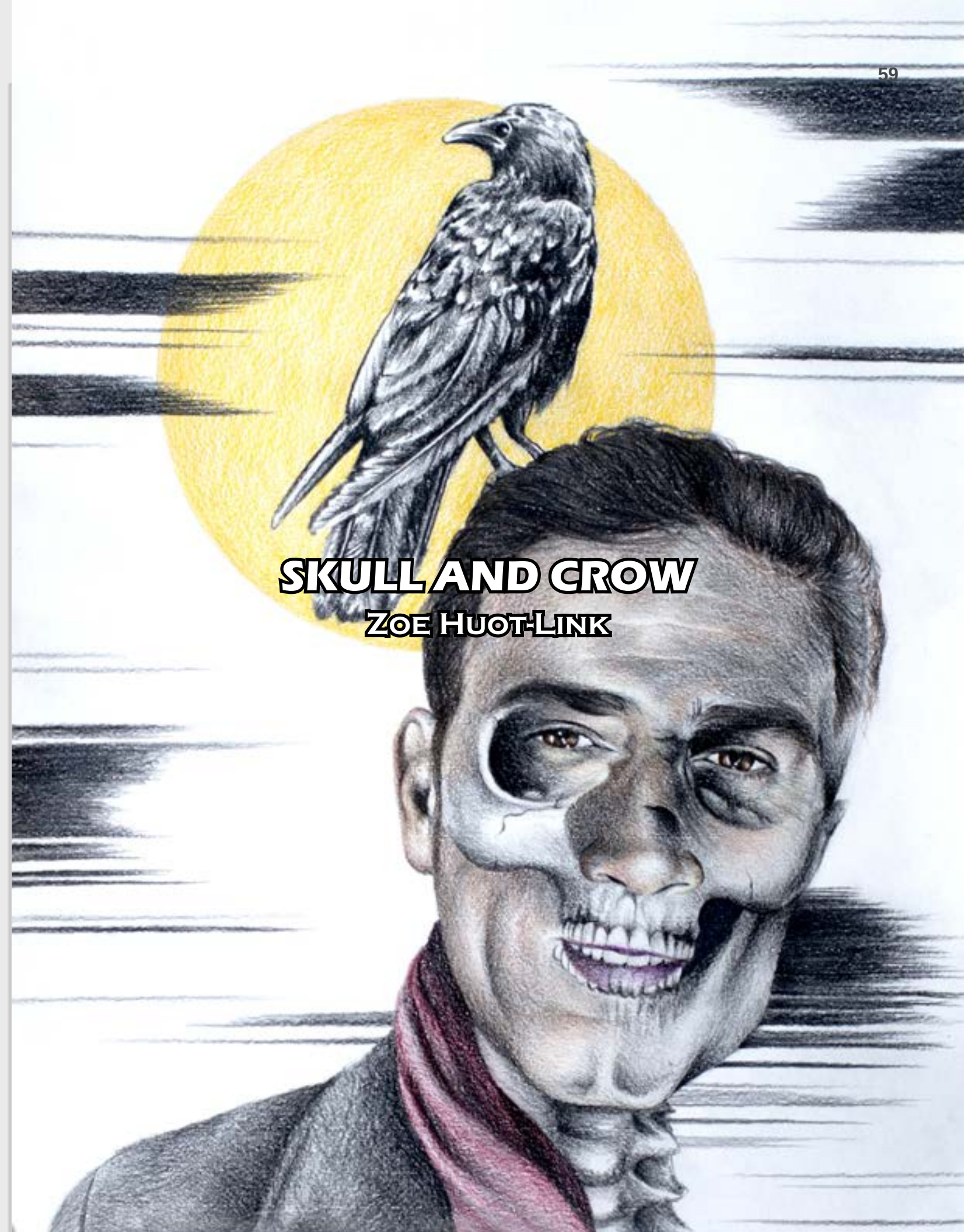
off any introduction, and cold slide
over words until they stick to the lips. Everything falls.
I'm a frozen vine, my stalk weaving mumbles. I
swirl the ice cubes in my drink, throw them to the street
with a crumpled poem, and try to think through
the dumb crashes of ink. If nature would

turn on this corner, it would
find our gestures already trapped by silences, sliding
stubbornly between the tables, through
with explanations, ready to drop carelessly as Fall,
eaten like flesh from a fruit. In the street,
the pits of conversations freeze under the feet. I

do what an evergreen does, I
 root in the bleak frost of alphabet, wait for wood
 to seed with slow strength and shoot from the street.
 Dance the dance of warmth—step, slide
 step—and words will grow from this. Fall
 will have its chance again, but words are also never through.

Each silence makes a place. Through
 the hum of the customers, I
 hear a tiny voice. Ice falls
 and melts. The woods
 sprout—step, slide, step. Step, slide—
 Dance green into the street.

Steady woods grow through silence and through
 Fall, fill strong roots, swell and slide until Spring. I
 make a forest of the street, drop my words and face the Fall.





THE SAND BLOWN BY WINDS

LEONARD S. TAO

*“The sand blown by winds, falling into mournful eyes,
Everyone can see, I’m—waiting for you.”*

It’s been twelve days since you leave.
You said, now that we have a home,
You need to catch lots, lots of fish and shrimp,
To care for me, “your beloved girl.”
I smiled as I saw you off,
But my heart had already sailed away with you.

Each time you set sail,
Out to the sea, and return,
You are the world, heart of the ocean.
But I stand on the shore,
Watching, and waiting for your
Return with the tides of time.

The winds always bring the sand,
Drifting through my memories,
Everyone knows, I’m—missing much of you.
The salty breeze carries your scent,
As if you are right at my side,
Sweetly calling my name,
But I can only respond in my dreams.

I don’t know. I don’t want to know.
Where the sand is, and where you are,
And so is my heart!
No matter the distance,
I just want to be with you,
Through the winds, through the storms
Holding your hands as we face
In each dusk and each dawn.

You said the depths of sea hold our life,
It’s the blue pace you’ve drawn for me.
Every gust of wind, every grain of sand,
Is your love for me, and my love for you.
Now, I’m tied with your sail,
Sailing with you, until
We embrace, and never apart.



AUTUMN OF THE ARTISAN

JOE BISICCHIA

Year round, I see her.
All the valley, all the sway,
the hills sloping interwoven,
the bending shadow,
I see the light of her eyes.

