



COSUMNES RIVER
Journal

SPRING 2019 » VOLUME 13



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The *Cosumnes River Journal* is published annually by the English Department of Cosumnes River College, Los Rios Community College District, 8401 Center Parkway, Sacramento, CA 95823.

To contribute poetry, short stories, essays, interviews (or other creative writing), black-and-white photography, and other visual art, please visit us at cosumnesriverjournal.submittable.com/submit.

For more information or to view our archives, please visit us at cosumnesriverjournal.org.

COVER » » » LEAH DOCKRILL » » » I AM WHAT I AM

BACK COVER » » » LAURIE-LYNN McGLYNN » » » SAND

tribute

This year we dedicate our edition to all of you who are writing and exchanging ideas with other writers—and readers. To this end, we share a draft we generated in our CRC writing group, Write Now. Practicing what we preach—related to the joys of writing and the importance of engaging regularly in the process—we meet monthly to break bread and draft to a prompt.

In February 2019, our Write Now group, consisting that day of: Jose Alfaro, Naomi Bahm, Jessilyn Gale, Lesley Gale (prompt leader for the month), Norman Hom, Cath Hooper, Heather Hutcheson, Erica Reeves, and Christina Washington generated an exquisite corpse poem we share here with you.

the day the music died

The strum of the strings, no melody brings.
Play me-out of tune. Maybe what you're hearing
is not me, is what you think of me as music.

What are you hearing that brings
music to mind? It may be all
in your head, as a sound I have not made.

Maybe it's the music of the spheres,
or the hip-hop of the heavens.
Maybe it's jazz of the gem-colored skies,

or the pop of the pine-crested Rockies.
There's something about that view
that puts me at ease. The long wide stretches

of clouds and sky bring me freedom.
Being alone with the wind arouses all of me.
Can you hear the tune carried by the breeze?

Can you?

Thank you for sharing your words and art with
us; thank you for enriching our lives.

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and supporters and for the many writers
and artists who submitted their work for
consideration. Thank you.

special thanks

Edward Bush, President
LaTonya Williams, Dean,
Humanities and Social Science

funded by



president's message

Congratulations to the *Cosumnes River Journal* on another exemplary edition that highlights the work of CRC student writers and artists as well as others from all over the world.

This year's section on the theme of "plenty" features a range of emotions—from satisfaction to saturation, from ecstatic jubilation to resignation. The 2019 *Journal*, our thirteenth edition, is brimming with plenty of evocative and stunning new stories, poems, essays, and pieces of art; it is a collection to satisfy the senses.

The *Journal* is one of many examples of the creative opportunities we provide our students at CRC to engage in the arts. The *Journal* now has a greater presence on the web. You can find it at cosumnesriverjournal.org.

I encourage you to take some time and read the great work of our students. They have poured their hearts and creative energies into this literary publication. Their skills, talents, and learning are manifested here.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Edward C. Bush'.

Dr. Edward Bush
President

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EVIE GOLD

Give Me Back

Give me back the long nights with no curfew, when we lay underneath the big white moon, planning our future together as soon as we could leave home and live together. I'd know now to savor the innocence of our dreams.

Give me back the night you told me you forfeited going to college to stay with me. I'd know now that instead of being charmed, I'd kick your butt into going.

Give me back the day I held the Ecstasy pill in my hand, and you assured me it was a good idea. I'd know now what they say about spiraling out of control.

Give me back the moment in the hospital when the doctor came out to deliver the news. I'd know now to go in and hold your hand instead of walking out the door because I'd thought I'd had plenty of time with you.



APPRIA NEGRETE » » » FEELINGS

JOSEPHINE BLAIR

Woman

she is behind me scalping fresh garlic
or cracking yolk skins, building
delicate watchtowers, white cities
in the valleys of her palms.
there is not a word for the way
this makes me feel, like the lighthouse
so small on the edge
of her thumb, slipping
ever so gradually into history
with each gentle wave in her wrist.
the kitchen hums and miles away
we're tumbling, warm like sun yawns
dripping into first snow, warm
like first love, fresh out the dryer.
the song i am playing is called
this will destroy you. i swallow it
like a memory. i'm not sure
how to fit lips around my breathing
anymore. she is behind me, slipping
out of my gray wool sweater, settling into
floorboards appearing beneath me, she is
so Woman
the house is rebuilding itself.

MICHELLE BROOKS

We Deliver to the World

It's nearing the shortest day
of the year, the light the color
of amber, and my life feels like
an adult dragging me along as I
struggle to keep up, worse for wear.
Images flicker around me, promising
things will be different this time.
I hesitate before the window in this
cold ICU room, stare at the flower
shop across the street, and notice
clouds forming in the distance. A man
down the hall screams, *Is it my time?*
Are you going to take me now, Jesus?
while Tom Cruise saves the world
on the small screen, noise intended
to mask the beeping of machines.
The flower shop sign says, We Deliver
to the World! which I assume contains
this room where I wait for nothing good
to happen because that's all that's left to do.

ELAINE OLUND

Under an Empty Sky

I dream again of the strawberry fields,
the ones near Pajaro Dunes, in the fruit bowl of California,
a desert forced to kneel down and bloom
silvery apparatus wheeling across the fields spraying water
rainbow streams in the sun
dozens of workers, dark-haired, brown-skinned,
many just children,
though my brother insists they are all just so short,
short is all—no one lets children pick strawberries,
but even so, they seem so small in the dream,
crouching in the heat of the dry rows watered yesterday,
plucking one by one berries sun-dried,
red and glistening as a bloody nose

Pajaro means “bird” in Spanish, but here:
no birds, no bees, no mosquitoes, no flies, even—
just an empty summer sky
and the sound of the highway—

in the dream we stop at the wooden shack
at the intersection of two dusty farm roads,
buy three pints for three dollars

three pints full
they smell sweet

delicate little miracles
plump and round as angels' hearts
and our mouths water—we want
to devour them right there

but the ghost of my sister suddenly appears
(even though she is not dead)
chiding us
to wait, wait,
wash them clean with tears
and pray for forgiveness
three times
before we eat



Don't Be Long

Matthew's hand slipped, and his body fell, sliding down the slimy stones of the tunnel's angled surface. He screamed in the darkness.

Alex spun around, wedging himself inside the slippery tunnel. Behind him, the sun burned the stones. He let himself slide down the tunnel, controlling the descent with his hands. He caught up to Matthew; the boy's fingers slipped on the slimy stones.

Alex seized his younger brother's wrist. "I've got you," he said. "I'm not gonna let you go!"

Matthew panted, chest heaving in and out, body resting in the slime. Matthew got his feet under him and held on to the cleaner, drier rocks near his head. "Okay?" Alex asked. Matthew nodded.

The tunnel shook, and Matthew slipped again. Alex caught him but lost his own footing, and both boys slid a foot down the tunnel. They looked back, and the rattling chains sped their hearts.

Matthew struggled past Alex, climbing over him with wide eyes and a heaving chest. Alex squeezed to the side as his brother advanced. "Go!" Alex said, looking over his shoulder. Nothing heaved itself up the tunnel at them.

Alex pushed Matthew. Their soiled feet slapped in the muck, and grimy hands gripped the rocks. The circle of orange sky grew bigger with every step, from the tiny pinpoint of color shining on their dank, murky, dark home, into a dinner plate, or a big coin, or a bright ball. They climbed, and the tunnel shook again.

Alex's cracked, calloused hands tightened on the rocks over his head even as his feet slipped on the rocks below. He slid back a few inches, righted himself, and picked his next footfall with greater scrutiny. Ahead of him, Matthew sped as fast as his emaciated limbs could manage.

A wet, sucking sound fired up the tunnel at them, and Alex put his hand to the little bit of chain he had saved, tied around the cloth covering his privates. The damp, cold iron comforted him, and he squeezed it for a second before climbing again. He caught up to Matthew and urged him on.

A rush of moist, hot breath, carrying the scent of mud and maggots, surged past them, ruffling their long, tangled hair. Matthew gasped and scurried ahead without care for picking the right handholds. Alex squeezed his eyes shut, refusing to look back, and jammed his feet and hands to the surface of the tunnel in case Matthew lost his grip and slid backward.

Ten feet separated Matthew from the opening to the sky, but as they got closer, the angle changed. It tilted up a few degrees, but Matthew's progress slowed and then halted. Alex reached him, and they paused to suck breath in and out. Behind them, mud slid over mud in the darkness. A long, deep groan vibrated the mouth of the tunnel.

"I'll help you up," Alex said, "and then you help me up."

Matthew nodded, shaggy hair bouncing. He started scrambling again, and Alex wedged himself where the angle changed and pushed Matthew from behind. The little boy found a tiny spit to hang on and reached for the exit, almost five feet over his head. He grunted at Alex, and Alex grabbed his feet with both arms and tried to lift them. Matthew's hand went a half-foot closer to the exit.

Alex's foot slipped, and he slid a few feet down the tunnel. The moist breath blew up at him, then sucked back down, smelling his sweat.

Matthew fell a few inches and caught his hand on a rock, small

dirty feet digging for purchase. He found it, then gritted his cracked teeth and growled at the circle of sun he had spent his few years admiring. He surged upward, scrambling with every thin muscle he had, and when his hand wrapped around the edge, he howled with triumph.

Matthew disappeared over the edge, and a moment later his wild face blocked the circle of light. The little boy stuck his hand down and waited for his big brother.

Hot air blew past Alex, and his head jerked to look back.

Rings of teeth, descending down a smaller, narrower tunnel of gray flesh, writhed its way toward him. The rings of teeth squeezed and surged, and a sphincter behind the last row opened to expel putrid breath. Long chains of iron ran over the gaping mouth and around the immense sides of the creature. Alex pulled the final link of chain out from its resting place and swung it. It cracked against the stones, and the worm hesitated. Alex swung again. "Go!" he shouted at Matthew. "Run! Find mom and dad! Leave me!"

Matthew retracted his open hand and shot it down again, fingers splayed and a resistant scowl on his face.

The worm pushed toward Alex, layers of its mouth opening and closing as it tasted the air rolling past his body. Alex swung the chain again, turned and scrambled to the tunnel's change in angle.

Iron scrapped against rock, and a deep groan followed him. Sharp teeth glinted in the sun. The worm shrank back; then it surged forward again, taking up the entire tunnel. Alex swung his chain, and the mouth closed for a moment, turning into puckered, withered lips. He swung again, and the lips closed once more.

Five feet above him, Matthew stretched his hand down.

Alex climbed as high as he could, using the smooth, slimy rocks and bits of stone, and the worm followed, endless groans escaping its mouth as more of its body came into the sunlight.

Alex swung his chain an inch from the mouth. It shut, and he stomped on its surface, launching up with all his might and catching Matthew's hand. He threw the piece of chain down, and it struck the mouth, which opened wide, throat oscillating as the worm writhed. Alex grabbed the lip of the tunnel as Matthew fell backward. Both hands wrapped around Alex's. The older boy pulled himself into the sun and tumbled out of the mouth of the tunnel; both boys rolled down the muddy hillside and fell into the small stream.

The cold water covered their skin, attacking the grime of years. The sun blinded them both, and the fresh air filled their lungs. The clear water dazzled them. The plants and sky exploded with color. Matthew groaned and covered his eyes with one hand, running the other through the stream over and over. He buried his face in it and drank.

Howls and shrieks came from the mouth of the tunnel. Alex's hand found a smooth stone under the stream and squeezed around it. The dark opening shook.

The sounds dwindled and died.

Alex sighed and let the rock splash into the water. Matthew grinned at his older brother, face shining and wet. Alex leaned back in the water, tears running down his face from the bright orange sky. Laughter bubbled up through his chest and out his mouth. A few minutes later, still laughing, the boys walked hand-in-hand along the path they had taken years ago when they had gone looking for earthworms for fishing. Their parents had said don't be long years ago.

Who's Your Daddy, José Flores?

When you are a retired widower in Toronto, even your birthday is just another day. It's ten o'clock, and so far, the only greeting I got was from my goofy cousin in Poughkeepsie—the one who signs all his e-mails, “Just pickin’ my feet/Ned Willard.” Curse you, Popeye Doyle!

So here I am, in the Canadian Tire, Westside Mall, trying to pick the best dishwasher detergent, and suddenly “Over the Horizon” blares from my right pants pocket. For all of you iPhone snobs and technopeasants out there, that's Samsung's standard ringtone. That means that some stranger is dialing me—and going straight to voicemail.

If I understand correctly, a Ms. Lester wants to contact me because my son, José Flores, frequently skips school. One problem—my name is Gus Schleuter. My grown son, Albert, lives in Burnaby, BC. Apparently, I must contact Westside Secondary School to resolve the issue.

Since I have nothing but time, I buy a large box of Finish, stow it in the trunk, and drive down Eglinton Avenue West. I just happen to forget how the Light Rail Transit construction jams up the street, which means that I arrive at the office in a nasty mood. When asked to state my business, I reply, “To worship the ground that Stephen Harper walked upon!” Needless to say, they did not appreciate my reference to the graduate who became our prime minister.

Ms. Lester was summoned to clarify the situation. She believed that José supplied phony contact info, which turned out to be my telephone number. Instead of pointing out that I am not the teen's daddy, I replied, “Doesn't my little *Josélito* want me to be his papa?” The homeroom teacher, being an even bigger smartass than I was, replied, “No self-respecting hip-hop kid wants Mike Pence for a father.” Damn, I thought that having white hair at 70 was a good thing. I tell her that “I am not the father that he wants—I'm the one that he needs.”

