

PONDER REVIEW

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PONDER REVIEW

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A NOTE TO READERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Ponder Review was born of, and continues to be sustained by, the belief that art and literature are vital to the proper nourishment of the human mind. That is why our small and rotating team of editors spends several weeks twice a year making a new, unique journal. We read hundreds of stories, poems, and plays, and we reflect on numerous works of art and new media. This spring, we again find ourselves grateful to have all of you, readers and contributors alike.

In the past, we have directed this note only to our readers; this time we want to speak to all who make the journal possible. As we write these words in late March 2020, many of you are under orders by state or local authorities to stay in your homes. Most members of *Ponder Review's* editorial team are, too. We are all practicing social distancing. With anxiety, we watch the COVID-19 case count rise and deaths mount, and we fear to hear a loved one cough or to feel a tickle in the throat. And yet you, dear contributors, have sent us hundreds of submissions, and we are delighted to have you, dear readers, to turn these pages. Thank you.

We have chosen the work for issue 4.1 based on quality and freshness, with little regard for its topic. This is not a pandemic edition. The work in it speaks about evolution and growth, about nature, about family and friendship. Our contributors come from as close to the home of *Ponder Review* as the American South and as far away as Australia, Ireland, and Italy. While the stories, poetry, drama, and art in the journal come from such diverse places, we hope they make you, dear readers, ponder the fears, hopes, and joys we humans share as we traverse our way through these uncertain times together.

Sincerely,

The Editors

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CREATIVE NONFICTION

SARAH MILLS

OPEN LETTER TO A MAN IN POWER

I cannot name you; there is too much at stake. I cannot stay quiet either, though. You would understand had the same thing happened to you or to someone you love. A scream builds up that needs an outlet. Some find it at the top of highs, traps that look like amber bottles and temporary people who promise to take the pain away. I've been spared the worst, but the same cannot be said for the others you have preyed upon. Thus, this is more for them than it is for me, and because I can write, I will scream.

You have not broken any law, not that I know of. You are not reckless. You prefer to operate on the margins of legality because you care too much for your own skin. You love yourself deeply; why should not others? You calculate and plot and bide your time. You found and lead organizations that strive to make the world a better place because you know the sort of starry-eyed person such noble purpose will attract. And you are right. They flock to your calls to action and find their hopes reflected in your carefully curated image at the masthead of leaflets and websites, something they can look at and sigh upon when they dare to believe in making a difference. You also know that hope attracts the wounded and desperate and fragile, and you benevolently offer your listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, to those with no one else to turn to. You are gracious. You dote upon adolescents just exiting childhood, who see in your older mind and body a patron saint, a surrogate parent, a standard to achieve. You give them gifts of time and attention. You sit back and watch and learn their favorite foods and pastimes, the stuff that brings a glimmer to their eyes, and you deliver back to them their dreams made real. And they swoon, bait bitten. A man in his forties has no business spending time with a teenager, and everyone knows this. But you have not broken any law, and everyone knows this.

You are a shapeshifter; men like you come in many forms. You are Priest and Activist and CEO and Director and Editor in Chief and President and Father and Husband.

You climb to your soft leather seat on the backs of others and, once there, you bar the entry to those who follow. You run your hand up the leg of a woman, your subordinate, and when she tries to stop you, you warn her that one phone call is all it takes to put her out of work forever, to summon a specter that follows her for the rest of her life. Your tentacles are far-reaching, and she has fought so hard just to make it here. She cannot make an enemy

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of you. She sees you in the office every day, and every day is reminded of the weight of your hand and the smell of your breath. She must smile, among colleagues and at functions and to mutual friends, but when we are alone, she takes off her armor and shows me the bruised skin underneath, and all we can do is sit together in the unspoken, mutual understanding of sisters in shared pain.

You are the Reoccurring Nightmare and the Flashback and the Trust Issues and the Anxiety. You are our skipped heartbeats and our clenched jaws and our racing thoughts and the sweat on the palms of our hands.

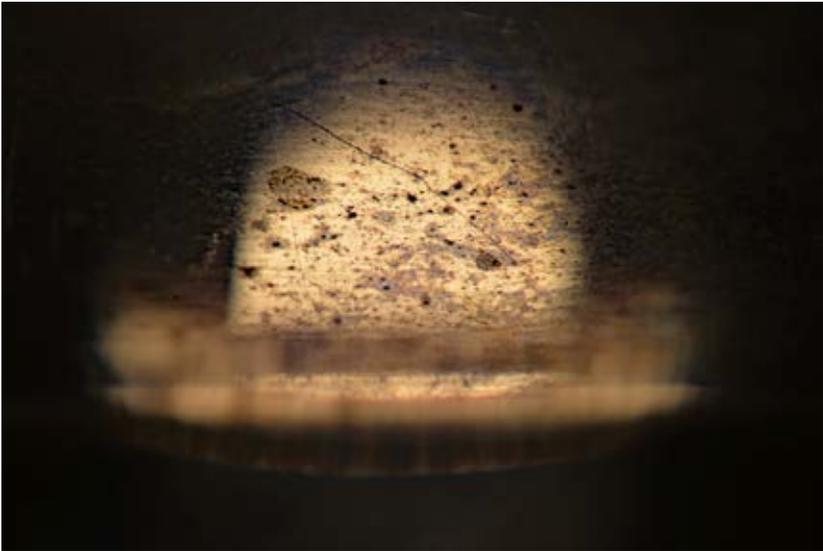
You leave traces of your malignant presence in the broken spirits of the innumerable, changed people who have had the utter misfortune of knowing you. But you carry on, static and unmoved and unmovable. You lather, rinse, repeat with every new, unsuspecting target. Rumors begin to float, and we warn each other to stay away from you, but we do not have your tentacles. We peak out from hiding when we hear your name, add to the story, confirm, sympathize, retreat. What hurts the most, however, is not what you have done to us, no. What inconsolably hurts is the death we die with every denial from those who tell us we must have the wrong man because he would never. What hurts the most is the hell of seeing you surrounded by loyal fans for whom our pain is simply inconvenient; they would rather pretend we are out to tear you down because we are jealous or petty or money-hungry or spurned former lovers with a vendetta. What grieves us is knowing the truth about you and wanting to scream it from the rooftops but finding suspicion as our only audience. What opens our wounds again and again is gathering the immense strength to confront you, to bring you to the steps of a courthouse, to have you found guilty of your crimes, and to see what they call Justice slap your wrist and send you off with nary a blemish on your record in the world's collective memory.

But we see you, and we know you, and with every person who crosses your path and falls victim to your illusions of invincibility, we become bolder. You are one, the sum of all the men in power. You are religion, and we are the revolution. And in these lines I have written, others will read their own stories. We will grow bold and far-reaching roots and put cracks in your concrete and upend you and overcome. Weinstein is now, and you are next.

Yes, you should be afraid.

MARÍA DEGUZMÁN

SOMBRERO



MARISA P. CLARK

NOVEMBER MORNING

In the birdbath, a leaf
has settled, a precise
centerpiece. Days pass;
it brittles and browns. Nowhere
in sight is the sycamore it fell
from, so I imagine

you bending to leave
this gift, this leaf the size
of your open hand, the one
you offered last fall, the one
I accepted believing

I could hold: an artful
gesture, this, and one
you'd make. Joke's
on me. Some big wind
blew it loose, and here is where
it landed. Last night I dreamed

of Chincoteague—all surf
and shoreline, no wild horses. Except
in dreams, I've never been.
The plural of *leaf* is *leaves*, and *leaves*

has more than one meaning.
Inside the house, the dogs
gaze out the window. I should
walk them. I should run
fresh water for the wild
birds. No one should
know such thirst.

NIGHT WITH FALLING SKY

That summer night, late, after
another day spent failing to convince myself

the world had not crumbled, I took
a walk. Love's abundance filled the air

with its absence, and the roar
of silence replaced friends' laughter

and the melody of my lover's voice.
Everything that was missing

pressed in and clung, suffocating,
and everywhere I turned, I found

only rubble. Every day I searched
the doom and, despite all evidence

to the contrary, repeated the saving lie:
All was not lost. But that night,

I believed there was nothing left
to fall

except the sky.
Overhead, the Big Dipper stretched, its ladle

upside-down, and I braced against its spill
of unrelenting darkness. Then I recalled

a favorite childhood tale: *The sky is falling*,
Chicken Little said, and paranoia spread.

I braved it then—my loss, my fear—
and traced those seven stars, those dots

connected only by imagination.
Even right-side up, the Big Dipper lets

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night sky slip through. I had
a grin, at my own expense—then,

still in one piece but no less
crushed, I pressed on amid the ruins.

RICHARD MANLEY

TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE

Characters:

ELIZABETH: Woman, 40s, seated on the train, dressed in a tailored suit.

MARY: Woman, 50s, boarding the train, casually dressed—an eclectic blend of colors and fabrics.

SETTING: On a train.

AT RISE: Elizabeth is already seated on the aisle. Her tray table is down in front of her, and she is engrossed in a newspaper folded to the crossword puzzle. She displays a severe grace. Mary has just gotten on the crowded train. Mary's natural curiosity and lack of pretense make her seem overly gregarious, even careless.

MARY: *(she stands in the aisle next to ELIZABETH, holding a to-go cup of coffee in one hand and a rolling suitcase in the other—ELIZABETH does not look up)* Excuse me.

(ELIZABETH looks up - MARY points towards the window with her coffee hand)

Sorry...that's the only seat open.

(ELIZABETH stands and steps into the aisle so that MARY can get to the seat.)

Uh...*(Extending her coffee cup to ELIZABETH)* Could you hold this for a sec?

(ELIZABETH reluctantly takes the cup as MARY lifts her luggage to the rack, and shuffles sideways with her large purse to her seat - taking back the coffee, they both sit)

Thanks a lot.

(MARY pulls out of her purse an iPod and earphones, a

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hard-bound book, a journal, and a sealed mason jar, half-filled with what appears to be sand, and puts them on her lowered tray)

Thanks.

ELIZABETH: *(turning quickly back to the puzzle)* Not at all.

MARY: *(with her hand extended)* Hi, Mary Gerard. . .just Mary. . .sorry again about the hassle.

ELIZABETH: Yes, yes, of course. . .Elizabeth Courtney.

MARY: That the Times's crossword puzzle?

ELIZABETH: Yes, yes it is.

MARY: My husband used to love that thing too. Never understood it. He used to do it in pen as well. . .cocksure of himself. . .just like you. I mean the pen.

ELIZABETH: *(smiles weakly)* Forgive me, Ms. Gerard. . .I'd love to chat but this is demanding all of my attention. . .so if you'll pardon my rudeness. . .

MARY: No, no, of course. . .absolutely. . .sorry. . .sorry. *(puts on the earphones)*

(Lights go up and down to indicate some time passing.)

MARY: *(notices ELIZABETH looking up and down the aisle and speaks too loudly because of the earphones)* Bathroom?

ELIZABETH: Yes, would you happen to. . .

MARY: *(pointing)* That way.

(ELIZABETH hesitates, worried about leaving everything within MARY's reach)

No problem. I'll keep an eye on it.

ELIZABETH: Yes, certainly, that's very kind of you.

(After ELIZABETH leaves, the train movement jostles the newspaper off the edge of the tray - as MARY catches it, she glances at the puzzle before returning it - lights up and down quickly to indicate the passage of time - ELIZABETH returns)

MARY: *(after a pause, with earphones still on)* I hope you don't mind, but the paper slid off the tray when you got up. . .I grabbed it. . .couldn't help

noticing. . .

ELIZABETH: I beg your pardon?

MARY: 27 across is Leverett A. Saltonstall.

ELIZABETH: Well, thank you for your contribution, but I tried that as a matter of course.

MARY: How did you spell Saltonstall?. . .T-E-N or T-O-N?

ELIZABETH: E, I believe, but. . .

MARY: Well, there's your problem. . .

ELIZABETH: Yes. . .well. . . (*realizes MARY is right*)

MARY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interfere. . .used to drive Wally crazy too, when I did that. . .

*(Annoyed, ELIZABETH puts the newspaper in her
briefcase and pulls out paperwork)*

. . .sorry. I should have known better.

ELIZABETH: It's of no consequence, but please excuse me, I have a great deal to accomplish before I reach New York.

MARY: Yes, yes, but I do need to ask one more favor.

ELIZABETH: Yes?

MARY: It's my turn to pee. . .

(Irrked, ELIZABETH steps into the aisle)

Thanks, thanks so much, I'll just be a minute.

*(As MARY leaves, the jostling of the train also moves her
book to the edge of her tray - pushing it back, ELIZABETH
notices the title, and its age - she opens it quickly to see the
title page - lights up and down to indicate a short time -
MARY returns)*

That should do it for a while. Thanks.

ELIZABETH: Please forgive me if this seems intrusive, but while you were away from the seat, I couldn't help noticing the book you are reading.

MARY: Oh, yes?

ELIZABETH: Are you aware of its value?

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MARY: Exterior or interior?

ELIZABETH: Pardon?

MARY: If you're talking about the words themselves, then yes, I'd say I am aware of their value. I consider them almost priceless.

ELIZABETH: Well, yes, assuredly, that's true...I teach Dickinson, among others, at Vassar. However, I am a bit of a collector, and in the event you aren't aware of it, that is a first edition of a rather rare collection. If you're interested, I'd be happy to send you some paperwork that explains how such things are valued, and to make you a generous offer.

MARY: I'm not interested.

ELIZABETH: (*placing a business card on MARY's tray*) Just in case you change your mind.

(Lights up and down to indicate time passing - ELIZABETH pauses to take a sip of coffee and realizes that it's all gone - she pauses to look up and down the aisle, and to wonder if it's worth the trip to the snack car - MARY sees the move and is considering the same thing.)