She runs with the leaves,
finds her way to spring
in everything, and leaps
even as the air crisps.
Year round, she still is

the almost delicate blanket
over the strident heart
as the bones cut their path
and the kite has its canvas
long after all leaves leave.



THE LAWS BROKE

UZOMAH UGWU

THANKSGIVING WITH THE HUDSONS

KJ CARTMELL

Quinn set down her phone, pushed her fingers into her long, sandy blond bangs and rubbed her temples. The stress headaches that were an almost daily part of her university life were back, pounding away from behind her eyeballs, in time with her racing heart.

Caleb's dark blue eyes watched her. He reached out his hand and began to stroke her neck. "What's going on?"

"My sister and I have nowhere to go for Thanksgiving," said Quinn.

"Come to my house. My mom'll take you in. You and Kinsley both."

Quinn rolled towards him and tipped her head into Caleb's broad chest. She breathed in his woody scent and listened for a moment to his deep, steady heartbeat. She wondered, *Are we really at the point where we're having Thanksgiving together?*

As a college freshman, Quinn constantly introduced herself to people from her classes and the dorms. She soon had a large group of girlfriends. Some shy boys hung around her, too, but one stood out.

Caleb Hudson was in her Calculus class. He had a kind smile, and his eyes were deep blue pools. He seemed well-known - in the Student Union, people called out to him, "Hey, Huddy!" He was so tall and broad-shouldered, Quinn might have been intimidated, but the slight gimp in his step gave off an aura of vulnerability that called to her.

They sat together in class, and he always joined her study groups. At the end of Calculus one morning, she said, "Hey, I usually eat lunch at the union. You wanna come by?"

"I'd love to have lunch with you," he said.

When she arrived at the student union, Caleb was sitting in the sun at one of the outdoor tables. He stood as she approached. "Hey."

"Hey yourself," she said. "Ready for lunch?"

"Yes, I am."

They went into the union and ordered entrée salads. Quinn said, "I just came from Psych. What are you taking?"

Caleb gave her a wry grin. "The school seems to think I should have U.S. History for the fourth time in my academic career."

Quinn laughed. "Didn't you take AP U.S. History in high school?"

"No, I did not. I was not the student then that I am now. Once I messed up my leg, I had to buckle down and get serious about school."

They found a table and started eating. "What happened to your knee?"

"Football," he said, pronouncing it the way jocks did, with the 't' nearly inaudible. "Messed it up pretty bad. It took a year of PT to get me to walk as good as I can now." His smile was wry, wistful. "You know, as a kid, you always tell yourself, 'I'm gonna be in the NFL. I'm gonna be in the Super Bowl.' You're gonna be the one who makes it. Then I caught my cleat in the grass, broke my leg, tore up my knee." She winced, but he shrugged off her gaze of pity. "My dad said, 'Your life is not over. It's just gonna be different than what you thought.'"

"Sounds like you have a cool dad."

His eyes glinted with humor. "Oh, I don't know how cool he is, exactly, but yeah, he's a good dad."

“I’ve got a good dad, too. I miss him. I haven’t seen him in weeks. My folks split up a few years ago. When I go home for the weekend, it’s just my mom and my sister Kinsley.”

It turned out that they grew up in the same area, just ten miles from one another. “Back in high school, I played against your school all the time. Football and baseball.”

“I was at some of those games,” she said with a laugh.

At the end of lunch, she gave him a hug. From that point, the hugs continued every time they crossed paths. They ate lunch together each day, sometimes alone and other times with Quinn’s girlfriends. Tall, lean athletes that would walk by the table to give Caleb a fist bump.

They met up again each night to study. Quinn relished the slow walks in the dark back to her dorm room. Their goodnight kisses were long and slow.

As the semester wore on, assignments stacked up quickly. During an evening study session, Quinn found her stress level spiking. Her head pounded and her neck felt locked in place. She pressed her fingers into the back of her neck, trying to loosen things up.

Caleb’s brow furrowed. “Would you like some help with that neck of yours?”

“Yes, that would be great.”

He moved behind her. She flinched at first to feel his thick fingers on her skin. His hands were big but in no way clumsy. His tender, undulating motions sent warm waves down her spine, as if she were easing into a hot bath. When he was satisfied with her neck, he moved onto her shoulders. Sitting in her plastic chair in the library, it was easy to imagine his hands wandering all over her body.

As soon as he stopped, she reached for her phone.

“I just loosened up that neck of yours. Now you’re getting right back on your phone?”

“We need to coordinate our calendars!” said Quinn. She opened up her calendar app, which was synced with her roommate’s. “My roommate has class from 9:30 to 10:45 tomorrow. Are you free, then?”

“I have PT from 8 to 9. I could be at your dorm by 9:30. What do you have in mind?”

“I just thought it would be nice to hang out without five thousand other people around.” She batted her eyes at him. “You could show off more of your massage-hands talent.”

He grinned eagerly, and his blue eyes twinkled. “Sounds like a plan.”

The next morning, she waited for him in the lobby of her dorm building, wearing her school sweatshirt over tight black leggings. When she saw him ambling down the concrete path, she went out and greeted him with a hug. “Good morning!” she said. “How’s your leg?”

“Still connected, still functioning,” he said. “How’s your neck?”

“It feels a little stiff again today,” she told him. “My shoulders and my back, too.”

“I should do something about that.”

Up in her room on the second floor, she lay down on her light pink comforter. With a slow stroke of his finger along her back, he sensed that she was not wearing a bra. He started on her neck, as he had the night before, but neither of them could wait. She felt as excited as he looked. Her shirt came off, then her leggings, and then they were making love.

Afterwards, they cuddled under the comforter, her head resting on

his bare chest. “I guess it’s just like everything else,” he mused. “You get better at it the more you do it.”

She giggled. “I guess you’re right.” No more needed to be said.

Time slipped away from them, and they had to hurry to get dressed before Quinn’s roommate returned to the room.

It was a Sunday in early November. She and Caleb were in her dorm room when Quinn’s mother called. After a few minutes of pleasantries, Mom dropped her bombshell.

“Stuart and I are going on a cruise. Mexican Riviera. The weather down there is really wonderful this time of year.”

“Great! When is your cruise?”

“Later this month. We’re leaving on the nineteenth and getting back on the twenty-eighth.”

“Mom! That goes right through Thanksgiving!”

“That’s why we were able to get such great rates, and on short notice, too.”

“Mom! You can’t leave Kinsley alone that whole time!”