José Flores happened to be in the cafeteria that afternoon—for the company, not the food, I suppose. As he was joking with his friends, I yelled, “José, pull up your pants, put down that hoodie, and ditch that stupid earring!” The boy, like any self-respecting youth, pointed out that I am not his real father. I whipped out my smartphone and played the telltale voicemail as Ms. Lester and Vice-Principal Braithwaite approached.

As I left the building, my mission accomplished, I heard “Home When” by Sparrows on the Hood. My real son just called to wish me a Happy Birthday.

MARIO LOPRETE » » » FABRI FIBRA



Forever Yours, Mr. Carter

It's him. It has to be him. I recognize the back of his silky, tousled hair, its tips brushing gently against the collar of his crisp, white shirt. I hear the charming chime of laughter escape his lips and see the way he adjusts his patterned tie, whilst swirling his blood-red wine around the glass that he holds carefully between his fingertips. I can almost picture the confidence and charisma oozing out of the veins that snake underneath his cold, thick skin as he captures the attention of the Bambi-eyed female sitting opposite him. Her blue eyes, surrounded by a black, thick kohl liner, mist over in awe. Her gaze fixated on the sunken dimples in his cheeks and the dark, sooty stubble scattered over his tanned chin. I know it's him, Christian Carter.

My eyes are roaring flames, dancing and flitting around my surroundings. I don't fit in here with my tangled hair and unflattering tracksuit, which displays the creases of the loose skin hanging around my stomach as a result of my pregnancy. I know it's there for a reason. It's there to remind me of what I did.

I'm slouched on a stool by the bar, glancing half-heartedly at the several empty glasses that are gathered around me. I trace my finger in and out of the grooves on the wooden surface, allowing my thoughts to drift. The beer has risen to my head. I told myself not to do this tonight.

"Can I get you another?" the lively barman asks me, grabbing the pint glasses, clinking them in unison. He already hovers near a clean glass because he knows what my answer will be. It won't be any different from the countless times he's asked me before. I nod and mumble something under my breath, fumbling in my pocket and pulling out a crumpled five.

I can't help but stare at them. I should be sitting there, soaking up every inch of his caramel skin, breathing in his musky scent. I bought him that crisp, white shirt and that patterned tie. I was his everything—but now, everything is gone. I can't let him see me. He warned me last time he would ring the police if this happened again. I promised, but I was crossing my fingers. I won't leave him alone until I finish what I came to do.

I wrap my fingers around the fresh pint with such great force that froth spills over the edge and trickles between my fingers. There's a shuffle of chairs, and he helps her put on her jacket. Her butter-gold blouse brushes softly against his chest. She tosses her honey-colored hair behind her shoulder, the tinkles of her giggles ringing in my ears. This is my chance; I have to take it. They head to the car as I follow behind them, possessing what can only be classed as a sickening sense of excitement, my beer abandoned and waiting to surprise the barman. I lurk in the shadows, watching Christian swing his car keys between his fingertips and the lady totter in her patent heels, waiting for the slam of his navy BMW doors.

Despite being close to eleven at night, the temperature at the peak of June doesn't fail to register its presence. The remnants of a muggy, unbearable heat lingers in the air, and along with the sour taste of beer in my mouth, I feel clammy and frustrated. I hear the rev of Christian's engine—he always was a show off, after all—and the car purrs out of the pub.

I trail behind his car down an everlasting road and one I don't recognize. My head pounds. Several times, my vision becomes nothing more than a series of blurs, and the car swerves abruptly until I jerk the steering wheel back in control. I've always had a problem with alcohol. It's why Christian divorced me. It's how I lost my baby.

A few miles later, I see the warm glow of his rear lights vanish into a turning. I slow down and gradually make my way up the road, using a weakly-flickering lantern outside the property to guide me, and, sure enough, the navy BMW is there—in prime position.

Hastily, I open the glove box. I rummage in a chaotic mess of empty pill bottles and prescriptions and rusting coins before I find what I'm looking for. I open the car door, inch by inch, and leave it open—it would make too much noise to shut it. If I'm seen, everything is over. I creep towards the BMW, twisting the cap of my tin of lighter fluid, and using my other hand, slide open my matchbox, staring at the three single matches with dissatisfaction. I'll have to sacrifice my midnight cigarette.

I have one chance to get this right—one chance to get my revenge. He left me when I needed him most. What's more, he blamed it on me. My drinking and my smoking killed our baby, he told me.

To my delight, the backseat window is open slightly, and although I'm immersed in complete darkness, I gently tilt the tin's nozzle into the car, feeling the weight of it decreasing as its contents soak the interior. I swipe the chosen match against the matchbox, and an amber flame sparks immediately, curling around the wood, devouring it. Without a second thought, I toss it into the car; then I run towards my safety. I crouch down, feeling the heat of the roaring flame against my skin.

A minute later, the fire is high in the air, licking up any remains. The front door swings open, and Christian sprints out, shouting expletives that are silenced by the crackling of the raging fire. I notice the devastated look overcome his face as he watches his beloved BMW burning to pieces. I soak up every moment of his priceless despair. He should realize how it feels to lose something you love.

I'm expecting his lady lover to run after him, but there's no sign of Bambi-eyes. I think he realises this at the same time as I do because his gaze turns hollow and meaningless. Then, I see it. Among the wreckage, I see a charred hand lying on the gravel.

MICHAEL DEMARANVILLE

Familiar Faces in Shanghai's Masses

Nearly thirty million
people, every morning at eight,
teeming out of these termite towers,
packing into business buses,
packing into public transit,
pouring onto sidewalks
like rubble, tumbling
to our final
resting places.

Fellow travelers,
shoulder to shoulder,
passing without seeing,
intersecting without connecting,
accompanying without speaking.

Morning after morning
at the bus stop,
fur-lined mint hood
wreathed round a flat face.

It was the mint coat
standing there, day after day.
How many times had I
walked on by before
the cold called my attention?

Four wintry months—
no hello,
nor smile,
not even a nod of recognition.

Here comes the second
in her favorite comfy
brown pants, returning from dropping
her elementary-age child, whom
I've never seen, at school.
She is always returning;
I am always going
daily cross intersections.

Wading through the curving metal
stream, I see him, my oldest companion:
blaze of ginger
fading freckles
slight favoring of his left leg
same knee-length
charcoal jacket.

three familiar faces—

Tomorrow:
a nod
a smile
a hello.



GUILHERME BERGAMINI » » » ENGINEER DOLABELA

OWEN SMITH

The Mad Dog of Midtown

His eyes were unwavering, like steady beams of light coming from the hood of a car. I wish I could say that it's unusual, but there are thousands of people who lurk and stare in a place like New York City. I often ignore them. After all, we can't expect everyone in an overpopulated city to have all of their marbles, can we?

Just last week I dealt with a woman who had to be off her rocker. She was a lady in uniform, which sounds sexy, but that isn't always the case, believe me. We met when I was spending time at the lounge, and before I knew it, she was asking what she could do to "*make me more comfortable*," if you catch my drift. It's a nice change to be chased rather than chasing a dame, but men are hunters, after all.

Nothing beats when she flat out asked if I wanted her to "*warm me up a bit*." I know I'm handsome, but talk about moving fast. Even I have higher standards than that. When she left to get me something to eat, I rushed out and fled down the stairs. Not to be rude, but I'm not great with telling a woman that she needs to buzz off. I figured she would get the hint. When I got close to the door, I dipped my head low and hid underneath a hat I found on a bench. I'm not a thief, although

I did feel pretty slick. You just have to do whatever it takes to dodge someone that's batshit and won't leave you alone.

But that was days ago. I've been casually going about my business since then. The only thing that had been nagging me was this goddamn toothache.

I could feel it with my tongue, rocking it back and forth. It wasn't a wisdom tooth, but one of the ones just before on my left side. It was looser than a hooker in Harlem and felt as if it could fall out at any moment. I'm not exactly sure how that happened, though.

I felt my tooth starting to throb when that bastard began staring at me. It was raining that day, so I found shelter underneath the base of a fire escape in an alley. The dumpster behind the Thai restaurant was overflowing with food scraps. I could smell the roasted peanut oil mingling with curry, roasted peppers, and coconut rice. I have always had a very strong sense of smell.

Each raindrop pinged off the rusted metal bars that connected along the fire escape. Ominous clouds swarmed over the brick buildings in the alley. Each building stood tall with a beautiful pattern

of red and brown that led up to the overcast skies.

I heard rustling behind the dumpster. A loud crash alerted me, making the hairs on my back and arms stand upright. I clenched my teeth, preparing to leap if necessary. It turned out to be nothing more than a stupid cat snagging a piece of garbage from the dumpster. I shouted at the feline, and it stared at me with a condescending glare. I ran at it until it faded in the darkness further down the alley.

That's when I started to get really agitated. I turned around and saw that freaky bastard *still* pummeling me with his eyes while heavy drops showered down on me. He was sitting at the bus stop by himself, of course. The local crazies don't keep good company with others, and I'm sure no one wanted to sit near him either.

I decided to leave the alley once the rain let up. I turned towards Lexington until I caught that man's eyes challenging me once more.

As I've already told you, there are people who stare, and people who STARE. I was tired of his crap and tired in general. It had been a very busy week, and my toothache reverberated through each nerve in my face.

So what did I do? I began to stare back. Two could play at this game. Why should I feel inferior to him because he was being aggressive? I could tell by looking at him that I was bigger, stronger, and most definitely faster. I had as much of a right as he did, if not more so, to be out in public and enjoying a shitty day.

But staring back seemed to make things worse. A woman came over to sit and wait for the bus too, setting her umbrella down beside her. I felt as if I could smell her Chanel perfume cascading off her skin and into the breeze. She wore a heavy raincoat and tall boots. I saw my *admirer* lean over and nudge her with his elbow. It seemed as if he was pointing at me, and the two of them started to laugh. Their cackling blasted as loud as the car horns that echoed through the streets. It perforated me straight to my core. All control I had over my joints and muscles was extinguished.

Before I realized it, I was charging at this man. I lowered myself down on all fours and galloped my way across Lexington Avenue. They were startled and stood up against the glass panes of the bus stop.

I could tell that my howling was intimidating him. *What a pussy!* My top hat flew off my head and blew away with the wind. Rain drops that landed on trees flew into my face like bullets firing at a mob. I hung my mouth open and sucked them in, moisturizing my tongue as I charged at my victim.

My howls grew louder, sounding rabidly delightful. The woman ran off, but the man stood frozen.

Not so tough now, are you? I thought.

I lunged at him, using my hind legs to propel me into his torso. I tackled him to the ground, rolling him over onto his back. He frantically put his hands in my face, trying to push my mouth away. I continued to flap my jaw shut back and forth, chomping away. Saliva dripped down my chin and onto his button-down shirt.

I bit down on his index finger, and he released a piercing scream. He hooked his finger out of my mouth, and my throbbing tooth wiggled free and dropped to the floor. I howled at the top of my lungs before biting down on his arm.

I felt two sets of hands yank the back of my collar, tugging me so I would jump off my prey. I was slammed into the ground, my face becoming one with the cement. The smell of filthy concrete swam through my nostrils, chewed pieces of gum and dirty shoes. I felt someone's knee press down into my lower back. I arched my neck and howled once more.

"I think we finally got him," I heard someone say. I turned my head and saw that he was one of two police officers.

I snarled my face at him, shaking my head back and forth, trying to tear at the seam of his pants with my mouth. He kicked his leg free and took a step back.

"Are you all right, sir? Do you have any idea why this man came at you?"

I tried to shout *because this lunatic was staring at me like a crazy person for the last half hour!* But it was clear that neither of them understood my barks.

"I've been sitting here, waiting for the bus," he said. "I didn't do or say anything. I didn't even notice this guy until he charged at me on his hands and feet."

Not notice me?!

I howled and spun on my side, using my feet to kick my body around in a circle. There was no way in hell that I was letting this jackass pretend like he was sane when I knew damn well that he was just like every other crazy person I've encountered in this city.

"Sir, we believe this is an escaped patient from the Manhattan Mental Health Center. You might have seen or read about him. The papers call him the 'Mad Dog of Midtown.' He's mentally ill and believes he is a dog. You're the fourth person he's attacked in the last week."

"Jesus Christ," sighed the man.

I was thrown in the back of a truck. I was certain that I would be put down for misbehaving on the streets, but I was taken back home to my white room instead. Although I had snuck out, coming home actually felt rewarding. I was back with a roof over my head and had someone waiting to greet me with a very warm blanket.

"I've been so worried about you," said my nurse, patting my blanket. "I went to get you some crackers when you were in the lounge, and before I knew it, you were gone! You must be so cold having been out in all of that rain. Let me wrap you in this and warm you up."

I hopped off my hands and feet and landed on the bed. I circled the center of it four times and collapsed into a heaping mound of exhaustion. She wrapped the blanket around me and brought over a large glass of water that I lapped up instantly.

I rolled over on my back, and she scratched my belly. My leg kicked happily.

"We're going to have to find a way to teach you to stay in your room. You need to start listening to us when we tell you that you are not ready to leave yet," she said.

Doesn't she already know? You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

TRAVIS STEPHENS

Painting the Muse

Begin with black, I suppose,
for lush hair and
snapping eyes.
Blue-black, my dear.
Load the brush with sunlight,
try to warm the tone, capture
that arc of eyebrow. Give her a
glass of wine, a tumbler of
whiskey, a shot of rye. No
martini, no careful concoction
for this goad of mine.