MARY: Listen Elizabeth, I'm sorry about my curtness earlier. I'm a bit prickly when it comes to Emily.

ELIZABETH: Not at all. . .was it a gift, or does it have some other sentimental attachment?

MARY: No, I'm just a big fan.

ELIZABETH: Do you have other books like this?

MARY: Quite a few, yes.

ELIZABETH: (*tapping the card*) Well, be sure to hold onto this, in the event you'd like to know what they may be worth.

MARY: Whaddya think, (*holding the card in front of the jar*) should we?

ELIZABETH: What did you say?

MARY: I wanted a second opinion from Wally.

ELIZABETH: Wally?

MARY: What's left of him. . .my husband's ashes.

ELIZABETH: (*startled, she knocks her papers to the floor*) Good grief Ms. . . Ms. . .!

MARY: Gerard.

ELIZABETH: Well, I . . . please take that thing away from me this instant Ms. Gerard.

MARY: I can assure you that he's harmless in this condition, Elizabeth.

(ELIZABETH reaches for the scattered papers, MARY helps with those closest to her)

Shall I pick these up, or have I jarred your sensibilities too much?

(She reads the headings and pauses before giving them back.)

ELIZABETH: If you please! What are you doing? Please hand those back.

MARY: I was just taking a moment to offer a prayer of thanks to the god of coincidence, my favorite deity. . .

ELIZABETH: Please return those papers immediately.

MARY: *(nodding at the top sheet as she does)* Do you teach him too?

ELIZABETH: Yes I do, why do you ask?

MARY: "This organ mischief, this profane caprice. . ." one of my favorites. . ."Classical and religious metaphors in W. S. Hopkins's erotic poems," is that your lecture title?

ELIZABETH: You're a fan of him as well, I suppose?

MARY: *(pulling an old photo from her wallet)* Yes, you might say that. And I have an extensive collection of not only his books, but also his letters.

ELIZABETH: Ms. Gerald, I . . .

MARY: Gerard.

ELIZABETH: Yes, Ms. Gerard, I appreciate your interest in the subject, but I am an authority on Mr. Hopkins's work, and outside of the estate, there is no collection of letters, although those of us in the business, so to speak, truly wish there were, so . . .

(MARY sets the mason jar on ELIZABETH's tray and props the photo against it.)

Take that off of my tray, or I'm warning. . .

MARY: Wally, meet Elizabeth, an acolyte.

ELIZABETH: Ms. Gerard, I swear I will call for. . .that's? Is that W. S.

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Hopkins?

MARY: Wally? Yes.

ELIZABETH: Where did you get this?

MARY: I hope you listen to your students more closely than you have to me, Elizabeth. 'Wally' . . .Wallace. . .my 'husband'. . .shall I go on?

ELIZABETH: But Wallace Hopkins was married to a scholar, she taught at Wellesley, a Mildred. . .

MARY: Yes, Mildred Mary Girard, who was an authority on Emily Dickinson, if memory serves. Is it my ditching the Mildred that threw you?

ELIZABETH: You mean. . .so the book. . .oh dear, I'm so sorry. . .

MARY: For what?

ELIZABETH: Well, for. . .I didn't. . .I. . .

MARY: For treating me like a country bumpkin, who wouldn't know a pentameter from a wooden spoon?

ELIZABETH: Well, no, not at all. . .I'm terribly sorry if. . .

MARY: No need for apologies, Elizabeth. Ignorance can be an asset if paired with curiosity. . .

ELIZABETH: But why carry his, his ashes about Ms. Girard; and in such a crude container? One would think that. . .

MARY: As I'm sure you know, he died just six months ago, and asked that I scatter his ashes a pinch at a time, in favorite haunts of ours, with close friends at hand, in the belief that it would soften my grieving. I started this pilgrimage in New Hampshire yesterday. Since the train was our favorite mode of travel, it seemed a natural choice for distributing Wally, and diluting my grief. As for the mason jar, it was an artifact of our first date. The restaurant served us a rum punch in two of these and I am still comforted by having him nearby, even after the weight loss.

ELIZABETH: How. . .sweet.

MARY: Good friends and the comfort of simple rituals.

ELIZABETH: Oh, yes, one can certainly see that in his work, the realization of which allowed me to perceive the connection to classical myth, especially in that poem you referenced. How delightful to be able to discuss this with the woman he called his muse.

MARY: Take another look at the photo, Elizabeth. Tell me what you see.

ELIZABETH: Well, first, he appears to have his shirt off, and someone seems to have drawn a crude, pencil-thin mustache on his upper lip. Where was this taken?

MARY: They're almost symmetrical, don't you think, one curled under each nostril, like a cartoon devil's mustache, I was thinking at the time. Wally and I had such a laugh.

ELIZABETH: What am I supposed to see Ms. Gerard?

MARY: Those are two of my pubic hairs, Elizabeth, that just happened to end up there after Wally finished one of his favorite desserts, and mine too, certainly.

ELIZABETH: Good grief Ms. Gerard, I have apologized, and will again, if need be. There is no need to be vulgar.

MARY: Wally wrote that poem you have on the title page about an hour after I took this picture. It contains no classical or religious metaphors, just lovely lust. For twenty nine years, I was his first reader and editor. He'd get a kick out of your pedantic foolishness, at least for a moment, and then he'd be pissed as hell, at your efforts to desiccate his passion.

ELIZABETH: Ms. Gerard, I have done no such thing, I assure you. If you read my notes, you'll see that I celebrate his raw masculinity and the conscious purity of a male ethos.

MARY: "It is fatal to be a man or woman, pure and simple; one must be a woman manly, or a man womanly."

ELIZABETH: Come again?

MARY: Virginia Woolf.

ELIZABETH: Oh yes, of course. *To the Lighthouse*, I imagine, but fiction is not my field.

MARY: *A Room of One's Own*, but no matter. It was on a placard that sat on Wally's desk, reminding him always to go beyond the gender to the species. In an effort to justify the popularity of his poetry, you have given it pretensions it does not possess, and in so doing, have sucked its blood and weakened its musculature.

CONDUCTOR/ANNOUNCER: (*voice-over*) Arriving Providence shortly, please exit on the right, all doors will be open, Providence, next stop.

MARY: (*rising - handing ELIZABETH back her card*) That's my stop. This looks expensive, and I have no use for it.

ELIZABETH: No, please, keep it. Let me visit, you. . .I could learn. . .it

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would be invaluable. . .as you must know better than anyone, your husband left the academic world no exegesis at all. . .

MARY: (*placing the card on ELIZABETH's tray*) "To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else." You can thank Emily for that one.

Exit MARY

END

JACK BORDNICK

REFLECTIONS IN MOTION



BRITTANY TERWILLIGER

WHISTLE

I remember hopping from toe to toe, hoping he would notice my new lemon-yellow swimsuit and the whistle that bobbed on a cord woven into the neckline. When I wiped the chlorine out of my eyes, he was so near I could smell the intoxicating afterglow of his fruity shampoo. An angsty love ballad echoed from the pool's rusty, cone-shaped speakers.

"Who are you supposed to be?" he said, "One of those chicks from Baywatch or something?"

Today was a speaking day, and the exhilaration made my lips tremble. For more than a year, Jeff had been coming to our house every other weekend, but so far I'd existed mostly in quiet impressions. Just that morning, while he sat at the breakfast table with his shoebox of baseball cards, I'd poured him a full-to-the-brim glass of orange juice and, being careful not to spill, set it next to his cereal bowl.

"Dad," Jeff had called out as I stood next to the table. His dad was in the next room kissing my mother goodbye, on his way out the door to his Saturday shift at the hospital. "Dad!" he shouted. "Hey, Dad, I want to show you something."

His father waved at us, wiping lipstick off his mouth as he walked out. Jeff stared atomic bombs in my mother's direction.

"Sorry she's such a...," I trailed off.

He picked up his baseball cards and left as if he hadn't seen me.

But he saw me now. He was looking directly at me, at my whistle. I studied his smooth, barely-sunburned cheeks, the peach fuzz on his upper lip. Pale, hairless chest and arms starting to show some muscle now that he'd made the basketball team. He was one of those clean and beautiful boys that girls love early. The silent coolness, the melancholy pout. I knew they concealed a sumptuous inner life, an exclusive club whose admission would mean something. There had been times, like now, or our Friday nights at my grandma's house, when I got the sense that I was almost in, almost a recipient of the scarce resource of Jeff's love. My mom had been trying to win him over for months.

Will approached, all broad-shouldered and tan. Compared to us he was practically a man, one of those kids who radiated some mysterious aura of worldly authority. "Big Bird, your mom's looking fine today," he said, making a "V" with his fingers and rolling his tongue between them.

Jeff coughed out a chuckle, so I laughed too. I glanced back at my mom,

all impeccable red lips and Wayfarer sunglasses, lying on a chair in the adult zone. She'd just finished applying a new layer of coconut oil, and the mid-day sun sheened across her buttery legs like she was made of plastic. To me, she looked no different than ever, old in a way I would never be and common as furniture. But I sensed the opportunity.

"We went shopping last weekend and she bought all this new underwear," I said. It seemed like the sort of thing they wanted to hear, so I wasn't sure what to make of the silence that followed. Jeff's bored eyes glanced over my shoulder and I followed them, to four kids lined up and holding hands, ready to jump off the steel pool gutter and into the water behind us. I looked back at Will's face, which would have been handsome if it hadn't been pocked with whiteheads. I wanted to reach out and pop them like bubble wrap.

Will whistled theatrically. "What does it look like?"

"What?" I asked. His stare embarrassed me and gave me a little thrill. "Oh. Kind of... silky, I guess."

"What color?" Will said.

Jeff rolled his eyes and flashed a sideways grin at me.

"White," I replied.

"Any lace?"

I looked around. "I don't know. I can't remember." I tipped my head back baptismally, to re-wet my hair.

Will whistled again. "I think we need to see them," he said.

"Lay off it, man," Jeff said. Then he stage-whispered at me, "don't do anything he says."

Will cleared his throat. "Go and get your mom's panties and bring them to us."

He said it without pronouncing the "t"—*pannies*—as if he was saying it for the first time. He seemed to like saying the word and also disliked saying it, and the sound of him saying it made me squirm.

"I don't know," I said.

"If you can get the *pannies*," Will said, "I'll let you come with Jeff and me to get pizza next week."

Jeff punched Will in the arm, and Will smirked. "If you can't, then....," he made a thinking face, "...I get to see your pussy."

I felt my face flush. I didn't know exactly what he meant, or if he was joking or serious or making fun of me. But I would have done anything to go out with Jeff, who was watching me now like this was all some sort of test. Will put his hand on my shoulder like we were becoming friends. There was the promise that if I gave him what he wanted he would like me.

"I'll try," I said.

"Meet us at The Place."

The Place was a little alleyway behind the concession stand. I knew

about it without knowing how I'd learned it; everyone just knew.

I waded to the other end of the pool, stepping out of the clear water and into the heavy air of the adult zone. When I turned around, Jeff and Will were both looking at me. Jeff said something to Will and then flicked water at his face. I waved at Jeff and he waved back, and I fluttered with joy.

My mother lay still, radiating the smells of sweat and coconut, her black one-piece dry and shiny against her skin. Saturday mornings she was always tired and grouchy because Friday nights she always went out with my stepdad. It seemed like a childish dream, the way we had been before I lost her to him, back when she only wanted to be with me. I'd felt the change before anyone else did, like those machines that can hear radio waves from Saturn. Out of nowhere Friday night became "girl's night out" and I had to stay home with my dad and watch movies. Jeff once told me that he'd known something was wrong too, long before his mom figured it out. When my dad found out, he left town and didn't come back, and I started to dread Friday nights because I had to spend them at my grandma's house, which was boring and stank of Pepto-Bismol. Then Jeff started coming to Grandma's house too, on his weekends with us. He didn't try to hide the fact that he hated it, but I lived for the nights he was there. Most of them consisted of me listening to him bad-mouth my mom, but I didn't mind. Sometimes I even agreed.

A paperback romance novel lay on the ground next to her rattan beach bag, which was splayed open revealing a set of hot car keys and the corner of her wallet. The clothes she'd worn that morning were wadded in a ball under her head and I could just see a scrap of the new white underwear peeking out from the side.

I hugged my fingers around goosebumped arms and stared at my mom's sunglasses for signs of life. By all appearances, she was sound asleep. I waved a hand in front of her face, and she didn't move.

The adult zone was crowded, but no one seemed to be looking at me. Parents of young children hovered and chased. Others, like my mom, slept in the sun. The Ken-doll lifeguard stared listlessly at the water. Concession stand workers fetched candy bars from deep freezers and ladled nacho cheese into flimsy plastic trays. I looked back to see if Jeff and Will were still watching me, but they'd disappeared. I was invisible again.

I crouched next to my mother, getting hold of the white fabric and pulling it carefully toward me, dislodging and unraveling it from its clothing wad. And just as I leaned forward to free the last bit of it, my whistle swung out and cracked into the side of my mom's sunglasses. She jolted.

"Jesus, Jessi!" She shouted, covering her face with her hands. I dropped the garment on the ground and froze. She pulled herself together and looked down, the puddle of white silk pooled between us like the incarnation of sex itself. I perceived its strange power, so different from my own underclothing.

My mom looked back up at me.

“Is that my underwear?” she hissed, grabbing for it and stuffing it in her beach bag. “What the hell are you doing?”

A voice broke through the song on the loudspeaker. “Blow your whistles, guards.” Whistles sounded in unison, and kids began to emerge in search of towels and snacks.

“Answer me!” my mom said.

“I was just looking for money,” I lied. “I wanted a hot dog.”

