

**The Raw Art Review:
A Journal of Storm and Urge**



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**COVER ART:
BLANK
by C. F. Roberts**

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cello suite

the spotted fawn was struck
by a gold ford explorer
it flopped dead
in my driveway.
the girl in the ford wore hospital scrubs
cringed after hitting the deer
stopped briefly
and drove off.

i couldn't leave the little fawn
rotting twenty feet from
my door
bringing in the buzzards
and the maggots
and the flies.

i drug her by her hind legs
her head rambling
over the uneven earth
limp and lifeless.

i drug her deep
into the wooded hollow
and i stared back
at her blank stare.

later
in the house trailer
i washed my hands and fried a steak
drank a twelve pack of best
smoked

listened to Bach
cello suites

i could hear
the spotted fawn
wandering gaily

hopping in the tall grass
alongside the road
calling to me
just in time
to see the end.

the clock on the wall
was dumb.

the typewriter and
i too
was dumb.

i tried again to
follow the deer but
my words were stiff
i wasn't born to dance.

desperate to feel something
i drug the sledge out
from beneath the trailer.
i took it to the clock,
then i went for the typewriter.

the first blow destroyed it
but i kept on

blasting the thing to bits
until the end of the 2nd bourrée,
in suite no. 4.

i opened the last beer
and collapsed in the olive chair
the pieces were everywhere
i felt like
i might vomit
i couldn't go on.

i gathered the bent type bars
the keys and chards
of the carriage
to a box.
i took it to the woods
and placed it
beside the fawn.
the light was enough
to see the blank stare.
maybe it was
a triumphant death.

there wasn't anything to do
without the typewriter,
but it seemed best
to try to sleep.

by Jason Gerrish
(Winner of The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



Fire Behavior
by Judith Skillman

A Formula for Intimacy

by Jacob Klein

Joseph got an offer to work at a new wing in a museum in the city. It's a big museum, prestigious and well-known. Certainly much larger than our modest, crumbling little building. It's not quite as intimate, not quite as carefully crafted as our one-and-a-half-person affair. But, it's vast. And it's stable. Joseph wouldn't have to salvage old specimens to make ends meet, the letter said. He could craft something more permanent. Of course, its wording was more delicate than that. But the whiff of Pity wafting from the paper was unmistakable to Joseph's expert nose. That might have been on purpose.

There's just one condition, the letter said. He comes alone. Makes a new start. Nonnegotiable. Which means I can't go with him. I told Joseph he should take it.

"I don't want a new assistant. You're the only person I can work with. Everyone else feels too... I don't know, but it's distracting. And it contaminates the specimens. You know that."

"I feel very content right now. Is that distracting?"

I was wearing Contentedness at the time. It was from a new exhibit: a blend of three parts Satisfaction, two parts Secureness, one part Amusement, and a faint undertone of Ignorance.

Joseph started to squeeze his hand. I rubbed at my face with my sleeve.

"But I made that. That's different."

I rubbed the last of the Contentedness off and returned to normal. I felt clear as a cloud and as featureless as the face of the sun. Joseph's hands returned to his sides. I could see him studying my face, his eyes trawling over my every feature. His eyes moved liked swampy gemstones grinding in a socket, wet and unreal. His gaze was like

seaweed's engulfing caress. But, in my natural, emotionless state, I was unaffected by it. My impenetrable neutrality seemed to calm him, as it usually does.

"I still think you should take the offer. You wouldn't have to sell off specimens to make space anymore. And it won't be long before the repairs become too much for me. I know you love this place, but you deserve more than a little museum with just the two of us that's about to fall apart. The world is going to drag you out of here eventually. Why not now? It is a good offer."

Joseph began squeezing his hand again. His eyes darted to his desk, to his research. He had been dissecting a mass of crude Bliss, and its pulsing, organic form was still pinned down on a board. He poked at it and rubbed the glowing, blue residue between his fingers.

"But we work well together. I'd miss you. I mean, I know I *made* you, but you're more than just a doll. I can't even remember what it was like before you worked here. And what would you do?"