“It’s only ten days. And, you’ll be there for most of those days.”

Quinn let out a hiss of irritation. “Mom! I have school that week! I have a class on Wednesday afternoon.”

“Those classes very often get cancelled.”

“You don’t know that. And what about Thanksgiving?”

“You could go and see your father.”

“Mom! This is why I didn’t go far away for school. I didn’t want to spend every day of my breaks in airports!”

“There’s still plenty of time. I’m sure you and Jim can work something out.”

When the call ended, Quinn’s hands were shaking. She set down her phone, pushed her fingers into her long bangs and rubbed her temples. From behind her eyeballs, her head was pounding to the beat of her heart.

Caleb’s dark blue eyes watched her. He reached out his hand and began to stroke her neck. “What’s going on?” he asked, his voice low and calming.

“My sister and I have nowhere to go for Thanksgiving,” said Quinn.

“Come to my house. My mom’ll take you in. You and Kinsley both.”

“Caleb, sweetie, we *just* got started. Going to Thanksgiving together is a *big step*. That’s what couples do right before they get engaged.”

Caleb shrugged off her concerns. “If you need a place to go, we’ll take you in. I just need to give my mom a heads up so she’ll have enough food for y’all.”

Quinn rolled towards him and tipped her head into Caleb’s broad chest. Caleb’s steady heartbeat always calmed her. Part of her wanted to jump at the chance to meet Caleb’s family. The other part of her was scared stiff. She wondered, *I just met this boy in September. Are we really ready for this?*

Later that evening, after Caleb had gone back to his dorm, Quinn called her father. She took a softer tone with her father than she did with her mother, but she made many of the same points. “I have school until

Wednesday. I don't think it's fair to leave Kinsley alone for that long. And, I really don't want to spend my few days off sitting in the airport."

"How 'bout I come up and see you? It'll be like an Airbnb, except that I'll be staying in my own house," he added wryly.

"That would be great," said Quinn. "What are we doing about Thanksgiving? You've never been much of a cook, and neither is Helen."

"We could go to that Hoff Brau place. They make a mean turkey dinner."

"Daddy, that place closed two years ago."

"Oh! That's too bad. Well, we'll think of something."

"Daddy, you can't improvise Thanksgiving Dinner. It takes planning!"

"You sound like your mother when you talk like that."

"Daddy, that doesn't sound like a compliment."

"Sweetie, there's still weeks to go. We'll figure something out."

Quinn sighed. "My boyfriend said he would take us in if we had nowhere else to go."

Her mother would have rejected the idea out of hand. She would have said something like, "We don't want to impose ourselves on his family." Jim, on the other hand, responded brightly. "Hey, that's a great idea! Tell 'em I'll bring the wine. And, we'll grab an apple pie from the bakery, too."

After she wrapped up the call with her dad, Quinn called Caleb. "I'm sorry! I mentioned to my dad that you had invited me and Kinsley for Thanksgiving, and he's gone and invited himself and Helen over as well!"

"Helen is your step-mom?"

"Yes, but we just call her Helen."

"Got it," said Caleb. "We got this, Quinn. I spoke to my mom already. We figured we'd be taking in your whole group."

"You're sure we're not being a burden? My dad said he'd bring the wine. He has really good taste in wine, and he doesn't mind paying top dollar for a good bottle. Oh, and we'll bring an apple pie, too."

"Wonderful. My mom makes a mince pie, and my sister's specialty is pumpkin. And my family never splurges on a nice bottle of wine. It'll be a treat for us."

"I love you. Thank you. This was getting crazy. I just needed everything pinned down. I hate leaving stuff like this for the last minute."

The last call of the night was to Kinsley. "We're having Thanksgiving with my boyfriend's family."

Kinsley's voice was low and sad. "Why can't I have Thanksgiving with *my* boyfriend?"

"Kinsley! You're having Thanksgiving with *your* family. We're just having it with Caleb's family, too."

"I'm not gonna know anybody!"

"Yes, you will. You'll know Daddy and Helen and me. And, you'll meet Caleb."

Thanksgiving morning, Quinn got up early. Her roommate had left for home the night before, so she had the whole dorm room to herself. This would have been a great moment to spend the night with Caleb, but she wanted time to get ready in the morning. *I don't need a lot of distractions at the moment*, she told herself. *If he wants to, he can stay*

with me tonight.

She put on a wool dress that was red and green plaid with gold trim. It was a bit on the Christmassy side, but with its long sleeves and calf-length hem, it screamed “responsible eldest daughter.” *I want to make the right impression on Caleb’s family.*

She told Caleb to pick her up early. Once her hair and makeup were finished, she went downstairs to wait for him. When she saw him ambling up the path towards her dorm, she went out to greet him.

“Thanks for coming and getting me,” she said. “I’m really looking forward to meeting your family. I’m used to helping in the kitchen during big family events.”

“My folks are looking forward to meeting you, too. I’m sure my mom will put you to work in the kitchen if you’re willing and able.”

Quinn stared out the window at the rolling hills as Caleb’s black Camaro rumbled down the mostly vacant highway. “Kinsley has been whining all week about this. I hope she doesn’t cause a scene.”

“Oh, I bet she shapes up for company,” said Caleb.

The scenery – the stores, street signs, even the trees – were looking familiar. “My house is right over there,” said Quinn. Caleb nodded. They continued east another ten miles before getting off the freeway. The Camaro cruised slowly through winding suburban lanes, coming to a stop in front of a two-story tract house.

The two went up the walkway side by side, holding hands. Before they reached the porch, the front door opened and out came Caleb’s mother, wearing an apron. “Good morning, son,” she said. “It’s so good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, too. Mom, this is Quinn.”

Caleb’s mother took Quinn’s hands in both of hers. “Oh my

goodness, you’re beautiful. Caleb, I think this one’s a keeper.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Hudson,” said Quinn, blushing. “I want to help out in the kitchen today, since I’m bringing my whole family over.”

“There’s plenty to do,” said Mrs. Hudson. “Come on in, and let’s get started.”

The aroma of the roasting turkey and mince pie permeated the entryway. After some quick introductions to Caleb’s father and grandmother, Quinn went straight to the kitchen and began washing and peeling potatoes. Caleb’s older brother arrived a few minutes later with his wife and children. Caleb’s sister soon joined Quinn in the kitchen and began preparing the sweet potatoes. The aroma of cinnamon and nutmeg filled the kitchen and mixed well with the smells of the turkey coming from the oven.