She eyed me warily. We both knew the money was in her bag. What must she have thought I was doing? She couldn’t have guessed the truth, but there were all kinds of other perverse possibilities. I could see in her eyes some barely-perceptible change in the way she looked at me, as if I’d just gone from being a transparent and fully-understood creature to ever-so-slightly opaque.

She pulled out her wallet and handed me a dollar, and I sauntered toward the concession stand to face my fate. The concrete was hot under my feet as I dodged globs of coagulating ketchup, speckled birds pecking at pieces of fallen popcorn and corn chips. Kids sat at picnic tables with red Sno Cone juice leaking down their legs like blood.

I pushed my way through the narrow opening between the concession stand and the chain-link fence that ran alongside it, until I reached The Place. In the shade, next to a row of brooms and old pool nets, Jeff and Will stood. The air was humid and mildewy, the concrete walls and floor coated in wetness like an open sore. There was the faint smell of stale cigarette smoke. I ducked under a cobweb and crowded in next to them, with barely any room to spare.

Will looked down at my hands and snickered. “Got caught, huh?”

“Yeah,” I said, heart thudding.

I looked over at Jeff, hovering on the edge like he might take off at any moment. I imagined him saying to me “let’s get out of here” and taking my hand.

“You didn’t rat us out, did you?” Will asked.

“No!” I replied quickly, rubbing a spot of grime off my elbow. “I would never do that.”

We all stood there for a few seconds in loaded, anticipatory silence. I ran my hand across the chain link fence that stood behind me like a cage, and felt the urge to escape. My fingers found the whistle, firm and cold against my chest, and I raised it to my lips just to see what would happen. I loved the metallic taste of it, the latent energy of almost-noise. But Jeff and Will looked nervous. I blew a pitifully quiet little sound, then dropped the whistle again, trying to look casual about it. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be here, but I didn’t want to ruin this either. I ached for whatever sticky revelation was

going to happen.

Will laughed awkwardly. “Well...” he muttered, “let’s see it.” He gave me an ‘I don’t make the rules’ shrug, then leaned back against the adjacent wall. I wasn’t really sure what he wanted me to do, and was even less sure how to approach actually doing it. Was he asking me to take off my swimsuit? Did he think about my body the same way he thought about my mother’s? Should I talk or keep quiet? I looked over at Jeff. He knew I was doing all of this for him, right? He stared at the ground.

I raised a hand up to my yellow strap. Will and Jeff were both looking at me now. I was on, existing, being witnessed, feeling for the first time the elation and stomach-twisting fear of that gaze. I wanted them to look at me, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to be looked at this way. Will licked his lips and breathed through his mouth. I smiled helplessly and took a step toward Jeff, but before I could get any closer, he threw an arm out.

“Get away from me, you little slut!” he shouted, swatting me away.

I sucked in a breath. Without thinking I turned, squeezed back through the caged passage behind the concession stand and ran. Past the kids and the picnic tables, around the corner and toward the pool entrance.

“No running!” the Ken-doll lifeguard yelled.

I made it to the locker room, through a minefield of soggy toilet paper clumps and into a stall that smelled like fresh urine. Miserable and heaving for air, I huddled into a ball with my whistle between my lips, and blew and blew.

JC REILLY

I AM THE BURNING WOMAN

come to set aflame
the seagrasses on the shore
old stumps and driftwood
 a row boat tethered to the dock.
Even that which is not
tinder will spark, catch light:
the cormorants the alligators
the damselflies the dog chasing
 its tail. I will burn it all.
 The house the car our bed—
our bed of bright green chintz
and yellow primrose decadence
will go first. What right
 has she to lie in wedding sheets
not her own? To burn
 them is to love them again.
I will not burn you with flame.
 You will turn ashen just the same.

K. JOHNSON BOWLES

VERONICA'S CLOTHS

While this body of work is not about a particular religious belief or canon, the series title takes its name from the St. Veronica legend. It is said Veronica wiped Christ's face with her veil during his journey carrying the cross. The image of his face miraculously left an impression on the cloth. *Veronica's Cloths* explores the residual nature of physical and emotional trauma in a contemporary context of my experience as a woman.

The works represent flashes in the mind's eye and suggest an untold drama of violation, loss, anger, grief, pain, and shame. The images are photographs of details from paintings displayed in museums. These details taken out of context suggest clues to a more complex narrative drama and beg the question, "What happened?" I am searching for truth and seeking healing from what haunts me.

Each work is a collage assembled on a vintage handkerchief in a manner purposefully pointing to that which is "grandmotherly," wise, and reflective. The unexpected juxtapositions of familiar materials, emotionally charged images, and menacing objects (insects, spiders, snakes, etc.) are designed to attract and repel the viewer.

The works are informed by my heritage as an Irish American, (non-practicing) Roman Catholic and my beliefs in feminism, secular humanism, and social justice. Writings on phenomenology, ontology, hauntology, and semiotics provide theoretical underpinnings. I admire contemporary vernacular art, Mexican retablos, religious shrines, Baroque art, seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings, Vodou, and African power figures (nkisi) of Congo tradition.

BETRAYED BY ST. AMABILIS, 2019



I SEE SPOTS (KNOCK-DOWN, DRAG-OUT),
2019



IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH (FEAR), 2019



THE LAST THING I REMEMBER



VULNERABILITY (TEARS), 2020



JAMI KIMBRELL

A TOP TEN MEMORY

When it rained when I was a child and my mama let me wash my hair in the gutter downspout, I was a movie star. I was a movie star on a movie set made to look like a waterfall. Gray and specked with chips of crackling shingles and crumbling tar, the roof runoff during any afternoon thunderstorm was more than enough to clean my entire body. I cleaned my body with a washcloth and a bar of yellow Dial soap. I stood close to the house and counted the seconds between lightning strikes. I calculated the miles between me and certain death until I was clean. At my feet I watched a river of suds carve its way through an ant hill. I watched the river of suds carry away a mangled dragonfly while my cat took shelter beneath the rhododendrons.

BARBARA DANIELS

CRACK OF DOOM

I sit among silver platters, smell
the lobelias, taste garlic in buttery sauce,
wipe my chin with a linen napkin

when up through breaking floor tiles
leap naked strangers, dancing, shouting,
jerked back from death by the crack of doom.

Shining silver drops from my hands, the table
splits, colonettes behind me fall. I too leap up.
I also dance with the numberless dead,

those who marched in every uniform,
red plumes, brown boots, those who died
three to a bed in the Hôtel-Dieu, ashamed

to be dying among velvet curtains,
hearing the groans, their own screaming,
themselves breathing harshly to the end.

The dead call, those who died neatly,
lined up by trenches, their blood
and bodies hosed away. But I refuse

to take off hot flesh like a red silk dress.
Stop the drumming. Stop dancing.
I'll start again like a washed cup.

WHITNEY BASHAW

THIS IS THE SMALL BECOMING OF A FROG.

When the rain comes
I spend my time spilled over wet tile.

Slowly lost to the world
outside the glass.

Legs enjambed,
water drops clinging to thighs and toes

with wrinkled fingers gripping the floor.
I clear my throat to break quiet.

Moss rings grow in my
kitchen jars, empty since purchase.

The apartment is humid
enough for orchids.

Air so heavy
it feels like food

and the yellow fog that settles on a mirror
after nights of slow breathing

leaves me sticky
in my skin.

I move out, in,
stinking like damp grass,

the smell that puckers the ground
with hope and morning.

I'm returning all my books to trees.
In the bath I pulp the pages.

If the rain will fall,
might as well cry,

swim, take a place
on the lily pad.

SARAH ILER

TWO WORKS

BLACK CAPPED CHICKADEE



FLYFISHO



CREATIVE NONFICTION

LISA FRIEDLANDER

SLIPSTREAMING

“Scientists do not know how the birds find that aerodynamic sweet spot, but they suspect that the animals align themselves either by sight or by sensing air currents through their feathers. . . They plan to investigate how the animals decide who sets the course and the pace, and whether a mistake made by the leader can ripple through the rest of the flock to cause traffic jams.”*

This morning I woke up remembering my great aunts Claire and Hannah who, during World War II, worked for the Red Cross, reclaiming body parts from the wreckage of bombed buildings in England. They put together, as best they could, like pieces of any puzzle, even that of lifeless bodies, semblances of wholeness. Each aunt must have developed a finely-honed eye for gradations of skin color, for the sizes of bones, for the proximities and positions of limbs around an epicenter of disaster, for items of clothing that made sense as outfits.

My mother used to call them her maiden aunts. I imagine how, bonded together in soot and sorrow and the smell of charred blood, these two sisters among nine siblings, returned to Columbus, Ohio after the war and needed each other as double mirrors: to remind themselves that they had survived, and what they had survived. They never spoke of their work unless asked, and then only in bits and pieces. I learned that Hannah had hosted a radio show while in Europe. And Aunt Claire had had a suitor, a soldier—perhaps threatening the sanctity of her lifelong, inseparable sisterhood—but things hadn’t worked out for undisclosed reasons. Then Claire got diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer.

The malignant breast, removed along with every lymph node in its proximity, left sizable scars my mother had mistakenly seen once, when she entered Claire’s bedroom unannounced. No fancy reconstruction existed in those days, so Claire wore a prosthesis, somewhat smaller than the remaining breast. My mother said Aunt Claire had been butchered. But the missing breast, to a woman familiar with the loneliness of unclaimed body parts, posed a casualty far more affordable than death. Claire faced the world with bright red lipstick and wide smile. And with a flapper haircut, her chestnut coif an angled, ear length bob, with thick straight bangs across her wide forehead. No feathering or fluff.

Because of my great aunts, it occurred to me so many years later in my

work as a therapist, with people who had survived trauma, that I could predict better and worse prognoses: better for those who felt they had participated in some kind of action, movement, or documentation to help right wrongs, than for those individuals who regretted participation in horrors that violated their own principles. For the latter, implosions of unassuaged guilt or self-hatred proved maximally harder to quiet. We had to expand the lens, beyond individual experience to the larger chain of command, the situation beyond their personal control, and the prevailing prison of narratives into which they were thrown, often armed and disarmed at the same time.

For some, I could also expect better outcomes in a form that seems paradoxical. Typically, therapists want to help victims of abuse and horror to identify as survivors. To focus on their resilience, their capabilities, and to envision future work, partners, friends, and opportunities that bring joy. But at the same time, acknowledging oneself as the victim—of rape, of intense physical or emotional abuse, or of rabid wars means knowing the monster resides outside, not inside, one's own being.

The poorest outcomes belong to those persons who have internalized a sense of defectiveness or lack of worth, or who have introjected the message that they invited what they had coming to them because of behaving badly or seductively. The shame-based nullification of one's own basic humanity and worthiness, achieved by brainwashing, secrecy, isolation and invalidation, requires a nuanced, but powerful piece of work to override or undo; to resurrect a humanly flawed, perhaps, but far less damaged image of one's birthright self—the self before everything else.

Both Claire and Hannah died in their eighties, a few years apart, having lived together all of their adult lives. I realized that finding chapters of my mother's unfinished memoir, on the occasion of her birthday, when she had been gone for four years, must have reminded me of all the lost women in my family. All these women of service, slipstreaming in the wake of those who lived bigger, more heroic lives. Never the leaders, these women encouraged, propelled, did the scut work, and cleaned up the detritus of the center stagers.

My mother had given me these memoir chapters while she still lived, but I had only skimmed them at the time. She'd written about "the good stuff," her introduction said. She promised to grind out chapters about "the bad stuff," in a future she never got around to, but acknowledged their existence for us, her daughters, who had spent our daredevil and multifaceted childhoods picking up pieces of broken glass from our father's drunken rages, and sweeping up dust hiding in the corners of the houses we moved through, in attempts to promote better chapters. But the winds of alcoholism and drug addiction blew quickly through our neat-keeping, killing our father at 44 and our brother at 26.

Among the theories of afterlives and better places, no one tells the

young that these important losses have presences that stay with you, more tortuous and infiltrating than phantom limb pain. They live in your gut, like an emotional microbiome, and inform the way you metabolize the world, see your landscape, and determine how and when your heart leaps and falls.

Maybe I hadn't initially read the memoir chapters after learning that my mother had postponed the bad stuff, because I needed to reconcile that traumatic material, to gather its missing limbs into one corpus. To come up with ways I must have participated in some kind of action, movement, or documentation to help right things, at least at some points during pivotal moments of my own life. Amid the tragedies we faced, our mother rallied us around the good stuff, and we'd toss those fun memories back and forth like beach balls: catching enough blues and stripers in our little fishing boat, the Ellen B, to stock a restaurant on the Cape for one night in exchange for a free meal; scaling the fence of our community swimming pool at season's end, to laugh-and-shiver as one reckoning with illicit entry and the embalming night air.

The neuroscience of trauma hadn't yet informed the public that we rally around the bad stuff, whether we like it or not, with our hypervigilant antennae steering clear of reminiscent triggers when we can. The good stuff moves over and around us aerodynamically and we don't have to keep it close. Every other emotion slipstreams behind fear on a trajectory of protecting our survival. It's difficult to get that leader—fear—to change places with curiosity, delight, even love.

My mother, like the excellent women before her, became a good loophole-finder and picker-upper. Her academic brilliance secured her a place among the quota of Jewish girls educated at Vassar. She read widely. She sewed Halloween costumes. She baked bread for new neighbors and grieving ones. After my father died, she pursued advanced degrees in both education and then social work. She founded a grief group and network that continued for at least twenty years past her initial inspiration. Still, she thought of herself as a backup. Someone who could, would, and did take the lead when the leader had fallen. But only then.