"I'd find something. I'll be fine. This will be good for you."

Neither of us said anything for a while. A brick nearby started to crumble and shake. I went over to gather the bits of stony Certainty and piece them back together with a sticky solution of Comfort.

Then, with my back turned to him, Joseph spoke, "I'll think about it. Why don't you close up for the night?"

Joseph acted strangely after that. I didn't think much of it at the time. After all, Joseph built this museum himself. He constructed every brick out of Passion and Desperation and Wanting. He made me shortly after it opened, after he had fired three assistants for being too disappointing.

In the front, beyond the vestibule, were three exhibition rooms. They had an order, but the rooms didn't

always follow it. And sometimes a room would get infested—Loneliness, in particular, could be persistent—or break in half and I'd have to weave a quick tunnel out of Determination and/or Apathy for guests to get from one room to another.

The first room was dark. The only light came from spotlights that illuminated rows of emotions. They were in their crudest, semi-organic form, dissected and pinned to the wall. This was what he crafted me out of.

The second room was the biggest. It had a large pit in the center. Joseph sometimes set emotions free in it to see how they would interact. There were glass cages built into the walls. These cages held emotions in their liveliest forms, bestial but amorphous. A menagerie of sorts.

The third room was the smallest, but it was the most valuable. Crowded shelves loomed over crowded aisles. They held hundreds of meticulously labeled bottles of clear liquids. Tight on space, that room was where Joseph stored emotions in their most refined form, locked behind glass doors. He allowed me to leave some bottles out on tables for visitors though. We are a museum, after all. Though we've learned to be more discerning with our samples after that incident with an overdose of Doubtfulness.

There were two private spaces in the back. One was for Joseph and one was for me. Joseph had the larger space, since he needed room for his experiments. My office was adequate. I didn't need much space to write labels and record repairs.

I had to pass through Joseph's lab to get to my office. I set it up like that on purpose to make sure I could always check up on him. I'm not sure he ever realized that was the reason. He was always so easily distracted.

It had been two days since Joseph received that letter. I tried to bring it up a few times, but Joseph kept saying he'd think about it. He didn't seem to be able to meet

my eyes anymore. When I came into work that morning, I found Joseph at his desk. He was snoring on a pile of folders and papers and diagrams. His chair leg was melting, so I propped it up with a book he didn't seem to be using.

I looked over his shoulder to see what he was working on. There was a formula for Intimacy on the corner of the desk. Joseph had been working on it since before he made me, but it always eluded him. No one had ever figured out how to effectively create it in the lab. Joseph was determined to be the first. It was his life's work.

Joseph's formula for Adoration was in the center of his desk. There must have been other formulae lurking underneath, but the various notes and figures for Adoration hid them. I took a moment to glance at his latest work.

Adoration

- 1. Heat 14 ounces of Affection until it comes to a roiling boil.*
- 2. Add 8 ounces of Longing.*
- 3. Let temperature rise to 325°, stirring continuously for 45 minutes until concentrated.*
- 4. Use eye dropper to add 2 ounces of Awe, one drop at a time, with 5 seconds between each drop.*
- 5. Let cool to 160°, then alternately add 3 ounces of Loneliness and Humility, 1 ounce at a time, counting 1 minute between each addition.*
- 6. Expose mixture to a UV lamp for one hour.*
- 7. Add 5 ounces of Admiration and blend in an industrial mixer at 500 RPM for 3 hours.*
- 8. Let settle, then stir in 1 ounce of Certainty.*
- 9. Add 1 drop each of Fear and Hope and let dissolve.*

I also skimmed over his notes, even though I already knew what they said. I tested Adoration the previous month. It worked a little too well. Joseph was so

surprised he couldn't speak for a good twenty minutes. Then he locked himself inside my office for the rest of the day. He couldn't look at me without blushing for a week.

There was something new scrawled in the margins, but it had been crossed out.

I went to get Joseph some coffee. He was still sleeping when I got back, so I tapped him on the shoulder. Joseph lifted his head and blinked. Bits of plaster had fallen onto his hair and eyelashes through the night. He brushed and blinked these away. He struggled to make sense of what was in front of him, shuffling around papers and mumbling to himself. He was surprised when he finally noticed me. He stuttered and scrambled for words. I held out the mug of coffee to give him something easy to say.