Quinn’s family arrived. Quinn and Caleb met them in the hallway. Jim held a bottle of wine in each hand. Next to him, Helen held the pie. Kinsley, looking shy and sullen, stood behind them.

Caleb’s dad greeted Jim. “Welcome! I’ll take those.” He admired the labels for a moment.

“One red and one white. Something for everyone!” said Jim.

“Hello, Daddy,” said Quinn. She gave Jim a hug. “Daddy, this is Caleb.”

“Good morning!” said Jim, heartily. The two exchanged a firm handshake. “Thanks for taking us in.”

“It’s our pleasure, sir,” said Caleb.

Quinn gave a warm smile to Helen and took the apple pie out of her hands. “I’ll put this by the others.” There were mince and pumpkin pies on a shelf next to the dining room table. The apple pie’s crust was golden brown and flaking.

Sitting at the dining room table was Caleb's grandmother, watching the action in the kitchen with interest. Kinsley wandered into the dining room and shot a nervous glance at her sister.

"You two do make a handsome couple," said the grandmother. "How did you meet?"

"We have a math class together," said Caleb. "I picked out the prettiest girl in the room and sat down next to her."

Quinn felt her cheeks burning. She was grateful when the grandmother turned to Kinsley, and said, "Kinsley, that's such a sweet name. Tell me a little about yourself, my dear."

Kinsley sat down and right away began pouring her heart out to the woman. Quinn smiled in satisfaction and returned to the kitchen.

Dinner was served. Caleb's mother said grace. Jim poured the wine while Caleb's dad served slices of turkey. Soon, Quinn's plate was full: turkey, stuffing, a dollop of mash potatoes and another of sweet potatoes topped with marshmallows, a serving of green beans and a plump little roll. She didn't know how she would ever fit in a slice of pie, but she knew that she would.

The two dads had hit it off, talking about their golf games. Caleb's mother talked to Helen, which meant that Quinn didn't have to. Kinsley was still talking to Caleb's grandmother.

Quinn slipped her hand to her side and gave Caleb's hand a squeeze. For a moment, they gazed into each other's eyes. She didn't know, right then, how long the thing she had with Caleb would last, but it warmed her heart to think that she could be having Thanksgiving with the Hudsons for many years to come.

I'M KEEPING MY HANDS BUSY LATELY

MAGGIE BOWYER

I'm keeping my hands busy lately

Digging into dough, my mind needs me to knead
until my arms are numb and memories are subdued.

This is not quite dissociation or distraction;
the smell of freshly peeled apples assails my senses
and the crust crumbles between my forefinger and thumb.

Soft serenades drift from the stereo
and I hum along, not quite absently.

There is no outrunning the past, so I decided to bake with it.
We laugh in the kitchen, and I fold it into a new recipe, taking my time.

The weather is warming, and bread is rising faster.
Early spring flowers are blooming
and we plant herbs in the thawing garden beds.
I make a blueberry pie and you tell me it tastes just right.



THROUGH THE CLUMPS

O.P. JHA

hovering for picking up worms
crawling on kernels
crows are deleting some tales
hanging on the lips of grains

some scare-crows are here
since Hammurabi days
for stopping crows

between crows and scare-crows
some wild flowers stand alone
as bruised orphans seeking shelter
in crazy-war-zones

a smiling Earth was seen
when the sky was clear

now, in smog
olives feel cheated
date-trees look tiny
and maples don't talk to light

in a war-time
it's difficult to dream
a day without smog

and a night without tears

there's a broken world
swinging between reality and dream
as a desperate lot
treading through uncertainties

through the clumps of leaves
a scared nightingale is watching
a wildflower standing alone
between crows and scare-crows
it has no option
but to dream a spring

a hard time for nightingales!



FROM ONE SEASON TO THE NEXT

KENNETH M. KAPP

Spring Becomes Summer

Last year, late fall I became aware of a strange old man who was frequently seen on a Sunday in the park, walking by the statue of General S. Lepoy. Weather permitting, several times a week and on Sunday mornings I would sit on one of the benches that circled the statue's pedestal, reading a book or the local paper. In the winter after a heavy snow, once the streets were plowed and long after it felt as if the four walls had closed in on me, I would often drive to the store for a special treat and then make a short detour past the park and stop where there was a clear view of the lake. Just a few yards north was the path leading into the park, a five-minute walk from where the General, proudly sitting on his horse, raised his saber as if giving the cry to charge. I would check to see if in the deep snow there were footprints; footprints that I was convinced were left by the strange man.

On such a day I parked there, watching as the grey clouds were blown out over the lake. A light snow had dusted several tracks as a reminder that there would be more storms before the winter was over. I didn't think the man would mind if I imagined he was a recent immigrant from Siberia and that our cold and snow were *nichevo*, nothing, for him.

But winter didn't stay longer than usual and soon it was spring and I was able to spend more time in the park. My favorite bench is on the south side of the statue's pedestal where I can shelter from the

north wind. It is not infrequent that a curious youth, mistaking the severe military cut of my clothes as a uniform, will approach me and ask if I'm some kind of honor guard for the General. When asked, I put down my book or paper and politely answer, "No, I've never been in the military and, besides, the General passed more than a hundred and fifty years ago."

If they appear receptive, I inquire if they wish to learn something about the General. A nod, "Yes," and I move my paper or book to the side and invite them to sit down. Then I happily tell them all about General S. Lepoy.

While I'm often there during the week, on Sunday morning some would say religiously, I arrive by nine with my thermos of coffee, my book, and the Sunday edition of the paper. I carry them in a tote bag along with a rag to clear the bench and, if the weather seems chilly, a small blanket for my legs and lap.

I first salute the General, thanking him in advance for protecting me from the north wind. Then after removing the thermos, I set my bag on the right side of the bench, sitting for a moment to admire the view. I occasionally wonder if before I leave I should compare my observations with the General, who from his high vantage point commands a better line of sight, the horse's hooves being eight feet above my head. I do have one advantage since I'm able to move my head from side to side – parallax effect, looking at things from a different perspective. Certainly, if the enemy were to approach, they would not remain undetected.

People who frequently walk along the path have become accustomed to seeing me in the company of the General. I'm often greeted, first with a smile or wave, and then with a brief stop, remarks exchanged about the weather or one's health. Eventually we may exchange names.