I wept when I read the frontispiece to her packet of memoir pieces: "How strongly they stand in the middle of their own lives, these boys and men! Heroes of their own stories, narrators of great adventures, they explore nature in boats, face life-threatening surgery; endure military service with humor and sang-froid; hang out in dictatorships and Peace Corps projects. Around the periphery of the stories there are glimpses of parents, physicians, top sergeants, girlfriends, but the boys remain central to the action. They are the CEO's; they make stuff happen! Wringing their hands, the little girls cry out their yearnings to be noticed, their longings for attention; cringe at old humiliations, anguish about not "fitting in;" endure with unspoken fear

and anger the Authorities in their lives, tell Cinderella tales. How small they seem next to the important Others!” (Ellen Friedlander 11/15/2000)

At night I turn on my mother’s lamp with a copper base, that sits on a copper plate, and used to live on a 19th century mother-of-pearl inlaid table from India, next to her reading chair. It casts a soft light, illumining the shadowy places that speak of her absence. Total darkness swallows, and morning sunlight blanches, those niches and briefly, I forget.

As years pass, I feel her inside my own body as if we are trading places, her outlived roles becoming mine in the family.

“Overall, individuals spent an average of 32 percent of their time benefiting by flying in the updraft produced by another bird’s flapping wings and a proportional amount of time leading a formation. . . . Since migration is risky—some research has found that more than one third of young birds die of exhaustion on their first trip—those that learn to fly in formation and change positions regularly can save energy, getting a bit of a free ride from flying in the updraft of other birds.”

Karen entertained the idea of bariatric surgery when no diet plan whittled her down to the size her failing joints could carry. But before she went to the introduction-to-weight-loss-surgery class, her doctor delivered the somber news of stage four uterine cancer, making the surgery moot, much less another knee replacement. At only 60, she told her husband, Ed, that she wanted a plush green, medium sized recliner, so she could look out the windows in their living room and watch the birds come and go from the Audubon feeder that had, despite its claims, failed to completely dissuade the most ingenious squirrels from sharing the plenitude. And in fact, had inspired her to research, among her many interests, the problem-solving abilities of squirrels.

Karen told her closest cousin—in her heart, a sister—who subsequently told me, that the wished-for dying chair had instead arrived as Ed’s future man cave chair—an oversized, brown, nubby thing, the fabric pilling and sticking to dry skin, electrocuting Karen with tiny static shocks; itself a secondary death sentence. So, she had parked herself on the couch instead, angling it to face the birdfeeder, and Naomi, her dear cousin, had brought plush green pillows for both ends of it. When Ed came home in the evenings after work, he would sit in the brown recliner as if it were the most natural perch in the world, as if Karen had sat in it all day as cancer consumed her, and merely yielded it to him at night.

Karen told Naomi she hated that chair, that place holder for a future in which Ed would outlive her. For a future in which Ed would sit in that chair

and reminisce about their son's wedding, or how he had cheered their son on toward future accolades and promotions.

After Naomi's vicarious trauma—feeling each tug and snarl of death while accompanying Karen to oncology appointments and arranging for hospice services—she wanted nothing more than to peck out Ed's eyes. To blind Ed, because he seemed already blinded to Karen's devotion, intelligence, artistic brilliance, and love, all of which Naomi felt. And to blind Ed on behalf of Karen, who, even in these last months, weeks, and then days, had kept her anger to herself, so as not to upset Ed. In an inevitable shifting of position, Karen didn't want to cause a traffic jam for Ed or their son as she led the way to her own funeral. Reluctantly, Naomi slipstreamed behind Karen, trying to keep ahead of her own rancor and resentment by catching the updrafts of Karen's last flight.

And when the opportunity came to speak with Ed, some months after the funeral when the rest of Karen's personal estate, including some books and paintings, was divvied up, Naomi found it impossible to punish Ed for the chair. Instead, she tried to comfort him as he expressed his monumental loss. The house felt endlessly empty, despite the ponderous un-green chair. The hallways echoed with silence instead of the music Karen always chose to go with the day, the season, or a particular occasion. The smell of oil paint lingered in Karen's art studio; some brushes still stood in a turpentine filled glass jar. These made him cry. He hadn't known she'd still painted in fits and starts, between morphine and sleep, and when he peeked into the aromatic room, he imagined for a moment she had just gone out for an hour and would return to the half-finished canvas and waiting brushes. He said he felt relief about buying her the chair she wanted before she died. Maybe Ed hadn't been selfish after all. Just clueless.

“The red-necked phalarope . . . turns the table on traditional gender roles. During the summer, male birds can be found incubating eggs and raising young. At the same time, the female birds are out strutting their stuff . . . Since female red-necked phalaropes are the aggressive maters, they instead have the showy feather garb.”

Geraldine comes in to see me for the first time. In her early 70's, she thinks she must have a deeply troubling diagnosis. She has not gotten over the death, two years ago, of her dearest friend, Penny. Her own husband, whom she despises, and everyone in her current life and workplace tell her she should have moved on, moved forward, or left her grief behind by now. She says, “I'm not going to cry.” Then, with expletives flying, she asks if it's OK to say “fuck” and any other version of it—fuck them, fuck it, fuck all. I

tell her I love words, any words, whichever she chooses. When she's finished using half a box of tissues, she says, "Oh, shit. I owe you one," in her smoked-up gravelly voice.

She'd known Penny since they were six years old, lived a few houses away. Together in their late teens, they double-dated men who also knew each other. Then married them. But Penny got the good one. Geraldine got Al who gambled away the entirety of their retirement savings five years into their marriage and spent his nights of entertainment with other machinists. And his great, unpaid debt endangered them.

Holding the younger of her two children, Geraldine opened the back door and found a dead kitten. She shielded her son's eyes and disposed of it, shaken. The next day two dead kittens lay by the back door. By day six there were six. And then her car wouldn't start and a neighbor across the street lifted the hood to find dead kittens jamming up the works.

When her children grew out of the house, she moved into her daughter's bedroom, and refused to speak more than a few words to Al for a number of years. She stopped dreaming of dead kittens and covering the poisoned soil of the backyard with new fill. But her pastor encouraged her to find forgiveness for her husband, to plumb the great depths of her emotional capabilities. She tried. But the post-forgiveness sex was thoughtless, cramped, and blighted by years of neglect. So, she took the other option and went back to her own room, and back to work in her late sixties, stashing her earnings in a private account.

Penny had been Geraldine's person; the one human being with whom Geraldine could say anything, rough-tumble or deeply intimate. Geraldine had taken Penny to all the doctor appointments and seen to the funeral. But Geraldine feels untethered as a helium balloon someone let go, traveling into unfamiliar space. There is only so much love to give new friends, with whom one doesn't share history. Only so much of oneself left, when those, whose gravitational forces held you orbiting in time and place, have vacated the world.

And just as Geraldine's anger overcame her fear of pennilessness, and she went back to work late in life, I read an online New York Times article, late February, by photographer and journalist Kiana Hayeri, and journalist May Jeong, about Afghani women, incarcerated for killing their barbaric husbands. Occasionally, that repressed anger—about which my mother spoke in her memoir, and Karen kept hidden from Ed—overrides even fear in the direst of situations.

These women, who had decorated their meagre prison rooms with handwoven rugs and draperies, emerged from their indentured servitude—the servitude of marriages to life-threateningly cruel, older men when they were but twelve and thirteen—and finally, felt safe and free for the first time.

Behind barbed wire they found the gift of each other and raised their children in this makeshift village. These brave, enraged women emerged from the trauma of their daily wars to make as beautiful as possible, this second form of imprisonment.

“Chick has been a term of endearment for a child since the 14th century. My guess would be that this is the source of the modern slang, also probably influenced by hen. . . which dates back to the 17th century. . . I suspect it is related to ‘honey’ and ‘hinny’ rather than being a bird-word, but it sounds like a bird-word, and if you’re used to hearing women called ‘hen’, then calling girls ‘chick’ would be logical.”

It’s slang to call a woman a bird. But women, like Claire and Hannah, like Karen, Naomi and Geraldine, can be slangy. Slipstreaming through an intergenerational flock of slang slingers, they wash the dead, push forth the babies, arrange the furniture, encourage the turn-tides of fortune. Beyond fight or flight, they pave the way, make villages, laugh in the morning and cry out in the night.

I think of how, in my therapy office, conversations migrate toward some close or distant place where things come together and make the kind of sense one can work with. I have a bookcase from one grandmother and embroidered chairs from the other one. I feel their presences, and they remind me of the epigenesis of behavior, ambition, mood, idiosyncratic familial traditions. I’m careful to draft behind the issues brought up by Naomi or Geraldine. I know my place, helping to put together pieces, to follow and then occasionally to trade places and lead toward a lighter, higher plane, if only for a moment. I see the V of the flock, with its singular point widening to an arrowhead. Behind, the slipstreaming followers draft, forming a chalice. Together, we sense how the journey moves us, when to deal head-on with the friction of air currents, and when to yield the hardest work. In flocks of geese, no one bird is exceptional. All cross-train for leadership and support roles. This is how we must survive.

“Our study shows that the building blocks of reciprocal cooperative behavior can be very simple. . . individuals take turns, precisely matching the amount of time they spend in the energy-sapping lead position and the energy-saving following position. . . In fact, surprisingly, we found no evidence of cheating of any kind within these flocks.”

After Geraldine flips the bird, as a demonstration of what her decades

of life say to Al, I wonder if all of us will ever sit together on that proverbial telephone wire when, after all reparations, reclamations and reformations have made us whole, we will fly toward that bright future which those of us who remain idealists, continue to envision. Leading and slipstreaming into our future we might reach a now where we no longer see little girls, “wringing their hands . . . crying out their yearnings to be noticed.”

When Geraldine leaves, I think, yes, it's possible. We live in a country where we give oppression names. In some areas of the world, oppression is synonymous with daily life. Today I'm waiting for the birds to return. It is almost spring in New England.

* ScienceMag.org, 'Why Birds Fly in a V Formation,' by Patricia Waldron Jan. 15, 2014

** The Jakarta Post, 'Migrating birds take turns leading the flock,' Feb.3, 2015

*** LiveScience (provided by Discovery News), 'Gender-Bending Bird Breaks Migration Record,' By Jennifer Viegas, Jan. 10, 2014

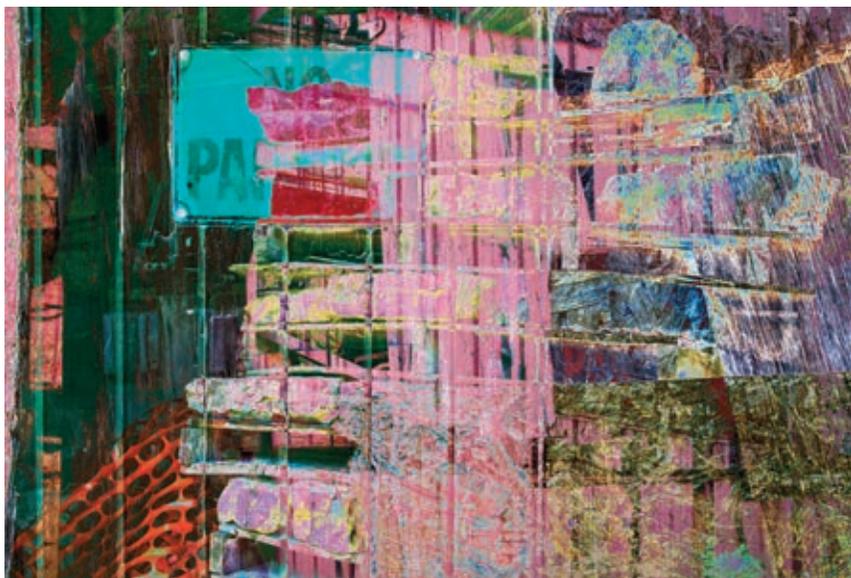
**** Wordorigins.org/Discussion forum, Syntinen Lauulu, 3/1/2007

***** Science News, 'Northern Bald Ibises Take Turns When Flying in V-Shaped Formation,' News Staff, Feb. 3, 2015

[PR] Spring 2020

CHRISTOPHER PAUL BROWN

UNTITLED FROM UNCONSCIOUS DUBUQUE,
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BIRD IN FLIGHT FROM UNCONSCIOUS DUBUQUE,
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PETER JUSTIN NEWALL

LETTER TO ASTRID

It was a typical Munich bar-restaurant: dark and close, wood-panelled walls hung with framed hunting scenes, heavy beams spanning the ceiling, even a stag's head mounted above the door. On each table stood a small vase holding a spray of flowers, and the chairs had fret-work hearts cut into their backs. The blackboard menu was chalked in florid cursive. It was very warm, especially after the snowy street outside, and the stuffy air bore the aroma of roast pork and cigar smoke.

The place was thoroughly, unmistakably German, but the two women at the table one away from Erich's were not. They were European, certainly, but their features, their clothes, even their gestures were indefinably but very definitely un-German. And they were speaking in a very un-German language, at once fluid and sibilant, Polish or Ukrainian perhaps, Erich was not sure. They were not talking loudly, but with animation, and he could hear them without effort. Their trilling voices were melodious and pleasant, sounding almost as much like music as language.

They sat facing each other across the round marble table-top, between them coffee cups, screwed-up sugar wrappers, and plates with the last sticky scrapings of chocolate torte. An ashtray held a pile of thin white cigarette ends with lipstick markings.

They were older than Erich, both probably in their late twenties, but quite different in appearance. One was plump, her face pale and smooth, with large brown eyes under soft brows and full red-painted lips. Her wide shoulders were squeezed into a grey fitted jacket, under which a black roll-neck sweater came up to meet a slight double chin. Despite the tailored coat, her appearance was womanly, rounded and feminine.

The other was thin and angular, with a sharp nose, high cheekbones, and pale blue eyes fringed with too much mascara. Her hair was dyed a harsh black. She had long-fingered hands, adorned with several large turquoise rings, which she waved in little circles while she spoke and held arched backwards, fingertips to her lips, while she listened.