Look, I'm not that good at pictures,
but I would recognize her laugh
in a stadium. The rarest victory is
to coax a smile, not just tolerant
but *j'amuse*.
There are days now when the sun
cannot fall fast enough. Cover this
day in darkness; let the rain fall.
My muse remains intolerant of fools,
romantics, or liars;
worse, she is alive, very alive...
but not here.

ERIN FORD

Gordon Ramsay

This morning my hair was Gordon Ramsay.
And the mirror reflected a screaming Scotsman.
I grabbed the paddle brush, ran it through.
No luck, still Gordon.
I sighed, I frowned.
Looked even more like Gordon.
Ran the brush under the faucet and tried again.
Some tamed strands.
More water, more brushing, less Gordon, now some other bad hair.
Jack from *Tropic Thunder* or Tasha Yar, can't decide which?
Stalked away in search of a hat.
Closet a wasteland of clothes that don't fit, but somehow devoid of headgear.
I decide on a shower to exorcise my Scot.

Yesterday I Cut the Grass

Yesterday I cut the grass,
and today
I see short
tender sprigs
soaring their way back
up bright and joyful!

O hundreds
and hundreds of sprigs,
when the world cuts me up—
spits me out—please—
let me be
as buoyant—
as forgiving!

To a New Teacher

They will come in with their chins lowered, with their eyes lowered, with their mouths in straight lines of apathy or exhaustion or both. They will be wearing unlaced sneakers, tongues poking atop jeans tight at the ankles, logoed polos, high-waisted yoga pants. They will come in with books and without books, with pencils and without pencils, but they will all wield phones. They will find their seats and talk to their friends, their minds full of everything but your subject, their mouths full of the conversation they just had in the hallway about whose boyfriend was kissing whose ex-girlfriend's best friend. All of them will wait. They will wait for the clock to run around in the circle that will mark an hour, that will mark the end of your class, the beginning of lunch, the conclusion of the school day, the start of the real, important lives they hold outside of the four walls of your classroom.

The bell will ring and they will stare at you, lending you the show of their attention. Look closely enough and you will see the radar waves they will emit in your direction. They will be probing for signs of greenness, signs of weakness. Within the first sixty seconds of your speaking, they will know if you are for real or if you are faking it, and you will be faking it. The newness will emanate from you like Acqua Di Gio wafting through the freshman hallway, and they will look at each other and smirk and *know*. A boy in the back slouched low in his seat with enormous feet tucked into enormous white, gleaming sneakers, with thick headphones encircling his neck, will shout something that will seem innocuous enough. Something like "I love that color on you, fam!" and you will laugh along with your students and try to tell yourself you are in on the joke and wonder all night if you should have done something beyond smiling dumbly at that boy as he slouched lower in his seat.

They will come in some days, and you will be certain they are mocking you. You will give them something empowering, some activity designed to speak to the contents of their character, to touch their very souls, and they will groan in complaint. The buzzing of teenage conversation will crescendo like a rightward-turned volume knob. A seed of anger will root itself into the pit of your stomach and blossom until your mouth is open and you are yelling, lecturing the class the way all the teachers *you* hated in high school lectured their classes. "We thought you were chill, Mr. G," the boy with the headphones will say. You thought you were chill, too. Mostly, you won't know what you are.

By November, exhaustion will press down upon your shoulders. You will arrive at school well before the sun comes up and go home in the dark and seek your bed and close your eyes and find sleep before you even knew you were looking for it. Your spouse will attempt to counsel you. "Teaching is harder than you thought," she will say. But instead of admitting this obvious truth, you will lie to

her. “Not much harder,” you will retort, forcing yourself to smile. You will drag yourself to school each morning like a newly minted member of the undead and count the days to Christmas break.

One unassuming afternoon, a girl from fourth block will shuffle into your classroom during your lunch, the only silent time of your day. She will ask if it is okay, mister, if she just sits for a while and talks to you, and you will want her to leave because you need just twenty minutes of alone time to prepare yourself to survive the rest of your day. But you will tell her that she can stay; of course she can stay. The girl will put her face in her hands, her hoop earrings catching the fluorescent lighting as they rock back and forth with the motion of her sobs, and you will put down your microwave dinner and bring her the box of tissues and touch a reassuring hand to her back. The girl will tell you that she is pregnant or that her boyfriend is hitting her or that her mother has cancer. You will pluck a tissue from the box and hand it to her. You will tell her that life is not always fair but that there is beauty in endurance of struggle. That she will make it. That your door will always be open to her. She will leave and something fundamental will have changed between you, and you will feel that, for one moment at least, you understand teaching.

You will make the mistake of reading the news. Of reading the comments section. Of paying too much attention to social media. You will see that you are overpaid, that you are underworked, that you are a part-time employee. You will read quotes from politicians who decry America’s crumbling education system, homeowners who see you and your tax-funded salary as a Ponzi scheme. You will examine your bank statement and your student loan debt and wonder what in the hell compelled you into such a profession. You will marvel at the maddening juxtaposition of the difficulty of teaching to the meager pay and public misunderstanding and wonder, seriously wonder, what would coax *anyone* into a classroom, let alone you.

Spring will come, and you will drift through the space of your school in an unpowered orbit, the rocket fuel of your now naive-seeming enthusiasm long burned away. You will go home some days and sit in a dark room and your spouse will try again to counsel you. “Maybe this just isn’t for you,” she will say. You will be too stubborn to admit that you have been wondering the same for months. Still, you will will yourself to the school every morning, pulling into the parking lot in the gray haze of early morning, in the gray haze of the start of another day for which you do not feel ready.

And yet there will be successes. You will have a minor breakthrough with a student or a class. A lesson will work as intended, or a student who you thought hated you will reveal that you are actually his favorite teacher. A colleague will observe you and offer praise. A principal will applaud your growth. The last day of

school will arrive, and your students will talk openly with you, will share that you are one of the good ones. You will know that even if you were not the greatest teacher of their lives, you at least made a connection with some of them, and that will be something.

Most of all, teacher, you will know after this first year that you were tried and found wanting. You will look back and see that all of your delusions of grandeur—all of the fairytales you told yourself about strolling into a classroom like Erin Gruwell in *Freedom Writers*—belong to a previous version of your teacher self. An innocent and long distant version. You will know that to achieve anything more than mere competence will require tremendous struggle. You will begin to retrace your steps back through all of your mistakes, cringing all the while at yourself. If you are dogged enough and egotistical enough and humble enough, you will return the following year a revised version of you, new and improved. And if you are lucky, you will begin to see teaching for what it truly is: a never-ending cycle of self-improvement, of self-discovery, of *learning*, in which one must live with ambiguity and the unresolvable truth that perfect mastery is never achievable.

Do not listen to popular wisdom: your students will not change. Decades into your career, they will still wear expressions of apathy as they cross the threshold into your classroom. They will still direct their radar at you. They will still groan at your best-laid plans. The boy with the white sneakers and the earbuds will still slouch in his seat. But if you can survive this first year, if you can tune out the news and the politicians and the voices of people who do not and will never understand your profession, you will by degrees come to see your students differently. You will begin to see them for their contradictions and their life and their energy and their beauty. You will come, truly, to see them. And you will *know*.



ANIKA LEE » » » UNBREAKABLE SMILE

January

I loved the summers: The way the rain fell fast and hard and the world became misty from the heat, the scent of freshly mown lawns and vegetables on the grill, the hissing cicadas and the morning dew.

Everything seemed so infinite then. I never imagined that my gangly-legged brother, the same brother who chased me around the yard with a super soaker water gun, would one day shut me out of his life. I never imagined that those endlessly blue skies would feel like a burden in the dark years to follow, or that I would wake up not imagining all I could do, but how I could make it through another day.

Now summers are fragmented, bittersweet memories that make me smile and grieve. Back then, we spent days dangling our legs at my Nana and Papa's pool, trying to eat orange creamsicles before they became a melted, sticky mess over our bare hands. Years later, I would not allow myself a single bite of ice cream, and now I find myself torn between those golden years and the lost ones.

Sometimes, at the beginning of summer, I get a strange urge to have a squirt gun fight or spend the day searching for insects, even though I am almost twenty-seven years old and my brother is no longer part of my life, even though during those dark years I didn't even have the energy to do such things.

It is winter now. The streets are covered in ice or slush, depending on the day. Salt stains my car, my boots. The days are gray more often than not, and the nights are long. I spend bitter, cold afternoons wrapped in a wool scarf and gloves, using the end of a snow shovel to try and chip away at the ice. Even with salt, I seldom make progress.

But.

Some days the sun comes out, and I can see a time, in the future, when the clouds will part and the temperatures become more mild. Even now, as I struggle through days when I feel utterly alone, or when I am tempted to simply let myself have the very small life I did during those dark years, I still feel something.

It is hope, however fragile. It is waking to the song of confused birds on an unseasonably mild day. It is a student telling me that I made a difference. It is a kind comment from a friend, a hug from my Papa, a note from the past where I was mapping out the best places to hunt for insects.

Sometimes I hear my brother's voice. Only it is not the voice of anger or resentment. It is the teasing voice, coming to drench me with a water balloon. It is the concerned voice, from after I skinned my knee trying to learn how to ride a bike.

And I hear the voices of summers past, both the wonderful ones and the terrible ones, merging. It is the pain of losing yourself and the pure joy of being surrounded by love. It is not the summers of the past, but of a future I can finally face.

ELI COYLE

Navel

Her sacral chakra
glows warm orange,
like fire in a monk's robe.
Erring on the side of caution,
the middle stop-light slows
the orbit of Jupiter.

Inside a cantaloupe
soft seeds against peach.
Pumpkin guts, string fiber
and October leaves.
Late poppies grow
on the tan hillsides.
And the brown curling leaves
are like the casings
of sweet potatoes, inside
the color of curry
over basmati rice.

When spring comes,
apricot and tangerine
sprout fruiting seeds.

And the belly button,
the one once
attached with cord,
knows its beginning.

The center of anything,
the monk in us all,
stays in the navel.

The center of no separation.
Jupiter in orbit.

CAMILLO LICATA

Catharsis

The axe goes up;
the axe comes down.
One log, two logs,
firewood.

A simple process
powered by sweat,
sunlight.

Later I'll sink
into cool water.
Let the salt flow
off of me.

Relaxed. I'll feel good.
For now.
I'll keep taking
one thing and making
it into more.

ZARA SHAMS

Freeway

california is on the radio, and jesus
christ is on the dashboard
he is

nodding his head as if he too
calls the west coast home now; you have
one flat palm against the wheel,

spinning while your friends call red
or black they say you drive like

a man;
they toss their beer cans
into the footwell; your teeth

are ground to dust, and you have sunscreen on
your left arm only; but you can taste it
everywhere. the desert breeze is blowing

the hot sand into glass trinkets. alex
is tapping out the percussion on your
headrest—you will flip at the motel;

for now, concentrate on the
pools of sweat on the road in the
distance; mel holds the water bottle

like a crib dribbler just out of your
eye line while you suckle—it is
hot here and the roadsigns speak

of paradise. strain harder and all
three can grow wings out
of your shoulder blades.
two

kilometers back a hot air
balloon landed halfway across

the freeway,
and the tourists
spilled out like picnic wine
into the oncoming traffic.

YADIRA MEDINA

Easter 2004

In a world of uncertainty,
going through life,
facing screens more than each other,
everyone in separate rooms,
engaged in an electronic world,
seeking virtual friends,
in search of a connection,
attention is craved
from those on the other side.
Expensive lifestyles, the new trend,
the cost of happiness,
clearly defined through updates,
longing to achieve
what we take for granted off screen.

Lost in storage boxes,
a forgotten picture from simpler times,
a group of blood relatives,
all nearly strangers now,
innocent young faces,
surrounded by wise protectors
dressed in inexpensive clothing,
wearing priceless smiles,
celebrating Easter
with those who really mattered,
the only screen,
a disposable camera,
capturing a happy gathering.

Fully within reach,
yet still out of touch,
separated by a man-made device,
held by all dearly,
filled with virtual followers,
something is missing.
The connection captured
in an old picture,
still accessible,
blocked by glass
and a couple of wires.

BHUPINDER JIT MEHTON

Diwali 2015

We illuminate our house
with clay oil lamps and fairy string lights.
It is the festival of lights, an
allegory of the triumph of good over evil.
All Mehton family members get together
for our last Diwali in that house.
Everybody is happy for us that
we are going to start a new life in the New World.
They are sad on the inside,
we are leaving them.

My aunt has found a photograph,
where I was sitting at my uncle's utensil shop.
The shop was filled with all kinds of steel utensils.
I had my water thermos, and
I was crying not to take a photograph.
It was my yellow shirt
that was shining more than everything.
It is a souvenir from my aunt to me,
to remind me of my first Diwali.

Life can take us anywhere it wants,
but to stay connected with our roots
is the beauty of life.
We can celebrate every festival,
but we can't have fun without family.
I hope we will have the family gathering again.

SOPHIA DEHERRERA

Oldest to Youngest

Of the olden, “golden” days,
three sisters sit around,
unknowing...
that within years
the old changes into
something new.

Unpredictable, spontaneous, erratic,
some changes welcome
...some difficult to fathom
Unwelcomed and abrupt.
Time still moved on,
but the family was opposite.