I made the acquaintance of Nanny Foster two years ago. Nanny is not her name; she is a nanny and cares for two small children. The

oldest was three when his ball got away, rolling up to my feet. She apologized, which was entirely unnecessary. I had hard candy in my pocket and, when she nodded OK, offered some to the boy. It was only to be expected that he accidentally tossed the ball my way the next time she came by with her young charges.

And there was a couple, I'd guess in their mid-twenties, holding hands, who shyly approached on a Wednesday afternoon. I remember because it was the first Wednesday after the second Tuesday in April and I had just read a funny poem in the paper about just that – a silly rhyme that I've now forgotten about how one day follows the next. But the young girl blushed and giggled, "Shelly just told me he loves me and I wanted to tell the whole world. You're the first one we could find."

I said I was honored and wished them a blessed life together, adding, "There is another witness, General Lepoy. I dare say he will be around longer than me."

About two weeks later I became aware of a shadow skirting the pedestal of the statue. By the time I looked up, I was in the middle of Anton Chekhov's story "Spring," I could see only the back of a man, scurrying south on the path. Judging from the posture and gait I was convinced it was the strange old man whom I had first noticed late last Fall. I gave it no thought and went back to Chekhov's story.

I read two more stories after that; I can no longer remember the names but the sun, higher in the cloudless sky, became uncomfortably warm. I gathered my things together and started for home thinking now spring will soon be gone.

~ ~ ~

Summer Fades to Fall

Summer lingered. There were no early frosts and cold winds came down from Canada to remove the spent leaves from the trees. I read

in the park no more or less than before, only coming earlier to avoid the late morning heat, and now sat on a bench to the north of the statue enjoying the partial shade it provided. The old man, when I observed him, was always in the distance. It was as if he wished to finally make my acquaintance but then, when he sensed I was looking, quickly turned and hurried away.

Others stopped to chat. Once a drawing class from the nearby college came to sketch the General and his horse. The instructor asked my permission for his students to include me in their drawings, "I've positioned them so that they'll see mostly your back and suggested they try to capture a sense of loss, you looking towards an uncertain future while the general hovering above your head, charges into a certain past."

I laughed and showed him the book of Russian stories on my lap. "If they lack for inspiration, I'd be glad to recommend one of the stories from this collection. For in truth, no one knows loss as well as Russians, at least those living in the 19th Century."

Another time an attractive young woman pushed her bicycle up to my bench. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I've slipped my chain and can't manage to get it back on. Could you perhaps help me?"

I put my book to the side and said, "I don't think chains have changed that much since I was a boy. Let's see what I can do." A cursory examination revealed that the chain wasn't broken, so I retrieved a couple of strong twigs from under a nearby bush. Picking up the seat I pivoted the rear wheel off the ground and asked her to slowly turn the pedal while I guided the chain back over the sprockets. A few clicks and turns and all was well. I wrapped the twigs in a tissue and disposed of them in a trash can along the path. I was thanked profusely but said that it was my profit since I could now feel like a hero in one of the stories I was reading.

As was expected, the days grew shorter and cooler. The first frost arrived two days before October, but the summer fought back

and lingered on for several more weeks. A few times it rained, but that was to be expected; leaves changed colors and painted the ground in a kaleidoscope of pictures moved by the wind. I didn't see the strange man once between the end of September and mid-October.

~ ~ ~

Fall Slides into Winter

The air this fall felt different. When I sat in the park and looked up at the General his sword appeared to tip down over my head. I did my best to dismiss the ominous feeling, attributing it to stress or being dehydrated. Most days I remembered to bring a water bottle along with my book and thermos of coffee, even mixing in one-third decaf beans with my dark roast in case it was too much caffeine that was causing my malaise. It seemed to help and my spirits lifted even as the last leaves fell from the trees in the park. Only the oaks held onto their dark tan leaves. I now brought a small down throw for my lap and my stays were shorter; at times, I was only able to read a chapter or two.

As the days grew still shorter and colder fewer people walked in the park and those that did were tightly bundled. Often a little dog such as a terrier or a dachshund sported a colorful vest while their owners wore a matching scarf or knitted hat.

I had become friends with Selma at the beginning of the summer. She had a frisky dachshund that would run from one side of the path to the other. Once, when I came late, she and her dog Fritz came running up from behind and I was tangled in the leash. She apologized profusely, telling Fritz he must ask for forgiveness. Three days later when I was reading the Sunday paper, Fritz approached my bench with a small branch clenched between his teeth. Selma spoke for him, "Fritz is so, so sorry and wants to give you his favorite chew stick. He's so smart, you

see. If you take it, he will shake hands. At least some times he shakes hands."

Fritz didn't offer me his paw, but took an interest in my tote bag which I had used to carry groceries home the previous day. I told him he was forgiven, and no, there was no need for a kiss. Selma laughed, thanked me, and dragged Fritz off to continue their walk.

And now Selma and Fritz were visiting again. He was wearing his Christmas vest and Selma sported a matching boa wrapped thrice around her neck. She wondered if it was too early for Christmas vestments, Thanksgiving was still two weeks off. I assured her it wasn't. "They'll soon put up the Christmas lights downtown, and, besides, you are both *trés chic – comme il faut*."

Selma smiled. "We do try. I'll tell Fritz. He's a German dog and I'm afraid he's never learned to speak French." And then they bounded off, or at least Fritz did. Selma was pulled along doing her best to keep up and soon they were back on the path. I returned to my paper, noting that I hadn't seen the strange old man in weeks.

But I wasn't disappointed. The next Sunday, when I was pouring my second cup of coffee, I noticed him going slowly south along the path. Reflexively, I waved, but he chose to look away. I must admit I was nonplussed and muttered, "So be it. We needn't be friends then and you can go about your business, whatever it is. I'm sure when the time is right, you'll wave and greet me with open arms." And then I laughed – normally I'm not so loquacious!

~ ~ ~

When Whiteness Covers All

I often think, "I should have known." But now quickly go on to

say, “But I wouldn’t have changed anything.” It happened so quickly. In a blink, I had time only to open my mouth and utter an expletive that I hadn’t used since I was a teenager. A fraction of a second later I started to laugh at myself for sacrificing fifty years of refinement in an instant, realizing at that same moment that none of it mattered. It was over, the “Then what?” had become the “Now what?”

Fall had lingered. Temperatures played either side of freezing from one day to the next. A drizzle or a sprinkling of snow; either would cancel my airing in the park. Thus, the week after Thanksgiving when the rain let up one late morning I decided to pack my tote, throw in an extra towel to dry the bench, and pick up whatever book was on top of the pile on my nightstand. I bundled warmly, and drove off at speed, not wanting to waste whatever sunshine remained in the day.