Neither woman was beautiful in her own right, Erich thought, but as a pair they were intriguing, particularly sitting in this local, very Bavarian bar. And whether they were beautiful or not, there was something unquestionably attractive in the flow of their speech, the way their two voices wove in and out, each picking up and dropping the threads of their conversation in turn, like a pair of swallows circling in flight. From time to time one of them

laughed, then plunged into her next sentence, still gurgling underneath her words. Erich was glad he did not know their language. Their discussion may have been entirely banal, but as he did not recognise a word of it, he could enjoy the sound of their talk without being distracted by its meaning.

Some recorded bossa nova was playing in the background, not Carlos Jobim but sounding like him. Erich could have done without the music, because it cut across the pleasing sound of the women's voices. And in this Central European city under its heavy grey winter sky, with its dark, solid buildings, rumbling trams, and iced-over pavements crunchy with grit, the sound of bossa nova – soothing sun-filled voices, tanned girls, boys in board shorts playing guitars – didn't at all match the mood of the day, no matter how high the heating was turned up in here.

It was an accident that Erich was in this bar on this afternoon at all, and he certainly had not come here to overhear anybody's conversation. Quite the opposite; he'd come in from the street to sit undisturbed for a while, intending to write a letter to Astrid. A serious, carefully-written letter. He wanted to make some sense out of what had happened between them, to explain his position, to balance the ledger somehow. Her call from Berlin last night had been a shock. He had not understood how angry and bitter she was about his leaving. He had persuaded himself that they'd more or less agreed to part, just without saying so in so many words. But over the phone Astrid had yelled at him, cried, enumerated what she called his cruelties, told him he had robbed her and abandoned her. Taken aback, feeling defensive and unjustly accused, he hadn't been able to explain himself at all.

He'd slept badly, and since mid-morning he'd wandered round the wintry streets of Munich, criticising himself, criticising Astrid, recalling her accusations and weighing up how to respond to them. He'd decided to write to her, rather than make another phone call in which he would only get outmanoeuvred or shouted down; he was already certain, after only two days apart, that he didn't want to get talked into going back to her. As he walked, muffled up in an overcoat, beanie and scarf, he composed a letter, conciliatory and firm by turn, making appropriate concessions about his mistakes but pointing out his good intentions and generosity. Then he'd come into this bar, which he'd come across in a side street off Marienplatz, to set it all down on paper.

Even before he had written out the first page Erich sensed uncomfortably that his letter, while undeniably fair, balanced and factually correct, might read as pompous self-justification. He'd tried to amend it to make it more conversational, more intimate, but after half an hour he'd put the pen and sheets of paper aside with most of what he'd written crossed out again. Now he was sitting without thinking about Astrid or his letter to her, just listening to the foreign women chattering in their bird-like tongue.

He drank off the last mouthful of his beer; it was warm and flat. As he stood to go to the bar, his chair scraped back loudly on the wooden floorboards, and the plump woman glanced up at him. He had been wrong; she was in fact quite beautiful in her own right. Her hair, which he hadn't noticed, was dark, rich and lustrous, and her forehead was broad and smooth. Her eyes were not just brown, but a sort of honey colour, raw honey with afternoon sunlight shining through it. Erich realised he had held her gaze for too long to be polite, and looked away in embarrassment. As he walked toward the bar, he heard the women burst into conversation again; commenting on his German rudeness, probably.

He had to wait some time for his beer. The barman had just tapped a new keg, and the first couple of glasses that sputtered from it were mostly froth. Erich felt too awkward to look around at the table where the two women were seated. When he finally collected his drink and turned back, they were standing, pulling on their coats. He felt a twinge of disappointment; he had no thought of speaking to them, but their presence in this dark little bar on this gloomy afternoon had become in a curious way important to him. Their evident foreignness, their otherness, was like a signpost marking a crossing at the border of a wider world than the one he knew, a world he hoped he might enter now that he was free of Astrid.

Astrid was immensely patriotic about Germany, which was good, Erich supposed, but it meant she had never wanted to travel, or learn another language, or even read a foreign author in translation. Her blonde hair, her typical Prussian features, her accent, had actually all started to grate on him some time ago, he decided. They had been sweethearts in school, when he'd thought their love perfect and permanent, but now that he had left Astrid he understood how oppressed he had been by her small-mindedness, her provinciality, her undiluted and unswerving German-ness.

He hoped the brunette would turn her foreign gaze on him once more before she left, and just as she stepped around her chair toward the exit she glanced in his direction. It seemed to Erich that she raised an eyebrow slightly, and smiled even more slightly. Then the two women were departing, equally bulky now in overcoats and woolen hats and scarves, still talking. There was a brief glimpse of the grey snowy street outside, a swirl of cold air, then the heavy door thudded shut behind them.

Placing the tall frosted beer glass carefully on its coaster, Erich sat down at his table and let out a long breath. A lace curtain over the window beside him blocked his view of the footpath, but there was no point in drawing it aside to look out. He would never see the honey-eyed woman again. She had nothing to do with his life and he nothing to do with hers. They had exchanged two glances, that was all.

But even that brief contact with a stranger, a foreigner, had restored

some of Erich's confidence. He didn't have to accept Astrid's caustic view; he must have some good qualities. He almost winced as he remembered a couple of her more biting assessments of his character. But he and Astrid had parted now, and that was that. So far as her criticisms were valid, well, he would learn from those mistakes and not make them again. He was free to go forward, and he had a blank canvas on which to make his future. And his plan was to go somewhere other than Germany, to become more cosmopolitan, to become a citizen of the world.

Erich had always dreamed of going to Italy and Spain, but now for the first time it seemed to him the Slav lands might be interesting. Poland, of course, was just across the border, but Poland was not so foreign; half of it used to be Germany anyway. Beyond Poland lay, what? The Balkans? Bulgaria? He realised his knowledge of Eastern Europe's geography was less than perfect. Perhaps he could even reach Ukraine, which Erich had always imagined as a huge sea of yellow sunflowers. He saw himself shuffling foreign cities like a deck of cards: Belgrade, Kiev, Sofia, Zagreb, Odessa. Wherever he went, he wasn't going to stay confined here in Germany. As a qualified draughtsman, he could always get work. His future was really unlimited.

He thought again about his letter to Astrid. What she'd said to him last night was completely twisted and unfair. There was a lot he could set down in his defence; the truth was that he'd treated her very well. And the truth was also that they were not suited any more; he could fairly say that he'd outgrown her. But writing letters about a broken love affair, even if you were telling the truth, was ultimately useless. Letters changed nobody's mind, made nobody happier. They didn't give finality, they merely prolonged the pain, kept the wound open to no purpose. There was no point in writing any letter to Astrid at all. Not wanting to leave the sheets of scribbled-on paper lying on the table, he folded them lengthways and slid them into his inside pocket.

He sipped his beer; it was crisp, cloudy, locally brewed. Only Germans could produce beer like that, no doubt about it. It was just as well that there was always Germany to come home to from whatever remote lands he visited. But he would return here a very different man; worldly, sophisticated, having lived in foreign places, eaten unimaginable foreign food, drunk foreign alcohol, and loved enigmatic foreign women. Erich found the prospect ahead of him very pleasing, and took a bigger gulp of his beer.

Now that he wasn't going to write to Astrid, he had nothing to do while he sat in the bar. Erich regretted leaving the book he was reading, *Steppenwolf*, back in his hostel room. He leaned back in his chair. Someone had left a copy of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on the next table. Reaching for it, he turned to the football page. Bayern München were through to the quarter-finals again, he saw.

ACE BOGGESS

CHARLIE

When we met, it was the first time
anyone held a knife to my throat.
He wanted to steal his mother's hustle &
eyed me: trembling junkie in distress.
I let him take the passenger's seat.

He tossed his crack pipe on the dash,
patted me down for a wire,
stuck his head out the window
like a cocker spaniel, howling
at every woman we passed, his dirt-
blond hair floating like a dog's ears
while we circled the city in search of pills
needed to help me endure a day.

Improbable stereotype, exact—the kind
you see in movies before a bar fight
because he put his hands on someone's wife.

I never dealt with him again, saw him once
in jail, cleaned up, wearing wrinkled orange,
ready to go before the judge as I was,
our trajectories similar: if we fall,
the same ground waits
to greet us when we land.

SORRY

I like to think you have the best version of me,
best version left. No more ski masks
to titillate readers of the local rag,
no more chasing night through alleys of need.
Also, no more youthful vigor.
Body wrecked from years of misuse &
others spent sleeping on a stone
won't dance the Charleston
or come in even last in a marathon.
I'm sorry for that, & how passion
settles into a loamy deposit of words.
I could've roped the sun for you once,
now offer its image in a pinhole box.
Apologies for my weariness.
I share whatever breath I have &
let you hold it mutely in your mouth.

MATT GOLD

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TIMOTHY BOUDREAU

WEEKNIGHT DINNER IDEAS, 1979

Weeknight #1: Mom's home.

Mom:

- Throw ground beef in a frying pan. Salt and pepper to taste or use any other seasonings you know about or can afford.
- While the beef browns, try to figure out what the hell to do with it.
- Oh wait: prepare a box of mac and cheese according to package instructions. Add milk, whatever it says. Stir the ground beef into the mac and cheese.
- Maybe heat some canned green beans.
- Your husband and kids will have two helpings before you fix yourself a plate. Your husband will usually notice and share his second helping. He'll do the dishes because he's a good man, that's how it works.

Weeknight #2: Mom's working

Dad:

- Open the fridge to see if your wife left a casserole or something.
- If she did, there'll be a note, written hastily, but you'll be able to read it.
- Follow the instructions exactly. If it says 30 minutes at 350°, that's what it means.
- If there's nothing in the fridge, don't panic.
- Idea: slit some hot dogs lengthwise. Slice some American cheese in strips, one strip on each halved dog. Bake for 15 minutes at 400°.
- Make the whole package of hot dogs. There's no veggies, the kids are gonna love you. Save something for your wife.

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- Do the dishes before she gets home. She probably won't eat the dogs. If not, offer to heat some Campbell's soup. Chicken & Stars is her favorite.

- When she comes to bed, touch her hand. Kiss her forehead when she looks extra sleepy. She's beautiful; you love her. Try to drift off yourself. It was a hard day. You guys did a nice job.

Weeknight #3: Friday

Kids:

- Mom and Dad aren't cooking tonight, they're tired. Be prepared to eat whatever's left in the fridge in a Tupperware.

- But if the family can afford it, you may get McDonald's. It's the only fast food in town.

- Everyone figure out what you want. Big Macs, fries, shakes; keep it simple. Don't ask for no pickles, you can't expect anyone to remember that.

- Mom will call Dad; he'll bring it home after work.

- Sit at the table as a family. Make sure there's plenty of napkins. No one eats until everyone's ready.

- Your dad's hands are rough, the cracks are filled with burner soot, he never gets them completely clean. The lines around your mom's eyes deepen daily with worry about money, work, other things. You're too young to understand how happy they are that it's Friday.

- If you're smart about it, they'll be in a good mood all night. Be kind to your siblings, unwrap your meals and enjoy.

SARAH ILER

FLYFISH



DS MAOLALAI

SCRAMBLED EGGS.

it's a cafe. winter, but we're eating
outside. we've brought the dog;
they won't let us in
with her. over the carpark
birds flock in cloudlit movement—
exploding like open flowers
and closing like flowers again. starlings—

they stick around for winter.
I don't know why; suppose
they like it here. we both
have coffee. you have toast.
I have scrambled eggs
and my meal for once
looks better than yours does.
I guess there are some herbs or pepper;
it looks good, healthy and not
like something collapsed.

there's a church nearby—it's sunday,
but it's not mass-time.
birds are on the steeple, they cluster
and loiter around. they move
as seagulls land,
together, with the practiced pace
of football players. all know
what everyone is doing. you offer me a corner
of toast; I take it
without thinking about taking it.

RAMONA REEVES

FAMILY DOLLAR

I'm unboxing hair care products when the baby kicks, as if protesting my life choices. He doesn't know about my plan to get a GED or to learn to cut hair, but you can't be too hard on someone who's dangling by a thread inside you like a creature from a space movie. It's the sort of thing Sims might say, and at work sometimes I can't help but think about him. He liked to talk of stars and space and all those tiny lights gleaming and twinkling, teasing us with a shimmer we could never reach.

On the last night we were all together, Sims said, "Out there is a blooming new galaxy." Sims was my pretend daddy, my mama's second husband, after the first one had run off. On days when we ate and slept enough, with the weather warm enough for bare feet, Sims talked a streak to the four of us—me, Mama and the two littler ones we called "the twins."

"What would you know about galaxies?" Mama asked him on his last night.

The sun was dropping into the trees and hiding, a time I liked best. The chunky extension cord that stretched a good hundred feet from the landlord's house to ours softened to a custard yellow, and our shed, set back in the overgrown rye grass away from the well-kept lawn, looked like the painting of a small country house you'd see in a Hobby Lobby. Inside our shed were fold-up cots, a mini-fridge and a tiny TV with aluminum antennas. Sometimes I imagined we lived in the big house with closets full of clothes, a kitchen big enough for a table and chairs, a bedroom full of toys, and all manner of indoor plumbing.

"Galaxies are up there by the thousands is what I know," Sims told Mama. He pointed at me and the twins. "Now if you stay in school, you'll know plenty more."

I think about school that year, how Mars dangled from fishing line tied to a coat hanger. The whole solar system dangled that way near my teacher's desk. Sims had dropped out after eighth grade and worked odd jobs until he landed the one stocking inventory at the Family Dollar, about a half hour from Meridian, Mississippi. But his job could never support a regular house, an apartment or even a trailer. It being the modern era didn't matter. Living proper takes money, and it wasn't until Sims met Bill Mason that we found a steady place for the low cost of one hundred dollars a month, plus a little extra for electricity and water.