Stagnant, cold, unwilling to change.
Three sisters sit around,
the two oldest chat and watch TV,
the youngest unaware of her surroundings.
The pair had themselves back-to-back,
Experiencing everything,
at almost the same age,
with the same understanding.
Both with a helping hand
from each other, which became a lifetime
and a lifeline.
The youngest, ignorant to the world.

Today, three sisters sit together
at one table.
Laughing, chatting, more experienced
from what life has given them.
However, the oldest two
still sit closer together, at the same side,
with the youngest at the other.

Two separate worlds somehow intertwined
that won't be in the same system
as time moves on.



KIT ALLOWAY » » » DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS



Searching for the Sun

Nicolas Poussin, a French painter, is known for his detailed works depicting religious and mythological figures. One such painting is *Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun*. The first impression upon looking at this artwork is how everything seems to be covered in shadow. The day has not yet begun, and the sun is still hidden just beneath the horizon. The only hint of daybreak is the faintest glow of light outlining the clouds in the sky. A forest is shown with enormous trees clustered so close together that it becomes impossible to differentiate one from the next. They become one hulking mass, casting an intimidating shadow on everything that lies beneath them. Any details on the ground are lost to this darkness. Hills rise and fall in the distance, the tallest of them cutting into the sky. They continue as far as the eye can see, hinting at a vast, unknowable landscape. Above them, massive gray clouds hover, appearing ready to burst with rain at any moment.

At the edge of this scene stands a hunter, bow in hand and a quiver of arrows at his side. He towers over the landscape, a giant amongst men, his head almost reaching the tops of the trees. He steps forward hesitantly, his great hand reaching out to feel for any obstacles in his path. His face is squinted into a mask of confusion and uncertainty, making it clear that he does not have the sight he needs to make it through this inhospitable countryside. His hand grips the bow at his side tightly, the only means of protection he has, useless against the challenge he now faces. Uneven hilltops are laid out in front of him, dips and mounds in the landscape presenting several opportunities to stumble and fall. Crag-faced rocks hide in the shadows, their sharp edges waiting in anticipation for some poor soul to misstep. The stumps of toppled trees reach out from the ground, leaning towards the giant as if preparing to drag him down to their level. Their gnarled roots stretch out along the dirt to claim the surrounding area as their own. Even a sighted person would have difficulty navigating. One wrong move could topple the blind hunter in an instant.

Although he cannot see his witnesses, the giant is not going through this tribulation unobserved. Amongst the hulking gray clouds obstructing the sky, a lone figure stands watching the scene below. She is dressed as a god would be, all white robes with a golden bow at her side and a quiver of arrows to match. She lazily sets her elbow against the puff of a storm cloud and lowers her chin to rest upon her hand. Her other hand settles against her hip as her legs cross. Posture suggesting mild interest, she watches the events unfold below her safe perch in the sky. Never does she show any hint of concern or imply that she may intervene should things turn disastrous for the stumbling giant. She is content to relax and let events unfold as they may.

Even so, the woman in the clouds is not the only one bearing witness to the giant's journey. Other men are pictured racing across the twisted landscape, desperately avoiding the giant's path so as not to be crushed. Their fear is palpable, as if the giant means to attack instead of just make his way past the forest and across the rolling hills unharmed. Some hide in the shadows the forest provides, becoming inseparable from the scenery itself, offering no help for the struggling blind hunter. They turn their heads as they run, never taking their eyes off the giant and the threat they believe he poses to them.

One man stands apart from the rest on the ground. As others run and hide, he steps forward, almost completely inserting himself into the giant's path. He is dressed much like the woman in the sky: white robes, but no bow and arrow to protect himself with. He steps forward with no weapons and no shield, offering guidance to the blind hunter. His arms outstretched, he attempts to mark the way forward as his head tilts up to gaze at the giant directly. Mouth open, he yells up at the towering man before him to warn of any dangers in his path. Thankfully, he is not alone in his endeavor. Another figure stands atop the giant's shoulder, telling him the way. Dressed all in gold, he appears as a sort of guardian angel sent to help the hunter on his quest. He seems to communicate with the man on the ground, both working together to help the giant navigate the obstacles present in the countryside.

Despite the numerous dangers inherent in the landscape and the vulnerability of the blind giant, he is ready to succeed in his quest to journey across the terrain and reach the safety implied on the other side of the hills. He faces towards the horizon and the rising sun as he takes a step forward, guided by the good Samaritan on the ground as well as the guardian angel on his shoulder. With their assistance, all the dangers in the world cannot felled the giant.

I Hold My Father's Beer

I

Grainy 4x4 photos
like some prop deck of saloon cards
my mother has filed
in a yellowed Polaroid Flashgun #268 box.

Meant for automatic color-pack cameras,
this box contains the cycle of life:
film to camera, exposure to development.

Now a mini-tomb,
it catalogues the slideshow
of childhood. Pinafores and matching
tights meet shiny doll babies and mini
kitchens.

Snapshot.
I slide the snug-fitting lid from my cache,
inhale the scent of 1972,
split-level with two-car garage,
shellacked orange linoleum,
golden shag carpet.
I meet variations of myself.

I see more clearly
the woman-my-mother who gathered these
pictures,
writing in skate-looped letters
my name, the year.
It is a small alphabet to unscramble
like the life I have now.
Dusty, itchy.

II

Most shots are of my legs.
Polly Flinders, patent leathers.
Fractional,
I am out of focus, off center, back to the
lens.

In one frame, I hold my father's beer;
in another, a pack of Salem Lights.
Most images
are presents: Christmas, birthday, Easter,
her photo omphalos.

You grainy womb,
white-washed tomb! You speak her—

don't ever forget
most important of all
is not the person,
not even the two-and-a-half-year-old girl,
but the package.

III

The girl is package.
Nothing inside
but the facade swing-door parlor
scripted game of cards.
She'll be stuffed back into boxes.

I grow more
comfortable in the uncertainty
of being that girl, both container and
contained. In the certainty of
dust,

I crave my father's cool, wet bottle of beer
and imagine the bitter sip
going down
like
a mother's expectations.



GEDIE MAY LICAYCAY

To Be Mother Again

Kitchen, living room, even backyard
She must be sweeping the fourth time—
Relatives are coming from afar.
It frustrates her honestly.
As if she has not done enough,
She makes sure all her kids' achievements
are on the wall—
medals, trophies, name it all.
One little item is missing:
where are the family photos to show,
to brag about how her kids have grown?

Visitors will ask for sure
About this only photo we have with her.
How could a lioness leave her cubs?
Some will say it is for the better,
That siblings are stronger together.
But we know the truth, even in our young
age:
My brother barely speaks;
My sister and I fight over dolls and clothes;
The head of the family,
A role my mother took upon herself,
The hefty price she bears
In exchange—for not seeing us grow.

The future she imagines
Will never be manifested.
We are back in her arms,
But how can we not recognize her?
She tried, regretted, and then realized
She will redeem the lost time.
Now she waits for her unborn grandchild—
Five months on the way—
So she can be mother again.

NATALIE GASPER

Winter Wanderings

The crunch of freshly fallen snow
beneath my boots is the only sound
within this forest of sleeping trees,
each one draped with a million
sparkling snowflakes reflecting
the sun's distant rays. A willow,
its sloping branches ever drooping
towards the forest floor, is tipped
with beads of ice, a winter chandelier.
Powdered sugar branches against sapphire
skies, crystal cages that frame my path
as I wander ever onwards.

Without Reservations

I never believed in true love until I met Will. He strolled into my restaurant, announcing his name and that he had a reservation for two, though he was alone. I didn't find his name in the ledger at first. "Will Daniels," I repeated. "I'm not seeing your name, sir."

"Check again, please. I made the reservation 40 years ago. Today is our fiftieth anniversary. We decided long ago we would celebrate here at Spindletop. We were here on opening day in 1972. That was our 5th anniversary. Thelma and I were still practically newlyweds." He said, chuckling. His blue eyes twinkled. "We've come on our anniversary every year since."

"Where is Miss Thelma?" I asked.

Will fumbled in an interior pocket of his grey tweed sports coat. A red rose was tucked into his lapel. He withdrew a picture and handed it to me. The picture was of a beautiful woman with her strawberry blonde hair teased into a bouffant. I'm also a strawberry blonde, but I wear my hair in loose ringlets. "This was her in '72," he said.

"She's beautiful," I said. My shift was about to end and I still hadn't found his reservation. I've only been at Spindletop for about six months.

Linda, the senior hostess, suddenly appeared from nowhere. "Will Daniels, as I live and die," she drawled. "Is tonight your anniversary? Already?"

Mr. Will nodded his head. Linda began flipping through the book until she found a note she scrawled long ago towards the back of another book, its paper yellowed with age.

"Where's Thelma, sugar?" Linda asked. She's in her early 60's, and when she speaks like that, the outdated terms of endearment sound sweet. I'm 23. I would sound ridiculous speaking to someone in such a way. "Is she getting her hair done?" Linda pressed, trying to determine Miss Thelma's whereabouts.

Will shook his head. He looked down. A blush crept up his neck and spread across his face. "She's in the nursing home," he said at last. "She has Alzheimer's. The kids insisted she needed extra care. I'll take her a doggie bag." His voice broke. "Isn't there another word for food you take home from a restaurant? A more dignified term?"

"How about the loving spoonful?" Linda asked with a wink. "Let me show you to your table, Will." She turned to face me. "When I get back, you can go home, Molly."

I nodded and watched them walk towards the best table in the house. Spindletop is Houston's first rooftop revolving restaurant. It's been a favorite seafood restaurant since it opened. Located inside the downtown Hyatt Regency, our glass-walled restaurant makes one revolution every 45 minutes, ensuring our guests can enjoy 360-degree views of the city and its landmarks. I love my job. I study hospitality at the University of Houston and hope to one day open my own restaurant. Linda made a gesture towards a waiter, and he approached Will's table, bringing a bottle of chilled white wine. I watched Linda listening intently to Will, and she glanced at me, grinning broadly.

When she returned, Linda put one of her red fingernails on my wrist. "Will wonders if you could accompany him while he dines. He doesn't want to dine alone."

I felt my face blanch. "Wouldn't that be inappropriate?" I asked.

"You remind him of Thelma. Pay him a kindness. It won't cost a thing."

I nodded my head and agreed to dine with him. I took a seat at his table. "I'd be honored to dine with you tonight," I said.

He poured me a glass of wine. "You're not a native Houstonian, are you?"

I shook my head. "My family moved here from Michigan in 2009."

"How old were you then?"

"14." I smiled.

"I was 14 in 1962," he said, taking a sip of wine. "I was 14 when I met Thelma. We danced at a sock hop. You ever heard of a sock hop?"

I hadn't. As the night went on, we enjoyed a meal of Spindletop's Seafood Pot which included lobster tails, gulf shrimp, mussels, clams, smoked sausage, fish, crab claws, and smoked potatoes, in a flavorful ancho chili wine broth with a side of rice. When we saw Minute Maid Park before us, Mr. Will began telling me about how he'd been an Astros fan from the very beginning. He and Thelma had season tickets.

Will said Thelma's father never approved of him.

"No," I exclaimed.

"My daddy owned a used car lot. Mr. Baxter, Thelma's daddy, thought I was too low-class for her. But I was madly in love and promised I would do whatever it took to give her a good life. We got married without his blessing. I was drafted and had to report for basic training in Georgia. Thelma said she wanted to marry me before I left, so we could consummate our love, in case..." He got quiet, looked out the window and said softly, "in case I didn't come back."

"You eloped," I said.

He nodded.

"How romantic."

"How ridiculous," he corrected. "Mr. Baxter hated me until the day he died. Said he couldn't trust me. Our children used to ask, 'How come pawpaw doesn't like you, Daddy?' That's not an easy question to hear from your children." He sighed.

My own grandparents didn't approve of my father. I could relate. When Dad informed my mother's parents he was moving us to Houston for a job, they were livid, insisting he could get an engineering job anywhere, and he wasn't trying very hard if he had to move us 1,300 miles away for a job. Mom teaches school; she explained her income would increase in Texas, but they wanted us to stay put. My brother Daniel, who was already 17 and about to be a senior, stayed with them so he could graduate from the school where he'd made friends. Mom sent money every month for Daniel's expenses, and every month my grandfather sent the unopened letter back with Return to Sender stamped on the envelope and a note reading TRAITOR scribbled on the back. Mom got teary-eyed every single time.

"He never forgave you?"

Will shook his head. I learned about him and Thelma's children. Margot was 49, Bryan was 47, and Jackie was the baby at 45. They all lived in Houston. Margot was a professor of medieval literature at Rice University. Bryan worked for Haliburton. Jackie taught third grade at St. John the Divine. Mr. Will swallowed before disclosing Thelma didn't remember any of them. "She's faded away," he said, reaching for my hand which he squeezed hard.

"I'm sorry," I said, not knowing what to say, but he looked into

my eyes, shaking his head. Slowly, a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth, and he exhaled.

"Her hazel eyes have flecks of gold in them like yours. Am I keeping you from someone special? Shame on me, forcing you to indulge a lonely old man."

This time, I shook my head. "I haven't met the right person, and I've enjoyed your company, honestly."

"You will meet the right person," he assured me. "Would you like dessert?"