The streets, while wet, were not icy. I was glad I had decided to come. A block and a half from the park I saw the strange old man. He was standing at the curb and waving me on as if he was trying to tell me someone else would take my parking spot. I was curious as to what book I had grabbed in my haste to leave. Foolishly, I glanced down at the passenger seat where the book rested on top of the tote. Too late I saw the car speeding down the cross street. I reacted immediately and slammed on the brakes. Alas, the temperature near the park, perhaps because of the lake or open spaces amplifying cold winds, had frozen the puddles on the street and I skidded across the intersection – T-boned. It was over, as they say, in a heartbeat, not even a chance to complain that I was a vegetarian and being T-boned was hardly fair. But I like to think that the strange old man had read my mind and smiled.

COLORBLEEDING

ANGELINA CARRERA

Oleg Kushch. *Pumpkin and leaves*. Watercolor on Paper. Ukraine.

Your pumpkin is bleeding into the colors of other fruits—
nectar sliced open,
persimmon at its ripest,
the peel of a mango under a heat lamp.

Leaves of aquamarine are watching your pumpkin,
crinkling into forest green and auburn red monsters.
The worst of them are a bruised hue, blue to the point of black.
The worst of them are tinged with golden sun.

I know why your pumpkin is bleeding.
Don’t you see the way she trembles in the shade,
the shadows which grow heavier over her head,
the leaves all scythes with their jagged edges,
shooting ombré daggers into flesh?
They wish to carve your pumpkin,
blade by blade,
murder every rind.
They wish to see that brave orange shockshell
shatter into strung-out, splatter-brained tissue,
her organ

hollow.

Bleeding
 is your pumpkin's act of self-preservation—
 if she can become a nectar,
 a persimmon,
 a mango's peel,
 she can become anything,
nothing.

And if she is nothing,
 no shadow can ever hurt her.

HALLOWE'EN WINDOW PAINTING

LINDAANN LOSCHIAVO

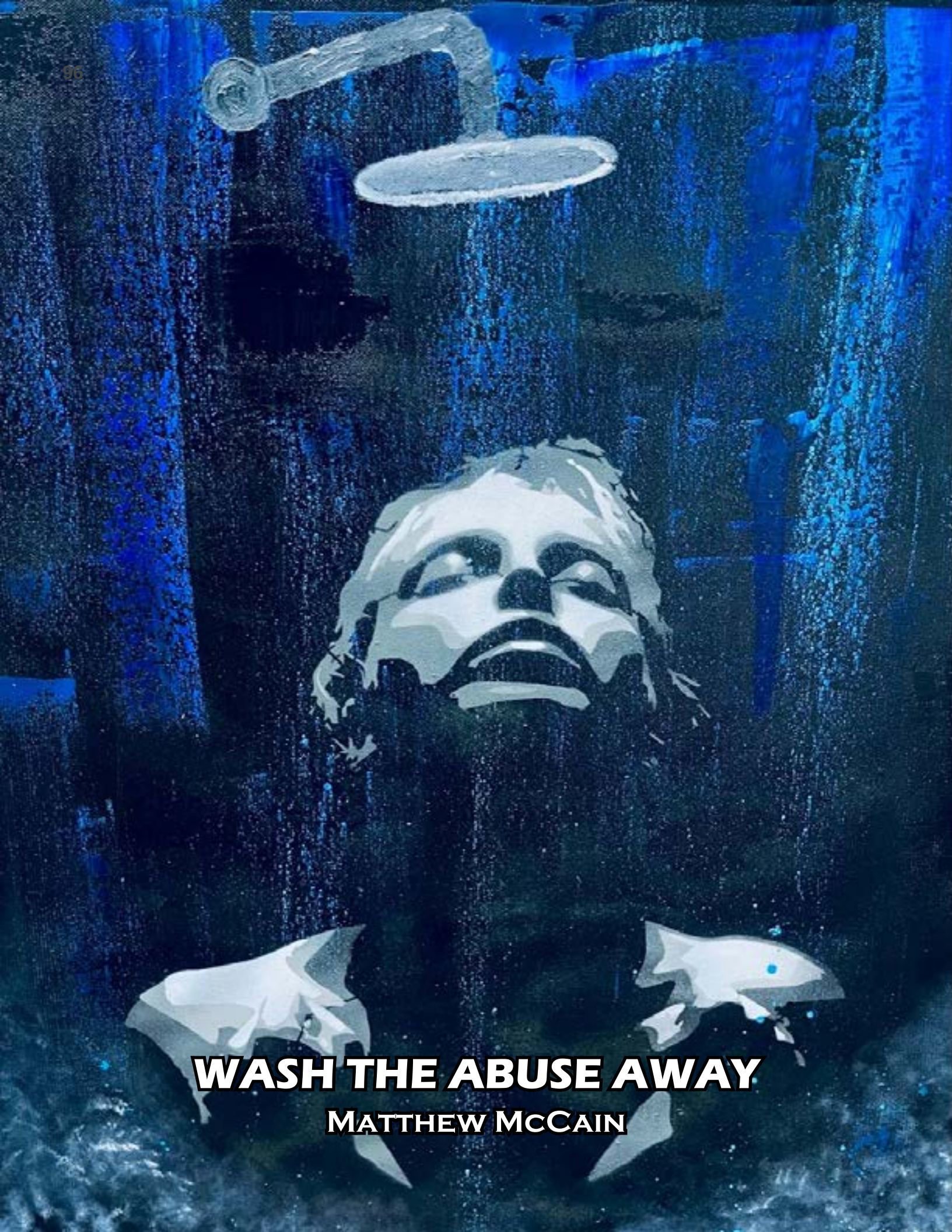
Ghosts rise, my brush broad-stroking outdoor glass,
 The store already closed, fluorescents on,
 Illuminating my half-finished sketch.

Stray skeletons, masked witches, pumpkin kings,
 All smiles and hope, parade down bat streaked blocks,
 Embracing trick-or-treat bags — pirate's loot.

Despite my weariness, my brush takes flight,
 Creating doors that open to a reign
 Of orange bliss just harvested: plump yams,
 Carrots, spaghetti squash. A scarecrow smirks,
 His jack-o-lantern head lit, menacing
 Owls, bellowing harsh candlelight. Unnerved,
 I freeze, aware I'm not alone, about
 To curse the closed mouth sky, providing no
 Clues where this strange farm lies — nor how to leave.