Anyone might think it a terrible way to live—my baby's daddy did—but I

remember it fondly. The three sheds sat far enough apart to play jump rope between them, and long, thick extension cords ran a straight line to each from the main house. Behind the sheds, we all shared an outhouse and a portable hand-washing station. Every morning, rain or shine, I pumped a pedal to fill my cupped hands with water to wash my face and brush my teeth. Once a week, I entered the big house for a proper shower in a bathroom added off the kitchen for Mr. Mason's tenants. And I have to give it to Sims; while living in the shed we didn't go hungry or need to pack up and leave in the wee hours. All of third grade passed with the same nice teacher. It was the year I learned to connect letters and words on a page and write my name proper, which is only right for a person with goals. And it's all because of Sims.

On nice nights back then, we liked to sit outside on a blanket after dinner and stare up at the sky. "No one on earth can own the stars," he said that last night. "Not even the richest man." He throned the only camp chair before cracking open a cooler and pulling out a beer, his first in a long while.

"Mr. Mason don't allow alcohol," Mama said. "You know that."

"Who's gonna tell if I have just one?"

When I heard the words, I turned to look at Mama. Our brown eyes, hers a greater degree of tired, said all there was to say. Sims was a hungry raccoon and no amount of yelling or pot-banging would deter him. The thing was, when it came to finishing a six pack, Sims succeeded every time.

Mama tried again. "We got a good home now, and you're steady at the Family Dollar."

Sims put the can to his lips and gulped, thirsty for what came natural. He crumpled the can with his hands and tossed it to the ground.

"What if the Carlyles hear?" Mama asked. The Carlyles rented the shed to our left. The shed to our right had been empty for weeks. The Carlyles, a couple in their late sixties, had run into a batch of medical bills that took everything they had. They rarely went anywhere at night and never looked at stars.

"A man's got a right," Sims said, "to feel he owns the world for just one night." He picked up the cooler and told us he'd be inside.

Mama spread wide the folded blanket she'd been using as a cushion. Her tank top hung loose when she bent to smooth each corner, but even when she stood straight up, her top hung too freely, as though it couldn't quite find her body. Pieces of her wavy brown hair nipped at her face. Other strands, spurred by the humidity, sprung into wiry curls, and I thought it might be nice someday to wash and comb her hair.

The buzzing of cicadas grew louder and drowned out my worry about Sims as I crawled onto our blanket bursting with arms and legs. I was glad to be outside with Mama and the twins. I felt strong, ready for my tenth birthday, and dreamed about a new pair of flip-flops topped by plastic

daisies that would pretty my toes. The four of us stared up at the sky for a long time before eventually letting the night lean heavy on our eyes.

Early the next morning, before the sun rose, we woke and moved inside to our cots, but we found no Sims—not that night, the next night or the ones after that. Mama learned he'd lost his job, and soon we went from wondering about the universe to wondering about the writhing in our bellies. For a time, Mama settled us into a Salvation Army in the city, until she found a job holding road signs for a highway crew and made enough money for an apartment.

I used to wonder what Sims would think of me as I grew into something new, my body tingling with gold dust. Maybe he would've told me not to spread out on a blanket with a high school boy or two, not to let them kiss me for so long, not to lay naked in the moonlight, not to be fooled by all that sky—none of it for taking.

I wonder now what he'd think about me stocking inventory at the Family Dollar, my belly like Jupiter and this baby in me asking questions about life and how we're gonna eat and sleep. My baby's daddy says he'll help, but I think he's helped enough.

I place my hands over the ball in my middle that was once flat as a window pane, and tell my little spaceman, "Someday we'll live in the country and look at the stars and you'll grow up to be an astronaut." I like our talks and often add that after I've been cutting hair for a while, I'll buy a little house or trailer, and me and him can sit outside at night and ponder the universe—the whole lot of it—just spinning and spinning and growing and breaking off, as if there's nothing better to do after all these gazillions of years, but I don't add this part because he moves inside me, restless with questions.

"I don't have all the answers, Little Sims," I say. I haven't told Mama I'm naming him after Sims, but she's remarried and raising the twins and can't be bothered with me and the little room I rent. Sixteen is plenty old enough to do what I please.

I step outside to take my break and look up at the stars. "We're going places," I say. Little Sims is quiet, and I decide he likes his name.

My grumpy manager pokes his head and his beer gut out the back door and says, "You already took your break, Renee. Quit your daydreaming and get back to work."

"It ain't day so I can't daydream," I whisper before returning inside. The manager has told me pregnant and poor is all I'll ever be, like he knows everything. I got goals, but it's true I need to save more money.

I decide that once I'm finished stocking the hair care section, I'll look up Mr. Mason on my phone. If I'm lucky, he'll still be renting sheds.

ERIC WEIL

A FRAYED COLLAR

In the museum of lost household actions—
dialing a rotary telephone, ironing sheets, repairing
a small appliance with screwdriver and pliers—

my mother sits in the heat of an incandescent light bulb,
turning the collar on one of my father's shirts,
carefully ripping and pulling the thread, then sewing it

back on, frayed side under, to gain another year
before consigning it buttonless to the ragbag, where later
my father will grab it for waxing the car.

A MOUSE IN THE GARAGE

We pulled in last night and saw it
scurry along the back wall
and disappear under the workbench

like a frightened phantom.
Sadly, I baited a mousetrap
with peanut butter. Sometimes

we can't accommodate the desire
to live and let live. As I emptied
the trap this morning, and the corpse

fell into the ivy along the back fence,
I thought of the words that let us
distance ourselves from taking a life:

rodent, pest, vermin. Words
no mouse deserves merely for having
the bad luck to live among us,

and I wished the barred owl
I have heard in the neighborhood
had been a bit more efficient.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

JERI GRIFFITH

ISLANDS

Heading to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts by ferry.

The dock, the pier from which we will launch. Wood pilings extend deep into dark water—gray-green weathered, showing grain, revealing stress, all held together by massive, rusted bolts. Across the way, scaffolding of boats. Rigging and supports bisect and cut the sky into segments like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. The mooring ropes are the color of weather, shades of fog.

We are aboard now and moving out over the water. Churches on shore thrust their spires toward the sky while the sound of a distant bell echoes and reverberates around us. Bird motion swings and sways in unrepeatable patterns as gulls cry overhead. Across the aisle from me, a baby whimpers. The mother takes a bottle from her bag to quiet the child.

Somewhere, it is raining, but not here, not now. On another day, it will rain because that's what it does. The sky weeps walls of water. I do not weep. I almost never cry any more. It's as though all my tears were spent in my youth. My early life was marked by personal difficulty and tragedy. When I was in my thirties, two family members were murdered in separate violent crimes. It took years for me to come to terms with those events.

And that's when I stopped crying. I came to believe that the most important thing was not the capacity to mourn but the capacity to go on and to find reasons for living and living well. A cormorant flying parallel to the boat dives deep only to resurface nearby. Catching sight of it thrills me. I love to watch birds. It may sound like a cliché, but for me, birds are like hope with wings.

The ferry leaves a white-water wake behind us, energy that spreads out and dissipates. I'm remembering another ocean moment, seaside really—I was looking out over the water from the shore. It was in Greece, in Nafplio on the Peloponnese. I was 21 at the time. The setting sun, a sky of blood, licked the dark arm of land. The bay of water, blue-green, turned black as night fell. A single boat made its way toward port, its sail a marker on the darkening sea, its whiteness indicating dimension and scale.

The boat seemed as nothing out there in all that vastness. I watched as darkness engulfed the small craft, and the sail simply disappeared. At that time in my life, I loved writing long letters describing my experiences in poetic and dramatic terms. I could easily have dramatized this moment as

the end of an hour or of an age. I might have imagined myself an island in a vast sea of darkness.

In reality, I didn't feel like an island in a vast sea of darkness. I didn't feel alone. I saw myself as an almost boundless being connected with everything. I was passionate about the sea and the sky, even more passionate about my many friends and lovers. My arms were always open. There was no edge to experience, no end to my quest.

After the murders, I found myself in quite another kind of mental space, a place I couldn't shape with lovely words or deep thoughts. Even tears had little effect since they couldn't raise the dead or change anything about the circumstances that had led to those deaths. Shipwrecked and isolated, I couldn't easily return to my former glorious states of mind. I felt marooned. I'd lost my whole way of being.

When the castaway finished the last of his wine, he sought refuge in a subterranean vault. There, he drank water from an underground stream. The water made him forget his homeland. He even forgot that he was now here alone. Suddenly, everything spoke to him; the ceiling and walls of the cave, and every grain of sand beneath his feet had a word. Outside again, in the light, thirst now quenched, he held up his ten fingers and found that his hand was transparent as glass. That was when he knew for certain there was no going back. He was here for good.

A seagull skims the water's surface, daring the small, white-capped waves to touch her flight. On the horizon, there are no fixed points. Oceanic spaces can seem very powerful, as if they contained all the pent-up energy of God. I watch the gulls dip and dive. Twenty more minutes into port.

The island is in sight and soon, we'll disembark. A lighthouse thrusts up its white-barreled building atop a green point. The sea swings and sways. I am happy to be here, ecstatic even. The dark times marked me but like the tide, they also receded. I rediscovered my poetry. Eventually, my island-self set sail. I began to love the world and the people in it once again.

During my lifetime, I have fallen in love many times, sometimes with places but mostly with people. For me, love, at least the falling in love part, meant intensity—a kind of hyper-awareness, and memory—remembering words, body language, and the inflection of the person's voice. I loved—sometimes long and hard, sometimes short and sweet, sometimes with joy that could easily turn to bitterness and disappointment.

Here, I'm not talking about the kind of love aimed at sex, marriage, and the development of an exclusive relationship. I still fell in love even after I'd been happily married for years. I sought deep friendships with both men and women. I was looking for transparency, for a more complete knowledge about the other person, about who they were, what they were really like, and about what had happened to them. I was ready to share myself, too, but

things didn't always work out.

Even now, an old friend is on my mind—someone I once knew or thought I knew or perhaps did not know at all. I don't know if we are friends anymore. We haven't had any contact for a long time. I suspect she told me too much and then had to withdraw from all those things she couldn't face.

Intimacy can be complicated. From a very young age, I found that people tended to confide in me. Something about me led them to believe they could tell me anything, even bad things. I would absorb and hold their experiences like a sponge holds water and nothing would ever leak out. It didn't leak out. I was never a gossip.

Over time, though, I learned that receiving people's confidences had its downside. These were precious possessions retrieved briefly from protected areas, zones where other people simply weren't tolerated or allowed. By listening, I could easily become the invader and armed with such personal knowledge, I might then be a potential threat. To love, to seek a deeper level of honesty and sharing, demands faith in both ourselves and others. It's a risk, a lot like setting sail on an unknown sea.

Arrival. On Martha's Vineyard, the sand beach gives way to a narrow strip of worn stones—pure white quartz stained red with iron, hard and yet smooth. I pick up a stone. How long did it take to make this pebble? The breaking off, breaking up, and beating—the processes of geology and geological change, our planet working through its life cycle with its activity fired by a molten core. Beyond the high tide mark, the grassy lea and the beach community. Weathered cedar shingles on grand houses. Streets lined with shops filled with t-shirts and swimsuits.

It is all so specific, so actual, and yet later I will leave wondering if I'd dreamt this place. Was this island really here? Was I here? Coming and going, I remember my name, the word I am known by. I recall also the names of all the companions who have shared time with me, the ones who sailed alongside me for a week or a year, those who are still with me and those who are no longer around. The ocean makes me want to tell a story, a kind of island tale. I'm visualizing a woman in a white dress.

Beneath the language of sleeping birds, that waiting woman fingers her collar. She wears only cotton and then only white. But someone is about to approach her. Someone wants to tell her about color and bring her news of the wider world. He wants to undress her, to fondle her breasts, to press the dark triangle of her sex. And she will allow this, not because she believes in her beauty, not because she is seduced in any way, but because the world is watery and wide, and that ocean is her home.

Is she me? Am I her? I don't know, but she feels very real. Maybe the castaway has already found her and is preparing to make love to her. Perhaps they will live their dream together forever in some oceanic place. In

the watery world, almost anything seems possible. And probably, in the end, that's why I go there. I can't accept being islanded. I have to reach out. I must expand my horizons.

MATT GOLD

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TOM DALEY

CLAIRE DE LUNE, REDUX, ORANGE CENTER ROAD

Lingering, like bleached flakes
smearing their want

over the slate steps, the gardens
dry to a crinkle

while the wind, a heavy
venture, turns its trawl

and lowers its roil. Over
us all there is one rumble,

one catch in the soundboard
as it snubs or bundles

drained light. Here, where I
learned exultation

and procrastination, crescendos
of flannel and elastic

still cradle and wreck. The old
fireplace, fitted out those days

with wrought iron and hardwood
more fragrant than a wound,

now is screened by a grate
barring the missing children

from plunging their famished knuckles
into the swollen flames.

THE COLD FRONT

A thunderhead hauls air from behind Portsmouth to our north off the back of an enormous weather. Across the Gulf of Maine, the cold front collides with the high haze. You have landed on this island full of candle stubs and decommissioned depth charges, stately, locked against infatuation. I watch you stride off the boat, tall, broad-shouldered, your moustache and goatee prickling against the narcotic effect of your luminous eyes. When I walk into the stone house you are ensconced in a wing chair, attending to some casual trouble at the foot of your griefs. I practice your name and feel the bitter potency of your locked-down turbulence. Your irises freckle with dust motes. The colored particles whirl with slow motion across sunbeams that beg their way through filthy glass. We share that awkward telepathy of two players in a pantomime who have forgotten their cues.