I nodded. He asked what I would like and ordered two of the Hibiscus Crème Brulee, which was rich custard infused with Hibiscus flower extract and topped with hard caramel and strawberries. It was delicious. He ordered a to-go package for his wife and told me he would feed her the loving spoonful even though she wouldn't recognize him. She might even get angry with him because that happened a lot lately. "But you know what?" He asked once Linda explained that the meal was on the house as a thank you for his long term loyalty.

"What?" I asked.

"I remember everything," he sighed. "And because I can recall every smile and laugh, every skinned knee we kissed, and every heartache we nursed, I am sustained. The arguments, I forgot about those, though I'm sure we had our spats. I remember making up; that's the only reason to fight." He tapped the side of his head with his left index finger. "Halloween costumes made at the last minute, Thanksgiving turkeys and biscuits that burned, untangling Christmas lights to decorate the yard, Easter hams that the dog helped himself to, scolding kids for missing curfew, pacing the floor and posting bail for a kid who decided to figure out for himself why drinking and driving is against the law, and watching my first grandchild take her first steps; I remember it all. Love is about letting go of reservations and diving in headfirst into the deep end, ready to explore the great unknown together. Love isn't about dipping your toe into the shallow end." He kissed my cheek before he left. He whistled a tune as he walked away.

I believe in the power of love now.

Kathy's Chances

Kathy Jessup had lost her married name, address, and phone number in the divorce, but she still loved an IPA – *Harry gave me that*, she thought. Their first date had been a B-movie; it had been terrible; neither of them had wanted to go home. Harry knew the bouncer at Club Mischief, and the boulder-sized man had cheerfully overlooked Kathy's fake ID.

That had been nearly forty years ago. Club Mischief had gone the way of jukeboxes, rotary dial, and film cameras – but Kathy, post-menopausal, eighteen pounds heavier, was back on what she was *almost* sure was the same stool in a bar now called *Chances*. It contained eight stools and only occasional traces of black mold. *I don't miss Harry, exactly – but he would have pulled up a stool here.*

The bartender fixed Kathy with a dubious look. She asked, more aggressively than was strictly necessary, “Can I *help* you?”

“You look familiar.”

She hunched her shoulders. “The once – and once again – Kathy Jessup.”

“Joel Boren.”

That had been more than forty years ago, a fumble on the goal line in the back seat of his father's car. Then Harry had asked her out. (Harry had introduced her to football, too.) She said, “It's been a long time. How've you been?”

Joel flung out his arms, encompassing the three potholes in the street, the slush-streaked window, the beer-filmed counter, and the plaid-drab clientele at this hometown bar. Except – Kathy noticed one man sitting on the short side of the bar's L, wearing an old-fashioned boutonniere in his sport coat lapel. “Who's that?” she murmured.

“Walter Burns,” Joel returned grudgingly.

Women are supposed to be bold, now, aren't they? “Do you know his situation?”

Joel snorted. “Don't bother.”

“Why not?”

Joel turned, hollered, “Hey, Walter, Kathy here would like to meet you.”

Kathy reddened but moved down toward Walter. There were still flecks of auburn in his hair, and his eyes were astonishing: forget-me-nots in a November face.

They re-discovered that she had been a freshman when he was a senior. They traced the familiar route: *The place hasn't been the same since the factory closed. Did you hear about Ben?* (Ben was their high school's one standout, now in Hollywood, playing second-tier henchmen.) *What are you up to now?* Kathy summarized. Walter was a widower, three children, two nearby, one far. He'd lost his wife to a pulmonary embolism, unexpectedly. I'm sorry to hear that. Another *Chances* regular, calling himself Tom, interrupted by asking Walter about the mayoral race. Walter said he supported the independent, Mitchell, because “Mitchell understands this town can't afford handouts or corporate gifts – it just needs jobs.” He put down a ten to pay for a seven-dollar drink, waved off Joel's question. Joel nodded.

Kathy smiled, “Can I buy you a beer?”

Walter said, “No thanks,” but signaled to Joel to bring him another. “It was nice to meet you, ma'am,” he said.

“Kathy.”

He nodded, with bare politeness.

Kathy drifted back to her original seat, downed her drink, paid – over-tipping – but muttered to Joel, “Thanks for that.”

Joel shrugged, an almost imperceptible curl in his lip. "I told you."

Kathy had listened to the audiobook of *Year of Yes*; a friend's daughter recommended it as a beacon amidst post-divorce fog. She yessed her way through fourteen poor to mediocre meals with men who might have inspired Ginsberg's "Howl." Not one a candidate for golden-years goings-on. One evening ended after a stray hand wound its way to her bottom. *Chances* lay just down the street; she went in to remove her recently re-acquired edge. One glance confirmed Walter's absence. His friend Tom was lingering, though, and she waited until he looked over. "So Mayor Williams was reelected, I saw."

"Williams is a dick," Tom replied. "He's a leach –"

Kathy interrupted, "Hey, I see your buddy isn't here."

Joel looked up, coolly.

"Nah. He's out at Resurrection."

Kathy raised an eyebrow.

"It's the anniversary of her passing."

"Oh." Kathy toyed with her IPA. "How long has it been?"

"Couldn't say. More than ten."

"Closer to twenty," added Joel.

Walter's friend nodded.

"I see," said Kathy. She finished her drink, went home, toyed with the idea of calling Harry. *But I remember why we called it off, and I'm sure he does, too.*

Kathy found an art class, and a church, and a running partner. She went to *Chances* for a darts competition and came in second—to Walter. She congratulated him on his victory, and he acknowledged her fine performance. Kathy told him about her recent paintings, and Walter said he and his children were about to take a trip to the Grand

Canyon. "It was the one thing *we'd* always meant to do," he said, toying with his boutonniere.

"I hope you have a great time."

Kathy endured six more dates with men looking for caregivers or maids or worse, men who had never acknowledged 50+ years of the women's liberation movement and men enamored with the sounds of their own voices. Many of these nights ended at *Chances*, sometimes her dates' attempts to extend the evening, more often her own attempts to forget them. She made pleasant chit-chat with Tom and the regular crowd, heard about Walter's trip of a lifetime. Kathy imagined listening over dinner at her apartment. *He would like my meatloaf. I'm sure.*

"Nice to see you, Kathy," he would say, and that was all.

One evening, a woman came into the bar, twenty years younger than the usual set; she pivoted around the tables and moved straight to Tom, catching his elbow, speaking in a low voice. Even so, Kathy and Joel and the rest could hear enough. Tom's mouth contorted.

"...last night..."

"...service on Saturday..."

Kathy started.

"...doctor said... 'cardiac event'..."

Tom stared into the middle distance, uncomprehending, a fallen running back abruptly horse-collared from behind. Kathy turned to Joel. "A 'cardiac event'...He wasn't that old!"

Joel shrugged. "They don't make hearts like that anymore."

Flaming Star

Seven years after me and Emily had run to Gatlinburg, over in east Tennessee, to get married straight out of high school, her birthday was coming around, and I was trying to be a good husband by remembering for once. "A quarter of a century old," I kept saying, kidding her, but she screwed up her face and muttered something, and I heard the word wasted, but I wasn't high, so the joke was on her. I asked what she wanted for her birthday present, and she said she wanted to go to some sort of art thing down in Nashville, which was about two hours south of Hartford. That wasn't too far to go for a Fleetwood Mac or Mellencamp concert or a pay lake, but I wasn't about to drive that far for art. Then she started talking about going down there with Vincent O'Casey, this goofball from high school. She said they was just friends who both liked art, but he'd been her boyfriend before me, and even if that was way back in seventh grade, he didn't get to take my wife out of the state of Kentucky and especially not on her birthday. I reckoned I could surely endure a little art show.

When we got to the big city late that Sunday morning, Emily gave me directions on how to get downtown, like her sometimes going to Nashville with her friend Kathy to shop made her some kind of expert; but when I drove over the Woodland Street Bridge like she told me to, I seen why. Coming in on I-65, all you could see was a massive junkyard, but Emily's way took us straight to downtown. Two other bridges ran parallel to the one we took over the Cumberland River, and beyond that was the city with buildings that had big columns and pretty details. They looked something like art to me. There were tall buildings, too, and a particular one that towered over the others. It had the letters L and C real big on the top. I wondered what that meant, and Emily peeked under the sun visor and said, "It's the Life and Casualty Tower." I was glad she didn't tell me that Life and Casualty was an insurance company. That would have made me feel like more of a dumbass.

We drove over to a street called Demonbreun. "Demon-bru-en," I said.

Emily laughed and said something that didn't even sound like English.

"What's that?" I asked.

"The correct pronunciation. Dee-MUN-bree-un." She said it slow. That didn't make no sense. "It looks like Demon-bru-en to me."

We went to a place called the Music City Café, and there was art on the walls there, too: drawings of cats and dogs and happy kids. I worried them kids would set Emily off, but she didn't shed a tear, so it was all right. The food was fancy stuff that Emily liked to eat, sandwiches with curved bread and herbs and lots of greens on them. I always wished I'd gotten her a piece of cake, it being her birthday; but I was thinking how much I wanted a hamburger and fries. Me and Emmy had a nice time, though, talking like we done when we was in high school. We hadn't talked that good in a long time.

The exhibit, as Emily called it, was on the Belmont campus. When we walked toward the building, going past a huge old mansion, I seen that the other people headed our direction were dressed up fancy like Emily, who wore a flowery dress and those woven shoes she called espadrilles. I didn't like going places where folks didn't wear jeans, and I started to sweat in my armpits. Emmy, though, she just strolled on through the doors like she was at home, so I put my fingers in my pockets and followed.

At first we looked at stuff together. I didn't understand none of it, but I did like one picture of a big bridge over a river and a city beyond, like downtown Nashville when we'd drove into it. Everything on the picture—the bridge and the water and them buildings—was made with fish hooks. That was right smart thinking on someone's part.

Hanging on the ceiling over us was this other big contraption, and Emily called it an installation. It looked to me like someone had taken a truckload of junk they'd collected, and I reckoned had glued it together and then spray-painted it silver.

"Waste of good paint," I said, joking.

Emily turned to me, her eyes glaring. "Why don't you go have a cigarette?" She took off for the next painting, and I followed. But she stopped and gave me her mad face. "I mean it, Kenny. I want to be on my own." And she left me there looking stupid.

I wasn't about to go outside and hang around like some useless piece of shit, so I followed a few feet behind, glancing at the art, wondering if there'd be any of naked women. Mostly though, I

watched Emily studying what was in front of her, realizing I hadn't paid her much attention for a time. Her walk had what I reckoned they called poise, and she was even prettier than when I'd married her and smart enough to be taking college classes at night after working all day for them lawyers and she knew about art.

I was a pothead ex-jock who couldn't hold a job.

That moment was the most I ever feared her leaving, though there'd been other worrisome times. But I'd figured out ways to get her to stay: by bringing up a tear at the right time, by staying close to home for a few weeks, by doing something that made her happy. On her birthday the year before, I bought her a poster I found at the Wax Works Record Store in Owensboro. Elvis had his cowboy hat on and his pistol drawn, like in that movie, and that same shot of him was repeated three times. When Emily unrolled the poster, she squealed. I reckoned it was because of how Elvis reminded Em of her dead momma, who'd loved the King, but then Emily pointed at a name in the corner and said something about it being a Warhol. I didn't know who that dude was, but Emily was happy about him. She always talked about getting the poster framed, and I told her to just thumbtack it to the living room wall next to her momma's black-velvet Elvis, but she didn't.

Two paintings at that exhibit kept her attention for the longest time. I went up to the first after Emmy had moved on. In it a pale woman looked into a big mirror that had a fancy gold frame; what the woman seen reflected back wasn't her own face but one that was more interesting, darker. I didn't get why you'd see a different image than your own in a mirror, and what Em seen in that one stumped me. But it bothered me more how long she stared at the other one.

The nameplate on the wall said it had been painted by a man named Edward, or I reckoned that it was Edward because it had a funny spelling. It was the front of a really old house, close up like. The white paint on the place flaked and peeled off the wall. Even if that's what the man named Edward seen, I didn't get why he wouldn't fix the house up better in his painting. Maybe he tried to make up for that by putting flowers in boxes under the windows of the house, though that didn't seem like a manly thing to do. But that wasn't what bothered me. Though I didn't get why, it was the door

on the house that caused me worry. It was big, and it was red, and it was part open.

With Kathy's help the next spring, Emily painted the front door of our house red. I reckoned that had been why she'd studied that painting so long. But I never could shake the uneasiness of it.

Three years later, on a July night so humid even gravel was damp, I told Emily about an affair. She sat there at the table, so still, and I didn't know what she was thinking or would do. A while later, she asked me, "Why are you confessing this affair in particular, Kenny?"—shocking me that she knew about the others. That's when I added the part about the baby to come, and I offered the idea that me and her might raise it together. She shook her head no and looked at me like I was a dumbass. She wasn't one to cry much, but her tears fell that night like a heavy summer rain that came on all of the sudden, and then she got awful quiet.

After a night of sleeping on the couch, which was helped by my smoking a joint, I went fishing the next morning. That was my favorite pastime, and it was supposed to give her a chance to calm down. When I came in, stinking of fish and river water and fresh blood, dresser drawers were open and empty and cabinets were half filled. Even the card table I played poker on with high school football buddies wasn't in the living room no more. And Emily's black-velvet Elvis wasn't on the wall.