Sly skeletons, loud witches, pumpkin kings
 Approach, aggressive country primitives.

My horsehair brush is weaponized, collects
 Enough white tempera to cover each one,
 Obliterating malefactors with
 Ruthless efficiency. Strong stubborn winds
 Convey me to a secret corridor
 That's underneath the Brooklyn store where I
 Was working on my mini masterpiece —
Completed in my absence. Can it be?
 A painted scarecrow meets my eyes and winks.



WASH THE ABUSE AWAY
MATTHEW MCCAIN

EXODUS (THE SWAMP)

ANNA CORREA

thick, deep water covered in duckweed laying still
long cypresses immersed in it,
fighting to fill their lungs with the few
rays of sunlight bathing the swamp
the crickets stuck to the trees,
singing the old song you will never stop to hear

the humidity sweats out on the ground,
it blends out with the wet mud
the dirt possesses your bare feet:

it doesn't matter where you go or
how much you try to wash it out
it will always be there
stained in your skin,

reminding you of where you came from
of how you can never escape the swamp

THE OUTSKIRTS OF WINTER

TOSHIHISA NIKAIDO

The green leaves perched upon timeless oaks that cover the park so bold,
become a canvas of beauty from afar;

A breathtaking painting of serenity and hope, counter to the nights that
grow continuously cold.

I am drowned in their presence, as if the leaves themselves call my
name, wishing to share in my memories,

And I accept their shielding from the falling rain, soon finding myself a
willing captive to their gentle Autumn embrace.

Yet on the outskirts of winter, the veil of eternal beauty fades in an
instant.

Revealing behind the vibrant greens, toxic purples that have always lied
below.

Not a sign of changing times but a reminder of lingering pain from long
ago,

Along with an introduction to much suffering yet to come.

The withered leaves slowly fall to my feet, allowing the rain to sully my
iron crown,

My heart and head become heavy, forcing me to look at the dark leaves
covering the ground.

Then, in one last act of defiance to the weight I bore, my eyes looked
away,

Away from the leaves and through the barren trees to the skies above.

The leaves of beauty I had found in the darkening days had impended
shadows over me.

So I cast off my crown of rust and turned my head to the barren trees.

Now I could clearly see that the promise of a brighter tomorrow did not
lie in the sheltering leaves,

But in the rays of light that, even amidst the harshest winters, still
pierced through the clouds.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rachel Turney is an educator and teacher trainer in Colorado. Her poems and prose are published (or are in press) in The Font Journal, Nap Lit, Ranger, Through Lines Magazine, Bare Back, Lobster Salad and Champagne, and Teach Write Journal. Her photography appears in By the Beach, San Antonio Review, Rundelania, The Salt, San Antonio Review, Umbrella Factory Magazine, and Ink in Thirds Magazine.

Richard Eddie started writing in 2002. Some of Richard Eddie's authors include Daphne Du Maurier and Kate Morton. Richard Eddie reads and writes for fun and lives in California.

Jenna Martinez is a 27-year-old mother, wife, dog mom, poetry enthusiast, writer, and music lover who experiences emotions profoundly. Originally from Texas, she faced significant challenges as a teenager and young adult, including depression, self-harm, medication abuse, anorexia, and suicide attempts, which resulted in substantial memory loss from that period. This poem is part of a collection she wrote to help her remember and to acknowledge both the good and the difficult moments of her past.

Rachel Coyne is a writer and painter from Lindstrom, MN.

Uzomah Ugwu is from the USA and is a poet, writer, curator, editor, and multi-disciplined artist.

Mario Loprete is an artist.

Serge Lecomte, born in Belgium in 1946, moved to the U.S. and spent his teens in South Philly and Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden High School, he joined the Air Force Medical Corps. He earned an MA and Ph.D. in Russian Literature from Vanderbilt, with a minor in French, and later a B.A. in Spanish Literature from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. From 1978 to 1997, he taught languages at the University of Alaska. Over the years, he also worked as a Green Beret language instructor, house builder, pipe-fitter, hospital orderly, gardener, landscaper, driller, bartender, and painter.

Annette Young is a native New Yorker and is touched by the glinting textures of creative expression that writing procures and gifts as a positive and organic vehicle of every day observation to translate into key strokes. The terrains writing travels leads to growth and connections that are priceless and worthy of precious time.

Daniel Barry recently completed his first year as a teacher on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Children gravitate towards him, because he knows how to play like one. He keeps a dream journal and has an unreasonable love for fava beans and figs. He's currently loving his work as a preschool teacher in the greater Philly area.

Jill Bemis is an aspiring photographer and writer. Her photographic work has appeared in the Minnesota State Fair Fine Arts Digital Catalog, Catholic Library World, MDE Book of Delights, and Maplewood Parks & Natural Resources videos.

KJ Cartmell story “Lost Friends” appeared in the November issue of The Bookends Review. He was featured in Issue 15 of miniskirt, and in the book Havik: Inside Brilliance. He is the author of several novels including Revelation, Rapture, and Liam Wren and the Dragon Wand. In his spare time, he enjoys music, movies and photography. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife and orange tabby cat.

Matthew McCain is an author and fine artist with 3 of his novels reaching the top #10 on Amazon Kindle Unlimited. His paintings can be found all around the world from London to Alice Cooper’s Teen Youth Rock Center in Phoenix, Arizona. He’s currently represented by the Bilotta Gallery in Florida. bartender.

Leili Najmabadi is an Iranian-American writer and photographer based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been shown in Gems Zine and Kindergarten Mag, and was a Brooklyn Poets fellow. Her work focuses on poetry, prose, and memoir-in-essays, accompanied by 35mm photography.

Toshihisa Nikaido has built a career spanning space development and video game design, contributing to renowned titles such as Resident Evil, Pokémon, and The Legend of Zelda. His storytelling extends across multiple mediums, earning shortlistings and honorable mentions in various writing competitions. Toshihisa Nikaido aims to create stories that resonate, entertain, and inspire curiosity.

Anna Correa is an Brazilian immigrant based in Orlando, FL. She won first place at Phoenix Magazine Poetry Competition this year and has been featured in some literary magazines such as The World’s Faire. Anna studies computer science and enjoys sparkling matcha lemonades late at night.