"I brought you some coffee. You looked like you might need it."

"Thank you, Phoebus."

Joseph brought the mug to his nose and inhaled. That seemed to calm him some.

"Do you think Adoration might be a part of the formula for Intimacy?"

"How did..."

"You left it out on your desk."

"Oh, yeah."

Joseph tapped his nails against the ceramic mug. *Plink plink plink plink*, one after another like a nervous refrain. I looked at him pointedly. The sound was distracting.

"Any progress?"

"Not on that. I think I might have found a way to stabilize Adoration, though. I need you to test it for me later."

Joseph caught himself clicking his nails and instead wrapped his palm around the mug to absorb its warmth. His

thumb rubbed the handle in absent arcs. The surface turned soft and tan at his touch.

"Should we close early, then?"

"No. No, there's no need for that."

"Alright. Have you given the offer any more thought?"

Joseph's eyes widened then quickly narrowed. He shifted to angle himself away from me.

"I told you, I'm still..."

"...thinking about it. I know. But the offer won't stand forever. You need to at least tell them something. It'll look bad if you don't reply at all. It'd be best to stay on the good side of the scientific community. You never bother with publishing your work—I practically have to hold it hostage for you to let me submit it to journals—and if they forget you..."

"You know I don't like talking about that."

"Then don't let it happen."

"I... We'll talk about this later. I promise. After we do this test... I promise."

"Good. I'm going to open up. I'll hold you to that promise."

"Fine. Whatever you say, Phoebus. Just let me get back to work."

Joseph remained in his lab the whole day. I brought him lunch and some water every once and a while, or else he would have forgotten. The ceiling started to sag at one point and I went to prop it up with some Optimism. After I closed the museum for the day, I stood outside the door of the lab and knocked on the lintel. Joseph nearly jumped out of his chair. The poor thing finally had enough and melted all the way. Joseph had enough wherewithal to avoid falling face first into a puddle of Purpose but staggered and flung himself at my feet, looking up at me, embarrassed.

"Phoebus? What are you doing here already? Shouldn't you be leading a tour or something?"

"It's 8:30, Joseph. I just closed up."

"Oh..."

"Is the new version of Adoration ready?"

Joseph plucked a half-full bottle from a pile of empty ones. He walked toward me and said, "It is. I was just double checking some data. It should work."

Joseph held out the bottle.

"Here. Try it."

I took the bottle and waited, but Joseph just stood and stared at me. A deep crack sounded somewhere in the walls. It sounded big, and I could hear spidery little cracks spread out after the initial fissure. I could almost feel the crumbling of the walls reach out to suffocate me.

I pointed and started to turn, "I should check that out before..."

Joseph grabbed my arm. His eyes fluttered like curtains around a broken window. His voice sounded like air rasping through a rusted gutter, "I'll take care of that later. Can we just do this now? Please?"

"Are you sure? That sounded serious."

"Of course I'm sure. I built this place. I built you. It'll be fine."

As if creeping across ice, I reached out to unstopper the bottle.

"If you say so, Joseph."

"Alright. Put it on now."

I splashed some of the mixture on my hands and rubbed it into my face. Joseph picked up his notebook as his face lit up in victory. There was a moment right before it took effect that I realized something was wrong. Like turning a corner on a tidal wave.

Joseph's notebook was nowhere to be found when I woke up in his bed. Joseph was looking at me with stardust eyes.

"So? How did it feel? Amazing, right?"

"You lied to me. What was that?"

Joseph moved closer. His eyes flashed with starlight. His skin glowed red with heat. His sweat boiled and filled the air with steam. Looking at him through the sauna-like air, his flesh rippled and became indistinct, like looking at dyed gauze through a cloudy glass. His words condensed and dripped with Anticipation in the thick air and bumped against me with their squishy heads. I swatted them away.

"Intimacy! I finally found it!"

"That's great, but why did you lie to me?"