I rushed through the house and saw memories of her everywhere: humming while doing the dishes, lost in her studies at the kitchen table, me kissing her awake on a snowy morning. I rushed through the house and saw ghosts of our younger selves, just married and before I'd started running around on her, before she pretended not to know. I rushed through the house, and Emily was everywhere but nowhere.

I started out to my truck so I could go look for her, and I seen the open red door. Then I got it, and the shadows of her ever being there faded as some necessary thing inside of me shriveled up and blew away. I ain't gone fishing since.

Sentimental Yearning

Funny how the same memories can draw people together and push them apart. Rem and Sarah had been friends in high school and even dated a few times. Their goals and paths seemed different enough that they lost contact not long after their graduation twenty-one years ago. Still, they both felt glad to see each other when they crossed paths in the supermarket on Rem's visit for his nephew's graduation.

Sarah's husband had failed to survive his third coronary thirty months earlier. Rem lived a bachelor's life since an amicable divorce now four years in the past. Neither of them inquired or checked overtly for rings there in the breakfast-foods aisle of the supermarket, but each of them wondered about the status of the other. They swapped phone numbers and agreed to get together.

"He looks good," Sarah told her friend Abby on the phone that evening. "If I didn't know better, I'd've said he wasn't over thirty, except for the receding hairline and the little flecks of silver in his beard."

"He has a beard now?"

"Yeah, it looks good on him—very distinguished, professorial."

"Is he a professor, then?"

"No, he's an editor. Well, he— Wait! Come over for coffee, and I'll tell you everything I know, which isn't much."

Half an hour later, Sarah related to Abby everything Rem had said. He'd gone to work for Hurst Publishing, working first on their *Family Home Circle* magazine and quickly becoming Assistant Editor. Three years ago, Hurst had made him Executive Editor, but he'd quit last month after soliciting a job offer from what he called the Big Five.

"Which is?" Abby asked.

"Book publishers, I gather."

"Oh, OK. So, same kind of work."

"I guess."

"But you said he looks good."

"Yeah, he does," Sarah replied. "He must run or swim or something, 'cause he doesn't look as if he's sitting around in the city reading magazines."

"So, did he ask you out?"

"Not yet, but we swapped numbers."

Rem did ask Sarah out—he rang a few minutes after Abby went home. He took Sarah to dinner at the area's nicest restaurant the next day, and they enjoyed a pleasant evening that felt more relaxed than their dates in high school. They talked a little about old times but mostly about how they came to be where they were. Sarah explained that she'd married at the end of her second year at the local community college and said she'd been a model housewife ever since. She had two children, a boy and a girl, who were both

enjoying university life thanks to a generous life insurance policy bought by her late husband.

In return, Rem gave a summary of his rise from Assistant Editor to Copy Chief, then to Assistant Managing Editor and later Deputy Editor, Managing Editor, and finally Executive Editor. He said that if he spent five or ten years in that job, probably he would have won promotion to Editor-In-Chief and maybe eventually to Editorial Director for all the Hurst magazines—but he didn't like being an executive and didn't want to move further in that direction. He also, he said, wanted to get involved in publishing books, something a little more substantial—"or at least maybe more lasting"—than what he supervised every month at Hurst.

Sarah asked about Rem's marriage, and he told her he'd married a year after receiving his bachelor's degree and just after he'd gone to work for Hurst. Like Sarah, he had two children: an almost-sixteen-year-old son, who'd moved in with Rem six months ago, and a fourteen-year-old daughter still living with her mother.

"Where's your boy now?" she'd asked him.

"He came with me. He's at Keith's, hanging out with his cousin."

"And do you get to see your daughter much?"

"Alternate weekends, most of her school vacations, and every time she has a fight with her mom," Rem said with a wry smile.

"Omigod! That'd be two or three times a week," Sarah said.

Rem chuckled and said, "Yep, sometimes it is." He shook his head and continued, "Mostly, they get along OK though."

The two went on to talk about parenthood in general and how they had each coped with and enjoyed it. Sarah asked how Rem liked living in New York City. Rem told her he found the city exciting at first but now felt tired of it and would prefer a more relaxed environment. "I guess I'll have to stay, though," he said, "'cause that's where my new job is."

"Y'could move out to a suburb and commute, couldn't you?" Sarah asked.

Rem explained that he and his then-wife did exactly that sixteen years earlier and that he'd moved back into the city after they divorced. "I didn't like the wasted time on the train," he said, "nearly ten hours a week." After a pause, he continued, "As a book editor, though, I'll be doing a lot more reading and less managing—and I can read on the train." After another pause, he smiled at Sarah and said, "Yeah, thank you! That's a good idea."

Sarah smiled back and asked how his son might feel about that.

"Yeah. He's used to living in the city, but he doesn't like it much more than I do."

After several minutes of reminiscing by Sarah, their conversation drifted onto politics. They both shook their heads over the two current Presidential candidates. "You'd know all about 'em, I guess,"

Sarah said, “since they both live in New York.”

“Not *all* about ’em, but more than I want to. What do you think you’ll do? Or are you even going to bother to vote?”

“Oh, goodness! I don’t know what to do. I don’t think I could stand to vote for Trump. I mean, I sort of agree with him on most things, but he’s just so embarrassing—like George W. I voted for Dubya in 2000, but I just couldn’t bring myself to vote for him in 2004, y’know? I couldn’t vote for Kerry either, though, so I just didn’t vote. Maybe I’ll do that again this year. What d’ya think you’ll do?”

Although Rem cringed inside at Sarah’s revelations, he made no sign. Instead, he said, “I think I’ll vote for Jill Stein.”

“Who?”

“Jill Stein.”

“Who’s she?”

“The Green Party candidate.”

“Oh. Sort of a protest vote?”

“Yeah, sort of, I guess.”

“I get that.”

From politics, they moved back to talking about people they had both known in high school. Later, Rem dropped Sarah at her home, and they agreed to share another date two nights later. That second date went well, as did a third the following night. After that third date, Sarah invited Rem to dinner at her home the next evening. She served an exceptional dinner, and afterward they sat on her sofa and both enjoyed a cautious conversation about books. Sarah didn’t read as much or as deeply as Rem, tending as she did toward romances, but she made up in enthusiasm what she lacked in knowledge and understanding.

Two adults too long single followed the evening to its natural conclusion. The next morning, neither seemed to feel uncomfortable or self-conscious about their long-deferred night together. They both had sufficient energy and interest for additional erotic activity, which led to their sharing reminiscences in the afterglow.

Sarah waxed enthusiastic about their junior prom, gushing about how nice everyone had looked.

“Did you know I’d invited Janet Ransford?” Rem asked. “Mrs. Swenson called me into her office and told me I couldn’t take Jan.”

“Mrs. Who?”

“Mrs. Swenson, the Vice-Principal.”

“Oh, yeah, I’d forgotten her. Why did she say you couldn’t take Janet to the prom?”

“‘Cause Janet’s black.”

“She couldn’t do that.”

“She could, and she did.”

“Huh! I guess that was a long time ago. She wouldn’t dare do that now.”

“No, it’d cause a huge outcry now, but that was in another century, nearly twenty-two years ago.”

“Hunh! I never think of it that way, but I guess it was. Didn’t you take Caryn Carson in the end?”

“No, that was our senior year. I took Sylvia Ramirez.”

“Oh, yeah! I remember that. I remember thinking it was strange ’cause you guys hadn’t been going out or anything.”

“I liked Sylvia, but I think I was really just getting back at Mrs. Swenson.”

Sarah laughed. “Yeah, that’d be like you.”

Rem laughed, too, and said, “Yeah, I haven’t changed much.”

“Are you still protesting and fighting for causes and all that stuff? What are you fanatical about now?”

Rem laughed again and said, “GMOs and the TPP.”

“What are *they*?”

“Genetically modified organisms—they pose *huge* risks. I’m involved in campaigns to get them adequately regulated and also for mandatory labelling.”

“Marches and demonstrations and all?”

“Some of that, but more letter writing, fundraising, editing—I’ve even written a couple of articles myself.”

“And what’s the other one—something to do with toilet paper?”

“No, but it’s just as shitty—pardon my language. It’s a treaty that would allow multinational corporations to override federal and state laws.”

“*What!?* No way!”

“Way. The treaty would give multinationals the power to force the United States government—or any state government—to change any law that could threaten corporate profits.”

“You’re making that up.”

“Sadly, no.”

The two, mostly Rem, talked for a few minutes about the proposed treaty until Sarah guided the conversation back to reminiscences of their high school days. That went fairly well until Rem reminded her how most of the boys had advocated bombing the whole Middle East back to the Dark Ages. “More than the Dark Ages, really,” he added. “They wanted to make the whole region a barren radioactive wasteland.”

“They just didn’t want to get drafted.”

“No. The draft had ended twenty years earlier. They were just stupidly reactionary.”

“And you were constantly arguing with them.”

“Guilty as charged.” Rem’s laugh carried both mirth and irony. “Rick Whitcomb would’ve beat me up one time if Dan Terhune hadn’t been there.”

Sarah laughed. “You should see him now—”

Willa Draws an ‘M’

“Who, Danny? I thought he’d disappeared, living in Arizona or something.”

“No, Ricky. Big ol’ beer gut hanging over his belt—he’s a wreck.”

Another hour of reminiscencing and a leisurely breakfast brought an invitation for Rem to return for dinner that evening, which he did. They both experienced the ensuing seventeen hours as an almost *Groundhog Day*-like replay of their previous tryst. Although the night and morning were not without their pleasures, both participants felt frustrated by their disparate recollections of their high school years.

“Remember the Beanie Babies?” Sarah asked.

“Barely.”

“I collected *heaps* of ’em.”

“I remember terrorists bombed the World Trade Center.”

“No way! That was 2001.”

Rem didn’t bother to reply.

“Remember Michael Jackson? He was *so* popular.”

“I try not to. I remember Eric Clapton, though, and Whitney Houston.”

“Oh, yeah. She was good. Remember *Jurassic Park*?”

“I never saw it, but I remember *Schindler’s List*. I liked the book better, though.”

“And there was a wedding on *The Flintstones*!”

“I never watched *The Flintstones*, but I remember that was when they set up the European Union.”

The two parted affectionately after two more hours of similar attempts to bridge the gap between them. They promised to stay in touch, and Rem did send a postcard to Sarah from New York. She wrote a reply but never sent it.

I had found myself in Memphis by way of Jackson, en route northwest to Kansas City. I told Willa she could come with me if she wanted, but she said she’d just come from the north, and she meant to touch Mexico, like she and George had planned. I asked her how she planned to do that, and the girl shrugged, caught by a multiplication problem she had no skill to solve. I’d been to Mexico before things got hot in Europe and had no need to return soon. Still, I couldn’t very well leave Willa in that Memphis jungle with her shrugging shoulders and nonsense dreams.

That night, Willa escaped my watch and ran into town and crept behind the station house. She found a shaky stepladder and lugged it window by window to the high, barred apertures, whispering his name like an anxious snake. Most cells sounded empty while a couple contained the voices of degenerate men Willa had no interest conversing further with. But certainly no George. They must have taken him to the train station right away — but to Jefferson? Kansas City? St. Louis? She’d never know, and even if she got her answer by the following morning, and even if she hitched a train and even if she confronted George and whatever force was holding him — what could a little girl do against America? She had never felt so small and so worthless.

When she came back, I was waiting for her. She told what she’d done. Then she asked me a thousand questions about what would happen, and I told her I didn’t know, and she didn’t like that. *Somebody* had to know. I asked her what George had told her to do before he’d left. “To be strong,” I reminded her, and she remembered. I told her that sometimes being strong meant fighting your own self off. “And doing that can be especially hard,” I told her, “if you’re an extra strong person, which you are. Ain’t you?”

In the months that followed, I got familiar with Willa. Not the way people tend to get familiar, mind you; more the way an ornithologist gets cozy with a specimen he or she is studying: constant watch. Willa forgot how to take care of herself, but I don’t know if that was because George was gone or she never learned how. She didn’t like to boil up, didn’t even like to clean herself, and that was not right for an upstanding tramp. Only when she could no longer stand her own stink did she clean. Once she joined Gertie by the river under one such blue moon, and the old coot reported that the girl washed herself like an echo after Gertie, like it was her first time.

As she developed more, I sensed a doleful shame come to roost with her. It wasn’t my place to tell her the growing made her beautiful, as a man, and the women, what there were, were not usually the mothering type. I’d catch Willa pushing her nose around like it was clay, determining it was badly formed. Certainly, it was wide and a little flat; perhaps a bit large for a girl if she was interested in finding reasons to hate herself. She stared at other women’s breasts, then at her

own, wondering if her tokens of womanhood were more supple than most. There were talks Willa needed to have, but there was no one to give them to her.