Later, you sit in during the class. You are the only one who can explain the difference between a heart attack and Russian roulette. In your own class, you offer the biography of phrases such as “suit of light” with which you stun my attention. When you sing, you shuffle your words into muffled queues, race between ache and shoofly shy. Your voice startles your high notes and chills them into whispers. The hair on my fingers stands on end from start to finish. I bless this cold front for it has doused the electricity that kept my inner ear vibrating to you without respite or shock.

ANDREW R. HEINZE

MASHA: CONDITIONS IN THE HOLY LAND

CHARACTERS:

Masha: (female, late 30s) A Russian prostitute in Jerusalem

Joseph: (male, early/mid 30s) A lonely American Jew

SETTING: Jerusalem, Israel. A room in a cheap apartment building. The room contains a bed, a bedside table, and a chair. On the bedside table is a bunch of money. In a fourth-wall window is an air conditioner.

AT RISE: Masha is sitting on the bed, wearing a nightgown. Joseph paces. He wears shorts, a tee-shirt, and sandals.

JOSEPH: No, I won't leave!

MASHA: You must! I told you, Joseph, one hour only!

JOSEPH: You're not getting rid of me.

(pause)

It's so hot in here.

(JOSEPH points to the air conditioner.)

JOSEPH: Isn't that working?

MASHA: She works like weather. Not according to expectations.

(JOSEPH rises, paces, returns to his seat.)

JOSEPH: What do you mean, you're going away? Where? Why? You can't go away! I need you!

MASHA: You know me six days only.

JOSEPH: How many days does it take to need someone? I was meant to be here with you.

(MASHA gestures to the room and grimaces.)

MASHA: Here? Vision is OK? Mind is OK? How can you say, is meant for you to be here, in room like this, with me, prostitute in holy land?

JOSEPH: I told you. I couldn't live like that anymore, in that... that... soul-sucking isolation. Can you imagine being in a business where everyone cares about only one thing: to get whatever they can out of you?

(MASHA gives him a gently wry look which says, "Yes I think I can imagine that.")

JOSEPH: Oh. Right. Stupid question. I just mean, no one ever looked at me. They only saw what I could do for them. You look at me. You look at me.

(pause)

I was lost. So, I left. Why did I come here? I don't know. This is where lost Jews go. And you found me.

MASHA: No. I did not found you. I sit next to you on bus. It was accident. Only accident. What if Arab blow up bus and we both dead now? Would be meant to be? Or would be accident? Accident.

JOSEPH: It was no accident. The night before I met you on that bus, I had a dream. I was at work, at the studio. People were all around me, pulling at me, at my arms, at my legs, at my feet, at my head. Like rats. I screamed for help. An angel appeared. She hovered over me and smiled -- smiled exactly like you -- and lifted me on one of her wings. We rose higher and higher. The people faded like dots. And one thought came into my mind: This is a holy place. Miracles can happen here.

MASHA: Only if angel has strong wings. If not, holy land full of holes. Angel drops you and you fall into deep hole here.

JOSEPH: Talk to me. Please.

(JOSEPH puts money on the bedside table.)

JOSEPH: I'm paying for another hour.

(pause)

Please!

MASHA: Americans is such crazy people. Yesterday you come for sex, today you come for talk. You pay one hour for talking in me, and you talking one hour. Now you paying second hour for me to talk in you?

(JOSEPH is about to speak, MASHA overrides.)

MASHA: You know how I tell who is Americans? Three things.

JOSEPH: What?

MASHA: Teeth is one. Americans has teeth like in heaven. On earth teeth is crooked and yellow. In heaven and America, no. Teeth is so perfect and white, they making me almost blind to look at them.

JOSEPH: I--

MASHA: --Second thing is: Americans always leaving big tips. Not like Jews and Arabs and Russians -- they always wanting deals. I tell them, you wanting deals? This is Jerusalem, so go pray to God for deals.

JOSEPH: I'm Jewish.

MASHA: No. You are American.

JOSEPH: I can't be both?

MASHA: No.

(JOSEPH puts more money on the table.)

JOSEPH: There's another fifty. Just to talk to me!

MASHA: You know what is third thing?

JOSEPH: *(Impatiently)* What?

MASHA: Only Americans pay for talking. My opinion? They always lonely. They want love, but I only have sex for them. So, they try talking. Then they go home to America to make more money to be lonely again.

JOSEPH: This is different! There's a connection here, between you and me. I know it. I feel it. I'm not here for a pill, I'm here for my life. I paid for an hour to talk to you, but I did all the talking.

MASHA: Of course, you did all the talking. You did all the paying.

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JOSEPH: Talking means both of us. I want to know about you.

MASHA: Listen, Joseph. This name is really your name -- Joseph? Or is made up for special occasion like this?

JOSEPH: It's my name.

MASHA: OK. Joseph, listen. You are young man still. How many years?

JOSEPH: Thirty-five.

MASHA: Thirty-five years old man is a young man. In America thirty-five years man, there is for him so many possibilities of love. You have still life in front of you.

(pause)

My advice? Go see the beautiful things here; the Old City, yes, it is beautiful, and the holy places. Go see the Sea of Galilee and Dead Sea. Go to the beach at Aqaba and see the beautiful red hills of Egypt. Once upon a time, I also saw these places. So go see them. Then go home and find love in America. This is no place for love.

JOSEPH: I'm not here for sightseeing. I'm here for you. I want to talk to you. With you. I want to talk with you. For the first time in my life I feel alive. Here. Here with you.

MASHA: You watching too many movies. Men always falling in love with prostitute in American movies. Even when movie is sad like The Taxi Driver. Have you seen this movie, *The Taxi Driver*?

JOSEPH: I don't want—

MASHA: --Very violent—

JOSEPH: --To talk about movies.

MASHA: True picture of ugliness.

JOSEPH: I want to talk about you. No, I want to listen. I want to hear you talk. Really talk. To me. From the heart.

(Long pause, as MASHA gets off the bed and paces, nervous from the pressure of the request.)

MASHA: You telling me you . . . You telling me I . . . I should talk in you.

JOSEPH: To me.

MASHA: To you. Talk to you.

JOSEPH: Yes.

MASHA: You want this very much.

JOSEPH: I do.

MASHA: More than sex? I give you sex. Right now I give you. Then you go.

(MASHA approaches JOSEPH and puts her arms around him.)

JOSEPH: More than sex.

(MASHA releases JOSEPH.)

MASHA: Maybe you not understanding something.

JOSEPH: What?

MASHA: Maybe you not understanding what it means, if I talking to you what is in my heart. Not talking stupid things, wee-wee-wee, bla-bla-bla, like people think is talking. Talking really. Talking from heart.

JOSEPH: OK. What does it mean?

MASHA: It means my way.

JOSEPH: I don't understand.

MASHA: My way. If I talking to you really, I can do only if by my way.

JOSEPH: Of course. You talk however you want.

MASHA: No, still not understanding, you are not. I talking only under . . . what is word? . . . sounding like this thing.

(MASHA points to the air conditioner in the window.)

JOSEPH: The air conditioner?

MASHA: Conditioner! Yes. If I talking to you from heart, must be under my conditioner.

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JOSEPH: Under your conditioner? . . . Oh! Under your conditions. That's what you mean.

MASHA: Yes. Under my conditions.

(pause)

Yesterday, you come for sex with me. I give you how you want, yes? You pay me money, I do how you want, yes?

JOSEPH: Yes.

MASHA: This is your conditions, yes? Same as conditions every men who pays me do sex for them. Conditions is, man pays, Masha do what man wants, no questions, yes?

JOSEPH: OK. Yes. I guess that's how it works.

MASHA: Example, yesterday you wanting Masha sucking how you want, not how I want to sucking. This is my job, which I know to do it right. I do it now two years long.

(pause)

Other world, other life, I was important person, important human being, I had real job. More than that. I had profession. I had real name, not Masha.

(pause)

So you holding Masha by head and moving head this way, that way, because you wanting no opposi . . . opposi . . . what is word?

JOSEPH: Opposition?

MASHA: Opposition. No opposition. This is your conditions.

JOSEPH: Yes, but--

MASHA: --Is same for me.

(MASHA takes the money which JOSEPH had put on the table and hands it to JOSEPH, who receives it uncertainly.)

MASHA: Here is money. My money. For one hour I pay. For talking to you.

(MASHA goes to a closet; JOSEPH watches, puzzled. She returns holding a length of rope in one hand and a kerchief in the other. She displays the objects.)

MASHA: Here is my conditions.

JOSEPH: What are those for?

MASHA: You say you want to listen, only to listen, yes?

JOSEPH: Yes.

MASHA: For listening you need only hearing. No speaking. No walking out of room.

(MASHA holds up the kerchief)

With this you don't speaking.

(MASHA holds up the rope.)

With this you don't walking out of room. IF you still want I should talk to you. If not, please to return my money.

(JOSEPH stares at the rope.)

JOSEPH: OK. OK. But we don't need those things! I promise I won't interrupt. I promise I won't leave.

MASHA: These is my conditions for talking. I pay you to do how I like. Take or leave.

JOSEPH: *(pause)* All right. I guess even miracles have conditions.

(JOSEPH offers his wrists to MASHA, who ties them gently but firmly to the chair.)

MASHA: Is OK? Not too tight?

(JOSEPH nods.)

MASHA: No one ever calls me his miracle. Only you. So, you are ready to listen to your miracle?

(JOSEPH nods. MASHA binds his mouth with the

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kerchief and returns to the bed.)

MASHA: You are nice man. Human man. Maybe even good. I doubt it. Anyway, nice. . . . Now I talk to you from my heart. Unfortunate to say, my heart she is no longer heart. She is stone. She is dead.

(MASHA reaches under the bed and brings out a large pistol.)

This gun, you see it?

(JOSEPH nods upset at the sight. Long pause, as MASHA stands and moves around, preparing to talk.)

MASHA: She is empty.

(pause)

Why do I want empty gun? I tell you why. One hour, I finish talking to you, I leave this place, I cross street where is soldiers on duty, I point gun to them, I scream something and the soldiers they kill me dead in street. Bim, bam, boom.

But now, now I explain. I explain why I do this terrible thing, why I make eighteen-years-old Jewish soldier boy shoot thirty-eight-years-old woman dead in street. I explain how I come here from Russia with husband, Jewish husband, like you, Jewish man, and children, my children, how I lose everything, how they saying I am not wife under conditions here . . . how my husband he leave me for Jewish wife, how they take my children, how they take my honor. Now I am hating everything in this place, hating these Jews, hating these Arabs, hating these Russians, hating God, hating deals, hating to live one more day.

To you I make my -- how you say? -- *final confession*. One hour.

(MASHA looks at the clock on the wall.)

Now fifty-six minute. . . Introduction is too long.

(with a faint smile)

Joseph, dear Joseph, never ask Russian to speak from heart. Is big mistake. When American is speaking from his heart, he is telling you how to live. When Russian is speaking from her heart, she is telling you how to die.

(Lights fade out.)

DOMINIQUE REVELLE

CECROPIA MOTH



EMPEROR MOTH



SORAMIMI HANAREJIMA

CARRYING CAPACITY

The microbes were engineered to eat bad memories, with their metabolic byproducts then serving as fertilizer for the imagination. They worked. Worked wonders, in fact, unobtrusively cleansing our minds of events we wished had never happened—hordes of these silent, little predators like stealthy sanitation teams.

Soon, they developed a taste for bad ideas, and we only made good decisions.

Later, they ate bad dreams, and we slept soundly.

Eventually, they began eating good memories, and we became forgetful.

Until someone figured out what was going on. The microbes had multiplied and were running out of bad memories, ideas, and dreams to devour.

So we had to think bad thoughts for them to eat. It was hard at first, getting used to thinking that way, and it is still hard to do, to think of some awful thing. But in seconds, the terrible thought is gone, like it had never been thought in the first place.

Now, we do this at least seven times a day. Some people prefer the packets of horrendous photos they can simply look at instead of imagining something terrible. Whether you come up with them yourself or pay someone else to, these briefly abominable things are but a small price to pay for a halcyon past, good behavior, and sound sleep.

CLAIRE SCOTT

I AM TRYING TO LOVE YOU LESS

I see you forget
the name of your favorite cake
that I made this morning
yet you thank me, touch my cheek
I see you forget
if you have taken your pills
two pink, three white each morning
I see you walk stiffly, slowly
stumble over curbs
trip and fall and fall
scrapes on elbows and knees
trying to hide them from me
but I see, my love, I see

You bring me morning tea
with a sliver of lemon, a gentle kiss
I see your hands shake, the tea splash
I read the doctor's report buried deep in your drawer

Yesterday you brought me alstroemeria
the long ago flowers I carried
in a country church with a priest
who stank of garlic and called me Carol
I remember urgent sheets in our tiny room
where the sun baked all afternoon

My heart clenches with all the tiny dyings
I pull away to bypass grief, to staunch unshed tears
I am trying to love you less
but my love you are making it hard

SARAH FIRTH

WINGS

You got a fast car. I don't know how to drive, but I know how to sit in the passenger seat with a white-knuckle grip on the door handle as your lead foot prompts the engine to snarl. You laugh at me, reach out to comb through my hair, scratch your painted nails against my scalp. You laugh and call me baby girl. Your baby girl.

My heart is a hummingbird when I put my hand on your thigh, but we can touch each other in your fast car. I can curl my fingers under the frayed denim cuff of your shorts because no one is here but us. We fly down midnight's inky black streets and it's the closest we'll ever get to having wings.

Wings would take us away. Wings would make us free.

On nights like these we drive fast and far. Rubber tires spit the gravel of backroads behind us and the path ahead feels vast and open. You park the car under a big oak tree and climb into my lap. I hold your hips and your lips are as soft as mine. They taste like cherry and the windows fog up with the heat of our truth and you make promises of someday, someday. I bathe in your promises until the sun touches the horizon with streaks of pink and it's time to drive back into the cold light of day.