Leonard S. Tao is a young poet and translator from Chengdu, China. Currently, he is a PhD student at Hunan University, as well as a visiting PhD student at National University of Singapore. He now works at the British and American literary works in the 1950s. He also serves as an editor of Mint Reading, where he writes about the social background and cultural knowledge in a book, including places, customs, and myths. His poems can be found in Pennsylvania English, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, and Blue Lake Review, etc. His literary criticism is in Orbis Litterarum, Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, and Religions, etc.

O.P. Jha has published work in numerous journals, including The Indian Literature, Rigorous, Mantis, Punt Volat, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Backchannels Journal, Poetry Pacific, and others. He is the author of Management Guru Lord Krishna and has translated over two dozen books, including works by Turkish writers Ahmet Hamadi Tanpinar and Yekta Kopan. With a doctorate in Translation Studies, Jha co-edited the Hindi anthology Yudh Ke Viruddh, featuring twelve hundred anti-war poems. He currently serves as Assistant Director at the Broadcasting Corporation of India (Doordarshan) in New Delhi.

Sam Hendrian is a lifelong storyteller striving to foster empathy and compassion through art. Originally from the Chicago suburbs, he now resides in Los Angeles, where he primarily works as an independent filmmaker and has just completed his first feature film Terrificman, a deeply personal ode to the power of human kindness.

Maggie Bowyer (they/he) is a proud cat parent and the author of various poetry collections including Homecoming (2023) and When I Bleed (2021). They’ve been published in Chapter House Journal, The South Dakota Review, Wishbone Words, and more.

Zoe Huot-Link was born and raised in Maplewood, Minnesota. She is a winner of the Manitou Creative Writing Fellowship. Her work has been published by For Women Who Roar, The Antonym, Awakenings, among others.

Erika Payne is a nature photographer based on the East Coast, with a primary focus on bird photography, though she captures all types of wildlife through her lens. Each of her photographs reflects her deep reverence for the environment, serving as a visual poem that reveals the delicate balance and harmony in nature. Through her images, Erika hopes to inspire others to develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world and feel encouraged to protect and cherish it.

Kenneth M. Kapp was a Professor of Mathematics, a ceramicist, a welder, an IBMer, and yoga teacher. He lives with his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, writing late at night in his man-cave. He enjoys chamber music and mysteries. He was a homebrewer for more than 50 years and runs whitewater rivers on the foam that's left.

LindaAnn LoSchiavo is an Elgin Award-winning native New Yorker, is a dedicated member of the British Fantasy Society, HWA, SFPA, and The Dramatists Guild. A Scorpio with a passion for all things Hallowe'en, she infuses a love for the spooky into her work.

Oreste Belletto is 53, and living in San Francisco. He has a master's in poetry from UC Davis. He has had poems published in Byline Magazine, Exquisite Corpse, The Lilliput Review, and nycbigcitylit.com, and has work pending publication from Zoetic Press, Eclectica Magazine, and Midway Journal.

Dylan Hoover was born and raised in Erie, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Allegheny College in 2023 with a BA in English & Creative Writing. Dylan loves to travel as much as he does to write. He first discovered so when he studied abroad in Lancaster, England as an undergraduate for a semester. Currently, he divides interests between England and California, and often finds creative inspiration in the jarring differences which naturally emerge. His writing can be found in Wilderness House Literary Review. Dylan is currently a second-year MFA student at the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

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Sarah Tabbert is an engineer and mother from Canada. She has a Bachelors of Arts and Bachelors of Science from Queen's University.

Emma Wells is a mother and English teacher. She has poetry published with various literary journals and magazines. She writes flash fiction, short stories and novels. She is currently writing her sixth novel.

Hunter Prichard is a young writer from Portland, Maine. Currently working as a claims examiner for an insurance company, Hunter is transitioning into a legal career and plans to attend law school in the near future. He writes short stories, dramas, and critical reviews/essays and began sharing his work with the publishing world in 2022.

Angelina Carrera 21, studies philosophy at UC Berkeley. Her work has been featured and is forthcoming with Wingless Dreamer Publisher, The Word's Faire, Pure Slush, The Bookends Review, and Last Stanza Poetry Journal.

David Cleofas Avila is a disabled creative. Having experienced psychosis as a teen, and later diagnosed with schizophrenia, he writes and makes art & music in order to better square away the sequelae of life. He has earned a B.A. in Psychology and lives as an expatriate.

Joe Bisicchia writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, he has written four published collections of poetry. He also has composed hundreds of individual works that have been published in over one hundred publications.

Donald Patten is an art student from Belfast, Maine. He is a current McGillicuddy's Humanities Center undergraduate fellow and plans to graduate with his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2024 at the University of Maine. He produces oil paintings, charcoal drawings, graphic novels and ceramic artworks. His art has been exhibited in galleries across Maine.

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California, who has been active in creative writing and Spoken Word since the early 1990s. He is the author of nine books, including *Boneyard*, *Unwritten Law*, *Stormwater*, *Skeletal Black* (all from POOR Press), *Elohi Unitsi* (Conviction 2 Change Publishing), *Rusty Gallows: Passages Against Hate* (Vagabond Books), *Plans* (originally Nomadic Press, now re-issued by Black Lawrence Press), *Crimson Stain* (EYEPUBLISHEWE), and his latest, *Discovery* (Southern Arizona Press). With 73 anthology appearances to date, Dee Allen continues to make his mark in the world of poetry and performance.

Frances Fish's passion lies behind a camera. She has dabbled as an abstract painter and often shoot hundreds of photographs a day. Her friends call her a 'preservationist' photographer, as her images are of the abandoned places in the Mojave desert, covered in graffiti, which change day by day. Some of the images Frances shoots can never be replicated, as the art is painted over, sometimes immediately.

The work of Frances Fish has been published in multiple magazines, and in a previous life, she was also a novelist, publishing seven novels, though under a pseudonym.

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 SEASONS OF CHANGE AND REFLECTION

As we close this Fall 2024 issue of *Gabby & Min’s Literary Review*, we invite you to pause and savor the beauty of transformation that autumn brings. Each story, poem, and image within these pages reflects the themes of memory and change, reminding us of the quiet power found in letting go and embracing the present.

This season of reflection encourages us to connect deeply—with art, with nature, and with each other. Thank you for journeying with us through these shifting landscapes of creativity. May the works in this issue inspire warmth, introspection, and a renewed appreciation for the ever-changing seasons of our lives.

With gratitude,
The Editors

END