As fall rolled on, most of the jungle we started with had traded out for new members. Some of the new fellows who didn't know George, or her pitiable story, would stare. These days she pushed the buttons of the boy's shirt she wore and had acquired a downright pleasing silhouette. A kind-hearted girl going on thirteen, seemingly alone, was rare, and for more men than I'd like to admit, it was exciting. Even with the caked-on dirt streaking her open, pale face, and the nest of her sandy blonde hair, these factors only contributed to the prospective success in the minds of dark-hearted men, who reckoned she would be an easy catch. So I stuck closer. I called out to men who'd try to follow her out of the jungle as she went to stand with the Salvation Army shysters, who enjoyed her pocket-loosening presence. Only on one occasion did a man succeed in disturbing her, a sharp-looking hobo about ten years older than Willa. The rogue liked to undress and boil up in front of the women and girls, really making a show of it. He might have been the first man Willa enjoyed giving the up and down; he was damn handsome. One night he'd finished a full quart of gin and cozied up beside her. Though she refused a second swig, she said it would be all right if he rested his head on her shoulder because he said he was tired and asked would she mind? Just when she thought it was nice having a man on her shoulder, she felt a hot, sticky tongue on her neck, followed by furious hands, grabbing at her breasts. Unlike the nervous and exciting feelings she had with his head on her shoulder, Willa knew this kind of touching was wrong because it felt wrong. What right did he have to her neck or breasts if she didn't say so? She had to say so. The violation turned her cheeks reddish-purple, and the shame made her stomach nauseous — but she didn't scream. She picked up his empty bottle of gin and broke it on his jaw. That's when I saw what was going on, and two other tramps and I made quick, red work of him, broke him in a few other places, too, but an example had to be made for others. Pursuing a child was a particular soreness with tramps, as it gave the whole lot of us a bad name with the uppities — worse than we already had.

After that night, Willa's ticks started. Chewing her hair, cracking her neck with two hands until you cringed; chewing her nails so bloody, you worried she would eat her own hands. She focused her eyes, and in a flinch she'd look quickly left and quickly right. In a back alley dumpster, she picked up a shirt and coat built for a fat man, and that was the last anyone saw of Willa's silhouette.

Life had intentions on her innocence that any remnant should be expunged. Another afternoon, Willa came tugging at me, blanched. She had lost her words and pulled me to some bushes where laid a young Mexican boy just full of bullets. His chest was a vicious spread of red

polka-dots, plus one in the forehead and two in the cheek. Looked to me like he'd ratted out some bad people because this was an angry murder, done with a tommy gun I'd wager to guess. The forehead shot looked like the final word concluding a particularly dramatic scene with a punchline. Willa asked, "Is that what's gonna happen to George over there?"

I didn't know. But I said it wouldn't. Sorry to say we didn't report the body to the authorities, but that would hold us too long and involve Willa in ways I'd have rather not — and it would open us up for questions on the complexities of our relationship, not to mention.

For my part, it was exhausting keeping tabs on every which one who came around. I had to convince myself that I loved her, as the pressure on my reason was mounting. When I couldn't take Memphis any longer and decided Willa was never going to push off of her own volition, I told her, once and final, I was leaving for parts north like I planned. "Willa, you got to come," I said. She looked off, toward some idea of Mexico she'd gotten trapped in her head. She nodded; she would come.

The day we left Memphis she didn't speak. We hitched a cozy boxcar full of salt pigs. When night fell, the moon stopped by with its belly full and visited us through a large opening at the top of the car. The moon begged me to write, as it often did. As I worked, Willa cheated over my shoulder. I don't normally care for people reading over my shoulder, but that night, I let it slide. She spied me, entranced, until the late hours became the early hours. She had good taste. I had the idea to give her a piece of writing chalk, of which I always carried two pieces (as any good tramp should — in case you lose one). I said, "If you want to." Willa examined the chalk and rolled it around in one hand, dusting her palm with white. She brushed her hands together, blowing a pale, falling mist into the night light. I knew then that Willa couldn't read.

But as my mind sat with the fact, Willa leaned over to the wall of the car and drew. The symbol she made was an M, which meant "tell a hard luck story here." She looked at me: my easy lips, my sharp nose, that forehead of mine which was just beginning to furrow. I admired her work. She leaned her head on the side of the car, staring at her symbol like a scientist. She fell asleep.

Quotes

PLENTY

In times of famine [people are] simply trying to find enough to eat.... But when a banquet is spread before them, it's time to argue over the place settings.

Terry Pratchett, The Last Continent

Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There's plenty of movement, but you never know if it's going to be forward, backwards, or sideways.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

We are stripped bare by the curse of plenty.

Winston Churchill

Anyone's life truly lived consists of work, sunshine, exercise, soap, plenty of fresh air, and a happy contented spirit.

Lillie Langtry

A cabin with plenty of food is better than a hungry castle.

Irish Saying

Death is Nature's expert advice to get plenty of Life.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

He who loses money, loses much;
He who loses a friend, loses much more;
He who loses faith, loses all.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted.

Albert Einstein

Young men are plenty but sweethearts few
If my love leaves me what shall I do?

Joan Baez

No matter how much cats fight, there always seem to
be plenty of kittens.

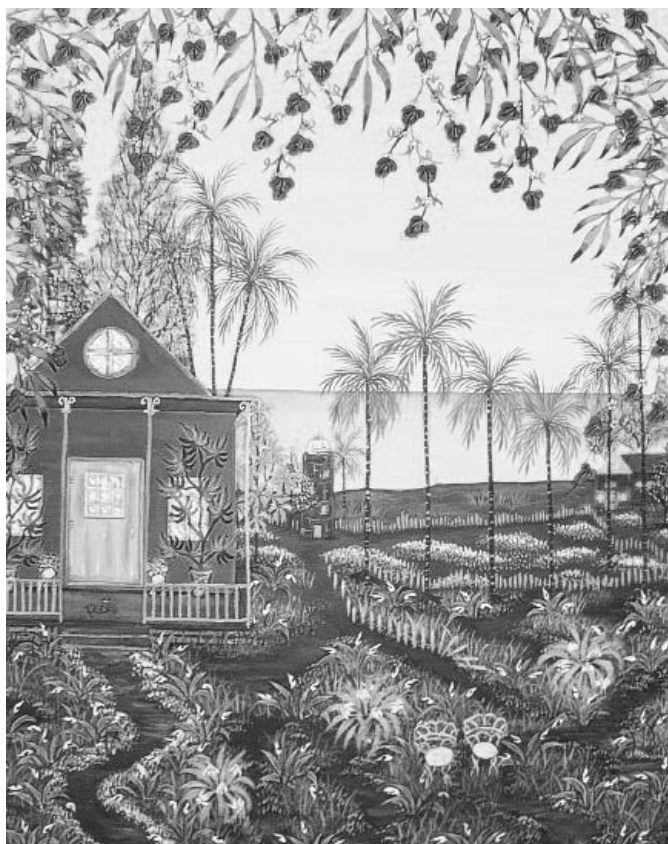
Abraham Lincoln

I had plenty of pimples as a kid.
One day I fell asleep in the library.
When I woke up, a blind man was reading my face.

Rodney Dangerfield

Be an encourager. The world has plenty
of critics already.

Dave Willis



TIMOTHY PHILLIPS » » » NORTH SHORE BEACH

PA KOU LEE

Thanksgiving

Every year there would be a sea of people at my aunt's house. All the immediate family members from my aunt's side and my uncle-in-law's side would travel the lengths of California from Los Angeles to San Jose to Eureka and spend the day at my aunt's house.

Every year there would be a huge spread of food on my aunt's dining table. For the newer generations, there would be mashed potatoes and gravy, creamed corn, biscuits, bread rolls, and pumpkin pie. For the older generations, there would be egg rolls, spring rolls, papaya salad, sesame balls, and coconut jelly. And last but not least, the turkey my aunt baked would take center stage on the dining table.

Every year there would be a cacophony of chitchat filling up my aunt's house. The men would announce whose son is planning to marry which family's daughter. The women would gossip about whose daughter is dating which family's son. Lastly, the children would catch up on new favorite songs, movies, and books.

However, this year is different. The sheer number of bodies inside the house has tripled. The amount of food burying the dining table has doubled. The customary conversations have been submerged in a somber atmosphere. But all of these cannot hope to hide the fact that the figure of my aunt is gone, and the house, which once held plenty of life, now only holds grief.

LORINDA MCKINNON

The Garden through My Father's Eyes

My father would have called it an orgy of food, and his eyes would have sparkled at the sight of my baskets of beans and boxes of onions. Colanders of crisp radishes, sampled freely as I lifted them from the dirt, would have been joyously rolled in salt and eaten one after another. Growing up during the Great Depression gave him a lust for hoarding food though his boyhood harvests would have been clams and mussels found at low tide on the Puget Sound.

I want to show him how I've changed—the capable country woman who has replaced the city girl he raised.

I find a bounty of asparagus hiding in the grass that should have been pulled weeks before and am saddened that he never got to taste tender stalks freshly steamed...stalks that hadn't stood in tepid water for days at the grocery store.

I'd love to see him walk through the rows of raspberries, marveling at the bounty I will have, imagining the jars of jam that will nestle next to the applesauce, offering a taste of summer in the cold snowy winter to come.

He would marvel that I chose this life over shopping malls. That I prefer pulling weeds to attending the opera. But he would find joy in my satisfaction, in my joy, and in the knowledge that with my patch of ground I will always have plenty.

ALLYSON MCGREGOR

Opportunities Passed

I had plenty of opportunities to get help, but something about that bent spoon and used insulin needle caked with a tar-like substance kept me coming back. Sitting inside my favorite abandoned house with only broken windows and a boarded-up front door, I had only a candle to help guide me in the right direction.

As I wrapped the belt around my arm and pulled it tight with my teeth, I remembered all the opportunities I had been given to get help. My family had spent thousands on rehabs that I never completed. I was never able to stay clean for more than seven days.

Looking down at my arm, I picked one of my less used veins and placed the needle flush with my skin. I sat and thought for a moment, asking myself, "Why are you doing this? Your family wants you to be clean and healthy, your friends love and care for you, and you want to succeed in life."

With tears rolling down my face, I gently inserted the needle and pushed the plunger in. Within moments, I forgot all about how horrid I felt that I had passed up so many great opportunities and whispered to myself, "Don't worry; there will be plenty more."

J E R E M Y S . F O R D

Stacking for Our Table

Stack high in the truck beds:

garlic, strawberries,

blood-red cherries.

Tiny camps burn behind tractors.

Mountains of budding lemon color.

Brown backs bend in the fields.

Lettuce

beans

hoeing;

tomatoes

grapes

plucking;

celery

peppers

cutting.

Stacking, stacking until full and another empty bed arrives.

Stacking with burnt neck. A thorn in a forearm

and fingertip.

But they keep pulling, keep stacking.

Their hands hard from the digging and pulling, calloused in the valley's

sun.

Then that seed we orbit

dips toward the ocean and earth, sketches its shadow across the field.

Gather for dinner. A smoke. A sip of something strong.

It'll be back tomorrow,

and so will they, backs bent, necks burning, stacking for our table blueberries, garlic,

blood-red cherries.

A S H L E Y T A N

No More

No more feelings

No more texts

No more talks

No more laughs

No more heart

No more love

No more tears

No more pain

No more you

Artist Bios

Kit Alloway is a mixed media artist and writer living in Cleveland Heights, OH. Her recent work has appeared in *From Whispers to Roars* and will appear in a forthcoming edition of *805*. She lives with a spate of mental illnesses that have informed her worldview about connection, compassion, and juxtaposition.

Guilherme Bergamini was born in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. He graduated in journalism and has been working with photography for twenty-three years. Through this art, Bergamini intends to express his experiences, worldview, and anxieties. Passionate about photography since childhood, Guilherme is an enthusiast and is curious about the new possibilities that this technique allows, including photography as a way to political and social criticism. He publishes part of his photographic journey on his website www.guilhermebergamini.com.

Emily Blackmore was born in Texas in 1987. She moved to London in 2016 to study at the University of East London's MA Fine Art course. Emily has a BA in Communication from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and an MLS in Global Studies from Southern Methodist University. Both have informed her work with a sensitivity to message and a conceptual awareness of the human condition. She now lives and works in Los Angeles.

Josephine Blair is a twenty-seven-year-old poet and activist from Washington, DC, who has spent the last few years living in Miami, Florida. Her work has been featured in *Epiphany Magazine*, *Soliloquies Anthology*, *Allegory Ridge*, and elsewhere. She is currently adjusting to winter in Brooklyn. You can learn more about her by visiting www.josephineblair.com.

Michelle Brooks has published a collection of poetry, *Make Yourself Small* (Backwaters Press), and a novella, *Dead Girl, Live Boy* (Storylandia Press). Her poetry collection, *Pretty in A Hard Way*, will be published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. A native Texan, she has spent much of her adult life in Detroit.

Eli Coyle received an MA in English from California State University, Chico, and lectures in their English department. Eli's poetry has been published in NYU's *Caustic Frolic*.

Sophia DeHerrera is being published for the first time in this edition of the *Journal*. The acceptance came as a big surprise to her. She is in her first year and going to CRC to cover most of her general education requirements; she will decide on a major once she transfers.

Daniel Deisinger lives in Minnesota and writes for work and fun. His work has appeared in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Defenestration Magazine*, *Whiskey Island*, *Outposts of Beyond*, and more. His twitter is @Danny_Deisinger, and his website is saturdaystory-Time.weebly.com.

Michael DeMaranville has spent most of his adult life as a foreigner. He has lived in Russia, Vietnam, China, Korea, and currently resides in Qatar. His writing has appeared in numerous print publications as well as on the Internet with his most recent pieces appearing in *The Finger*, *Write Launch*, and *A Shanghai Poetry Zine*.

Leah Dockrill is a visual artist residing in Toronto, Canada. Her academic education includes degrees in education, library science, and law. In addition, she has developed a thirty-year art practice of collage and painting. Leah has exhibited her work in both Canada and the U.S., has won numerous awards, and has had her work published in several journals.