I say we'll never have wings. You say we will. I don't argue, because you have wheels, and wheels can make us big in the dark if they go fast enough. We could go anywhere, be anything. We will. That's what your promises tell me.

I know those promises aren't yours to keep, not even when you mean them with everything you've got. I know that, for now, I'll go home and skip the creaky step as I climb the stairs to my room. My fingers will still smell like you when I fall asleep, and when I wake up, I'll wash you away.

At lunch, I'll sit next to you on the picnic table outside the gym. You'll eat your sandwich and I'll doodle on your arm with a blue sharpie and pretend I don't know the taste of your skin.

I want the future you paint for me, one in which we don't exist in perpetuity caged by other people's smallness, one in which we live our life in more than stolen moments. I want more than midnights and fast cars. I want the world, as limitless and beautiful as it looks with the windows down and the pedal to the metal. I want the wings you promise.

MICKIE KENNEDY

BREAKING POINT

My mother spent my teenage years saying
she couldn't take it anymore, but she did.
She had no choice but to take it
7 days a week.

Chugging coffee over the sink
before her commute to work, looking out
the back window where the sun would cut
into the morning. A lit cigarette
in the ashtray beside her.

At night she'd make a pot of spaghetti
swollen double size on account
of the hour on boil. A sheen of grease
on the sauce from the ground beef
she never drained.

Among the days of taking it were the nights
of vodka roulette, I never knowing which
mother would show up:

The funny mother who slurred her words
and danced me into the dining room
where the good china would click
in step with our feet.

Or the other one who knew how
to exact the maximum pain
per square inch of fingernail.

She was some kind of crazy I promised
myself I'd never become.

There are a lot of things we shoulder
that if we were asked we'd rather decline:
a night lost in the woods, a month
spent nursing an incision where a fist-sized
mass of cancer has been removed.

The phone calls where it's obvious
her memory is skipping stones across a pond.

To her, my daughter is always in the sixth
grade, not in high school. My son
still plays with toy cars she sends
and the tooth fairy leaves you money
for your teeth rather than taking a wrench
to your jaw because you took too long
to find the TV remote.

Unable to take it, she continues even now,
rolling down the window of her car
as she gives the woman at the pharmacy
her order: *Big Mac, no pickle, fries.*

LINDA KING

NIGHT SOJOURN



VENUS UNDERWATER



TRUTH



MILLIE TULLIS

MORMON PIONEER YOUTH REENACTMENT

we good
girls pushed
and pulled
handcarts down
one hill
and up
another
holding two
pound flour
babies on
our hips
we wore
long skirts
pale cotton
flowers
floppy bonnets
we and our
mothers sewed
to match
the leaders
said we
pulled
to honor
the pioneer
women who
carried on
even after
their men
joined the
Mormon
Battalion
our own
congregation
of boys
waited on
the last
hill wide

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brimmed hats
in hands
when we
stopped
pulling
pushing they
offered each
girl a
little red
draw string
bag
its belly
full on
a few
red pebbles
and one
paper slip
teaching who
can find
a virtuous
woman for
her price
is far
above
rubies
little girl
bodies shining
with sweat
good red
virginity

FEEL LIKE A BIRD

my second
singing voice

mother named
my *pretty voice*

childsoft
falsetto

i thought i invented
airy sound

she called
my *pretty*
voice darling

hysterical
let me sing
even when they

stared
in church
i do not know

what kind of bird
she imagines

for this voice
this is a poem

i don't say

be more specific

or offer
a Veery

is polyphonic
makes songs
in both lungs

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splits sound
down the mouth

world's smallest
duet

while i have lost
almost all
my range

THANK YOU LORD FOR FRUIT

is there anything prettier
than a grape

water you can bite
the Amazon is burning

and i buy
blueberries

i have not eaten them
the last blueberries

i bought
would not rot

when left
on the counter

all day
did not taste right

i do not know
what they were

not blueberries
i know nothing

about fruit
how everything

moves i mouth
the world

take my belly
of stones

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ACE BOGCESS is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Misadventure* (Cyberwit, 2020) and *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018), as well as two novels, including *States of Mercy* (Alien Buddha Press, 2019). His writing appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *River Styx*, *RHINO*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

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CHRISTOPHER PAUL BROWN is known for his exploration of the unconscious through improvisation and the cultivation of serendipity and synchronicity via alchemy. Over the past three years, his photographs were exhibited twice in Rome, Italy; in Belgrade, Serbia; and throughout the US. His series of ten photographs, titled *Obscure Reveal*, was exhibited at a Florida museum. His works appear in the books *Tusis*, *Manipulated Images*, and Manifest Gallery's *INPHA 7*. He earned a BA in film from Columbia College Chicago in 1980. He was born in Dubuque, Iowa, and now resides in North Carolina.

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TOM DALEY has been inspired by the anthology *A Celtic Miscellany* (translated by Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson); Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred*; the poetry of Lucie Brock-Broido, Atsuro Riley, Sylvia Plath, Pablo Neruda, Gwendolyn Brooks, Emily Dickinson, Robert Lowell, Arthur Rimbaud, and Aimé Césaire; Thomas McGrath's *Letter to an Imaginary Friend*; and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*. A machinist for over twenty years, he now teaches writing workshops online and in the Boston area. His poetry has been published in *Witness*, *North American Review*, *Fence*, *Crazyhorse*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere.

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SARAH FIRTH is from Ottawa, Canada and has been passionately writing and sharing her stories with the world for years, focusing on themes of mental health, sexuality, friendship, and all the delightful and terrifying complexities involved in the intersection between the three. Personal achievements include having birthed human beings from her own body twice and surviving the battlefield of raising them long enough to discover her queerness and rediscover her love of writing.

LISA FRIEDLANDER is a psychotherapist in Massachusetts and an essayist, with an MFA from Solstice at Pine Manor. She's passionate about making connections, not only with people, but finding the isomorphic themes

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between disparate realms of experiences and knowledges. Stories often come together like quilts rather than linearly; and are co-creations with clients, and co-creations with many sources of inspiration in writing. Recent work appears or will appear in *Shark Reef*, *The Forge*, *Pink Panther*, *IO Lit Mag*, *Wild Roof*, and *PROEM*.

MATT GOLD is based in Brooklyn, New York, where he divides his time between music and photography. As evidence of the democratizing nature of his approach to photography, he has no formal training in the visual arts. His first image, a picture of his cat on a Sony Ericsson Z310a flip phone, was taken in 2008, and he has continued to explore the aesthetic possibilities of that instrument, resisting the updated phones and apps available and revealing a contemporary nostalgia that encompasses the prolific imagery of our visual culture. His work has been featured in numerous publications and journals.

JERI GRIFFITH is a writer and artist who now lives and works in Brattleboro, Vermont, after stints in Boston and Austin, Texas, but her childhood was spent in Wisconsin. These disparate places each feel like separate countries to her, with landscapes, seasons, and ways of being that influence both her art and her identity. Jeri has published stories and essays in literary quarterlies, including, most recently, *Sky Island Journal*, *The San Antonio Review*, *The Green Briar Review*, *The Antigoniish Review*, and *Hunger Mountain*. She is currently working on a memoir and a collection of short stories, as well as organizing exhibitions of her art.

SORAMIMI HANAREJIMA Fascinated by the ways in which the literary arts can serve as a mode of metacognition, **SORAMIMI HANAREJIMA** writes innovative fiction that explores the nature of thought and is the author of *Visits to the Confabulatorium*, a fanciful story collection that Jack Cheng said, “captures moonlight in Ziploc bags.” Soramimi’s recent work can be found in *Typehouse*, *[PANK]*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Firewords*, and *Tahoma Literary Review*.

ANDREW R. HEINZE Formerly a tenured professor of History at the University of San Francisco and an award-winning non-fiction author, Andrew Heinze made a radical career change, becoming a playwright about ten years ago. His plays have been produced across the country, have won many awards and honors, and have been anthologized in such volumes as *Best Women’s Monologues of 2019* (and 2015 -- Smith & Kraus), *The Best Women’s Monologues in New Plays, 2019* (Applause Theatre & Cinema Books), and other anthologies of new plays. Andrew is Dramaturg of the American Renaissance Theater Company in New York City; he is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America and PEN America.

SARAH ILER lives and works in Blacksburg, Virginia. In her free time, she enjoys writing and other creative pursuits. She previously had artwork

published in *Ponder Review* 3.2. She also had one poem published in the second issue of the online literary magazine *The Stirling Spoon* and two poetry fragments published in the online journal *Passaic / Völuspá*.

MICKIE KENNEDY is an American poet who resides in Baltimore County, Maryland, with his wife, husband, son, daughter, and two feuding cats. He enjoys British science fiction and the idea of long hikes in nature. His work has appeared in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Artword Magazine*, *Conduit*, *Portland Review*, *Rockhurst Review*, and *Wisconsin Review*. He earned an MFA from George Mason University.

JAMI KIMBRELL is a mother of four and a trial attorney practicing in Tallahassee, Florida. She also holds a B.A. degree from Florida State University in Literature. Her short fiction has appeared in *Word Riot*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Vestal Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *New South Journal*, *Tin House Online*, *Fiction Southeast*, and the *Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. She has poetry forthcoming in *Birdcoat Quarterly*.

LINDA KING received a BFA from the University of Tennessee in 2001 and an MFA from the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University in 2007. Her work has been exhibited at the Blütenweiss Gallery in Berlin, Germany, and the Union Street Gallery in Chicago, Illinois. She teaches college art appreciation and humanities courses online. She received an Assets for Artists matching grant in 2011 and an individual artist grant from the Berkshire Taconic Artist's Resource Trust Fund in 2015.

TUCKER LIEBERMAN is the author of *Ten Past Noon: Focus and Fate at Forty*. His photographs have recently appeared in a dozen journals, including *Barren*, *Crack the Spine*, and *L'Éphémère*. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia. His website is tuckerlieberman.com.

RICHARD MANLEY After two decades of success as a commercial writer, Richard started a second career writing stage plays, which he has been doing full time for the past twelve years. Richard's plays have been produced in New York and a dozen other cities. He has won or been a finalist for numerous awards in various competitions, including the Ashland New Plays Festival, the STAGE Award, the John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award, the Pillars Prize, the Getchell Award, American Association of Community Theatre, UCM, Child's Play/YETI, and the Woodward/Newman Award.

DS MAOLALAI has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love Is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

SARAH MILLS is a poet, essayist, travel writer and editor based in Italy. Her poetry has appeared in *Panoply*, *Poets Reading the News*, and *Ink and*

Oil, a publication by the Kuwait Poets Society. Her articles on culture in the Middle East have been published in *Al Fanar Media* and *Culture Project*. Much of her work explores the intersection between identity, current events and art.

PETER JUSTIN NEWALL was born in Sydney, Australia, where he worked in a Navy dockyard and as a road-mender before taking a degree in law, but has since lived in Odessa, Ukraine and most recently Kyoto, Japan, where he sang for a popular local blues band. He has been published in England, Hong Kong, the USA, and Australia. His stories “The Luft Mensch” and “The Chinese General” were each nominated for a *Pushcart Prize*. If he could have written any one novel, it would be Joseph Roth’s *The Radetzky March*. Some of his published stories can be found at <http://peterjustinnewall.blogspot.com.au/>.

RAMONA REEVES grew up near Alabama’s Gulf Coast and now lives in Texas with her partner. Her fiction has appeared in *New South*, *Ninth Letter*, *The Southampton Review*, *Pembroke*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Gris-Gris* and others. She’s won the *Nancy D. Hargrove Editors’ Prize*, been runner up for the *Barry Hannah Prize in Fiction* and received an honorable mention from *Glimmer Train*. She recently completed a novel told in stories and is working on a second novel in between teleworking and looking through her telescope on clear nights. Find her online at ramonareeves.com and on Twitter at [@ramona_reeves](https://twitter.com/ramona_reeves).

JC REILLY’s most recent collection, *What Magick May Not Alter*, will be out in April 2020 from Madville Publishing. She serves as the managing editor of the *Atlanta Review*. When she’s not writing, she plays tennis or practices her Italian (badly). Follow her on Twitter [@Aishatonu](https://twitter.com/Aishatonu).

DOMINIQUE REVELLE is an artist based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has been painting and drawing for as long as she can remember. Growing up in rural Colorado, she spent her time outside as much as possible, riding horses, skiing, and going on adventures. She has a degree in painting from Southern Oregon University. She loves to work in various mediums and is currently painting a series of endangered pollinators.

CLAIRE SCOTT is a recently retired psychotherapist who enjoys having more time to write, take long walks, and try to stay ahead of the weeds. She is excited to be spending more time with her five grandchildren. She is an award-winning poet who has received multiple *Pushcart Prize* nominations. Her work has been accepted by the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Enizagam*, and *Healing Muse*, among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to Be Called* and *Until I Couldn’t*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters’ Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

BRITTANY TERWILLIGER grew up in the Midwest and graduated from Indiana University. She is the Managing Editor at *Pithead Chapel* and the author of the novel *The Insatiables* (2018), published by Amberjack Publishing. Her short fiction has appeared in *Ghost Parachute*, *Five:2: One Magazine*, *New Pop Lit*, and elsewhere. She lives in New York.

MILLIE TULLIS is an MFA poetry candidate at George Mason University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Mud Season Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Juked*, and *Ninth Letter*. She reads for *phoebe* as assistant poetry editor. She can be reached on Twitter @millie_tullis.

ERIC WEIL's poems have appeared in journals ranging from *American Scholar* to *Poetry*, from *Main Street Rag* to *Silk Road*, and from *Dead Mule* to *Sow's Ear*. He has three chapbooks in print and lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.