Ronald Epstein was born in Bogota, Colombia, in 1956 and has lived in Toronto, Canada, since 1959. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1979 with an Honors BA in History. Past credits include *Dalhousie Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *The Toronto Star*. He currently reviews genre DVDs for *Videoscope*.

Fierce Sonia is a mixed media artist. She builds a substrate with acrylic paint and collage. A narrative is constructed by the tension between the lush layers moving to dreamy feminine mindscapes with a brighter palette. If you listen closely, her work has a soundtrack, a rhythm, a pulse that will give you a magic carpet ride to a fairytale that restates your own heartbeat. Follow her on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/fiercesonia>, or find @fiercesonia on instagram.

Erin Ford is a pet enthusiast, tea lover, and semi-avid knitter. She lives in Western Massachusetts with her dogs, fluffy cat, and fiancée. Erin has an MFA from Western New England University, and this marks her first publication.

Jeremy S. Ford's flash fiction has appeared online as part of the Akashic Books' series "Mondays Are Murder." In 2013, he attended the UC Berkeley Summer Creative Writing Program with a focus on poetry. He lives in New Orleans.

Natalie Gasper is an internationally performed poet whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Write Launch*, *The Hickory Stump*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, *Noon by Arachne Press*, and *ellipsis...literature & art*, amongst others. She works as an interviewer and reader for *The Nasiona*. Find her on Twitter @NatalieGasper.

Damian Gessel is a former award-winning newswriter and current veteran high school English teacher living and working in Central Pennsylvania. He is passionate about writing and the teaching of writing, his wife and two small children, and his Goldendoodle, Macy.

Evie Gold is a non-fiction essay writer whose personal stories have appeared in *Thought Catalog* and *Brevity*. She has climbed the Himalayas, survived living in a tent in the Amazon rainforest, and actively avoided cult recruitment. To learn more and sign up for her newsletter, visit www.eviegold.com.

Erin Jamieson holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *After the Pause*, *Into the Void*, *Flash Frontier*, and *Foliage Oak Literary*, among others, and her fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Jamieson currently teaches English Composition at the University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash College and also works as a freelance writer.

Candice Kelsey's poems have appeared in such journals as *Poet Lore*, *The Cortland Review*, *Sibling Rivalry Press*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Burningword*, and *Wilderness House*; recently, her nonfiction was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is also the author of a successful trade paperback parenting guide. An educator of twenty years' standing with her Master's degree in literature from LMU, she lives in Los Angeles with her husband and three children.

Anika Lee loves to create art of all sorts. In her free time, you can find her with her sketchbook and drawing pencils.

Pa Kou Lee is a professional Pinterest pinner and stubbed-toe survivor. Her hobbies include breakfast, brunch, elevenses, lunch, tea, supper, and dinner. Her favorite activity is carrying the plates at an all-you-can-eat buffet. Unfortunately, she is a nap dependent life form who suffers from allergic reaction to anything math-related.

Camillo Licata is a graduate student seeking his MFA at the University of New Hampshire. He is originally from the Hudson Valley in New York, and the greenery that he grew up around frequently influences his poetry.

Gedie May Licaycay was born in the Philippines and moved to America with her family in 2012 in search of better opportunities. She is currently studying Engineering at CRC and has recently been admitted to California State University, Sacramento, for the Fall 2019 semester.

Mario Loprete writes: "I live in a world that i shape at my liking, throughout a virtual pictorial and sculptural movement, transferring my experiences, photographing reality throughout my filters, refined from years research and experimentation. Painting for me is the first love, an important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which I want to send a message to transmit my message, is the base of my painting. The sculpture is my lover, my artistic betrayal to the painting. That voluptuous and sensual lover that gives me different emotions, that touches prohibited cords..."

Jessica Manchester-Sanchez lives in Houston with her husband of twenty years, eighteen-year-old son, and two charming cats. She studied journalism at Texas State University and then worked as an editorial assistant at a newspaper in Harlingen, Texas, where she wrote obituaries and filled in for the bird-watching column. She is currently working on a BA in fiction at SNHU. When not writing, she's dancing. Sometimes she's dancing while writing.

Laurie-Lynn McGlynn writes: "Through the trials and challenges in my life, visual art and writing have always been my outlet, a cathartic experience and a way to express my thoughts about the world around me...as a woman...an artist...a writer....a mature student. There have always been barriers, but I have learned that one only wastes precious energy trying to change the world all in one go. I have learned to 'pick my battles,' as it were, and yes, I have a few scars. Many creative women have stormed this road before me, setting examples by pushing boundaries outside of the domestic sphere. I just hope that if I can be half as

determined and passionate as my predecessors were, then I shall indeed feel I was worthy to own this sex."

Allyson McGregor was born and raised in a small town in California. Her writings do not reflect her life. They represent small things she sees; she adds to them to make an interesting story.

Lorinda McKinnon is retired and living in the mountains of Washington State. She left the city behind and is living the life she always knew she wanted. Gardening in the summer, reading in the winter, and writing all year long bring her joy.

Linda McMullen has been published in *Chaleur*, *Burningword*, *Typishly*, *Panoply*, *Open: Journal of Arts and Letters*, *Allegory*, *Enzo Publications*, *The Write Launch*, *Palaver*, *Curating Alexandria*, *SunLit*, *Five:2:One*, and *Every Day Fiction*. She is a wife, mother, and US diplomat, currently in Arlington, VA, on a domestic rotation, but she is most often found in Africa or Asia.

Diana McQuady holds an MFA in writing from Spalding University, was the 2007-2008 Writer-in-Residence at Western Kentucky University (WKU), and was co-chair of the Kentucky Writers Conference during its first five years. Her work has been published in anthologies, newspapers, newsletters, and journals. She teaches at WKU and lives in Bowling Green, KY.

Yadira Medina grew up in the small town of Lodi and loves to read, write, and serve the community. Yadira's hobbies include spending time with family, friends, and online shopping. A nursing major, Yadira has a passion for putting thoughts and feelings down on paper as a form of self-care.

Bhupinder jit Mehton is a student at Cosumnes River College and would like to be a software developer.

Serene Slumber is a small drawing done in ballpoint pen. This medium has been a personal favorite of **Salem Naylor** since she was thirteen. Since then, she has traded the black ink in for some of the more colorful mediums, such as watercolor and oil paint. At the moment, she enjoys studying the human figure.

Appria Negrete is a local artist. She has prints of this piece and other pieces available for purchase. She is also available for commissions. Negreteappria@yahoo.com.

Charlotte L. Oakeby is a seventeen-year-old from West Sussex, United Kingdom. She has a passion for literature, languages, and fitness. Her love for writing began after cancer stole her father in 2015. She decided to focus her attention towards writing a novel, which she hopes to publish in the future.

Ryan Scott Oliver is “shaking up musical theater with his dark, twisted and genius work... [Oliver] could very well be musical theater’s answer to an auteur filmmaker or a gothic novelist” (*Huffington Post*). He is the winner of a Larson Grant, Rodgers Award, New Musicals Awards from Weston Playhouse, Pace University, and the recipient of a Lortel Award Nomination as well as numerous fellowships, residencies and ASCAP awards. Find writings, videos, tweets, and more of his morbidly optimistic musings @ryanscottoliver on all platforms.

Elaine Olund writes, draws, designs, and teaches yoga & creativity workshops in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her work has been published recently in *Flyway*, *Peregrine Journal*, and *Turk's Head Review*, among others. Find her at elaineolund.com.

Timothy Phillips writes: “[My artworks] are brilliant and lively, colorful and joyful. They all show what is possible for one to achieve, or inspire one to achieve. My art is built on layers of brush strokes; like the layers of days, months, and years of our lives, we build on them carefully to create a whole life, a complete life.”

Ann Schlotzhauer is a Kansas City native and graduate of the University of Tulsa. Her poetry, fiction, and photography can be found in *Foliate Oak*, *Alluvian*, *Cardinal Sins*, and more.

Zara Shams’s work has appeared in several publications, including *Noble/Gas Qtrly*, *Visual Arts Collective*, and *Sonder Midwest*. Zara’s prize-winning poem, “there is no such thing as a woman,” has been published by the Poetry Society, and her chapbook of the same name was published by Zoetic Press in June 2018.

Owen Smith is an author from New York City.

Travis Stephens earned a degree at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. A sea captain, he now resides with his family in California. Recent credits include *Stoneboat Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Southword*, *Havik*, *Apeiron Review*, *The Finger*, *Night Picnic Journal*, *Pennsylvania English*, and *Gravitas Poetry*.

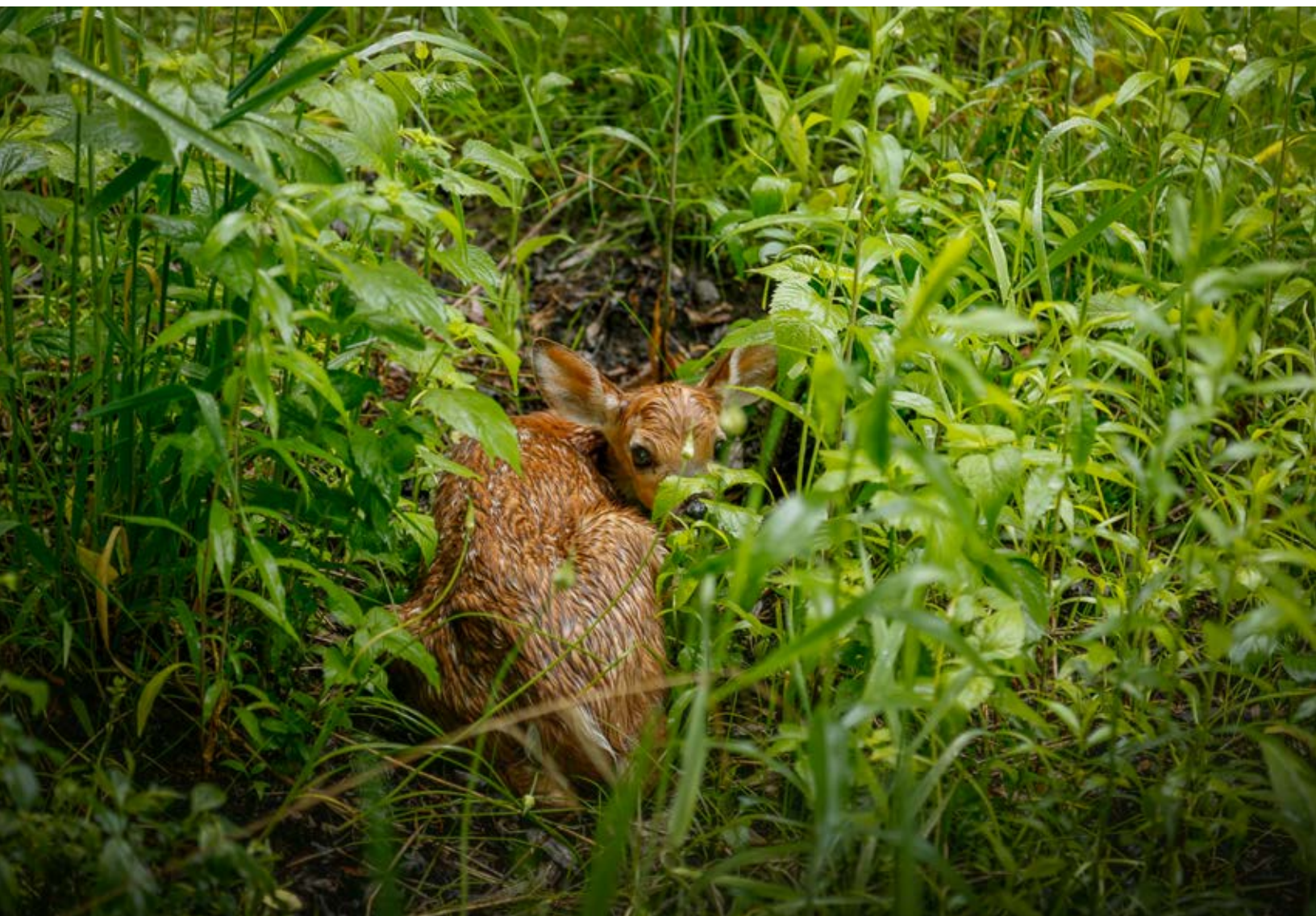
Matt Stevenson is the winner of the Big Snowy Prize in Fiction and is currently a student at Montana State University.

Ashley Tan is a freshman at Cosumnes River College. She is planning to major in chemical engineering. In her free time, she enjoys reading, working out, taking photos, and hanging out with friends. She has much experience in the arts, does ceramics, draws on occasion, plays guitar, and sings sometimes; and she writes when she is sad.

Cora Tate graduated as a mathematician but has been a full-time professional entertainer most of her adult life. Cora’s repeated attempts to escape the entertainment industry brought work as a librarian, physics teacher, syndicated newspaper columnist, and city planner. Cora lives, reads, writes, and struggles to learn Dzongkha in Bhutan.

Ahrend Torrey is a poet and painter. He is a creative writing graduate from Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. When he is not writing, or working in New Orleans, he enjoys the simpler things in life, like walking around City Park with his partner, Jonathan, and their two rat terriers, Dichter and Dova. Forthcoming this year, his debut collection of poems, *Small Blue Harbor*, will be available from *The Poetry Box*.

Grace Weakley is a student at CRC majoring in health information technology. Originally from Oklahoma, she moved to California at the age of thirteen. She enjoys writing in her spare time.



MATT STEVENSON » » » FAWN



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