"Because I wasn't sure if... It doesn't matter. It felt amazing, didn't it?"

The Milky Way condensed in his eyes. It was so bright it almost hurt to look at. The sheets around him started to smoke.

"Of course it did. But why would you lie to me?"

The light in Joseph's eyes still hadn't reached his mouth. It gaped open until a trickle of starlight found its way out.

"I'm going to turn the offer down. I promised I would tell you my decision afterwards, didn't I? Well, I'm turning it down. I'd rather keep working with you. Just the two of us. I know things are unstable at the museum, but we should have enough money to renovate soon. And we don't have to tell anyone I found the formula for Intimacy. It could be our secret. It's exciting, isn't it? All this? Unfortunately, we used all of the Intimacy last night, but I think I can make some more by tonight and we can do this again and..."

"Again? Why would we do this again?"

Joseph flinched. His eyes flickered.

"Why wouldn't we do this again? You said it was fun, didn't you?"

"Yes, but those weren't my feelings. You made them. I don't have emotions, remember? It's why you made me. So why would *I* want to do this again?"

A black hole opened up in the back of his eyes and pulled all of the heat out of the air. Impotent scorch marks scarred the bed.

"Because... Because I love you. I love you, Phoebus, and I just thought that..."

"But you didn't think about me, did you? You lied to me."

"Yes, but..."

"Then you don't really love me. You want to, but you don't."

The starlight in Joseph's eyes slipped beyond the event horizon. His skin glistened with frost.

I got up and got dressed. I opened the door and took a step out, but stopped to turn back and check on Joseph.

He was still frozen. Not even his eyes had moved. He was frozen, but he would thaw. Light from the rising sun was creeping through the window toward the bed.

Still, I felt like I should say something.

"If there is a work to go back to, I'll see you at work."

*(Winner of the RAR John H. Kim Memorial Prize for
Short Fiction)*



A Little Bird Told Me (Shaming)
by K. Johnson Bowles

LAST RITES

It rained cottonmouths for 30 days after you died.
They wore proud boots and took over the streets,
slithered and kicked through the steel-plated doors.
They sat coiled or casually drooped in your special recliner.
They ate the last Tyson's chicken in Arkansas—they did!
and then ravaged the okra and bean patches out back.
Then they took the tomatoes and purple-hull peas,
cutting a swath like Sherman's army marching to sea.
Their white mouths turned a deep heliotrope purple.

We plied them with offerings of heavy red wine
and they turned all purple and died. We swept snakeskins
for weeks. Next the bats came, echolocating what we
humans heard only as a series of slight erratic clicks.
We developed a decoder that could read bat-tongue for us
and learned that they repeated through the walls a gossip chorus:
"You know he heard the wind chimes just before he died, a music
that played so hauntingly on the listening ears of time."

We banged every pot and pan in the house like a marching band
starting off a Fourth of July parade with John Phillip Souza's brass
until they gave up their roost, a lonely, leaning excuse for a chimney.
When finally we wept and muttered a flood of desolate words
over your cavernous deep rhombus in the earth, a dark hole really,
an aunt we barely knew said to me, "Give me your last skinny-back
wishbone hug and tell us how thin we've become."

by Pamela Sumners
(Winner of The RAR Poet-in-Residence Contest November 2019)

LOVE POEM

Darling, while I was gone for the summer
you heated gas on the stove and burned
down the house, and darling, while I was
gone, you invited a snake pit into the kudzu
and they strangled every last flower we had.
This is what I had heard but when I returned
the house stood true against the falling sky
but one dog was dead and another ripped
in his throat. I know my people always said
you were a little cold-natured for a Southern girl.
It must be those Yankee Calvinist parents you had.

by Pamela Sumners

(Winner of The RAR Poet-in-Residence Contest November 2019)

PATINA

The things you forget are the stupid verbal confetti of old love letters,
the weight of ancient matters settling the scales of justice around your
shoulders like a yoke or a shawl, and it doesn't matter, because you're
wearing it, for work or for warmth you don't know. They've come to rest
there, ploughshares or bodyrags of old words, leaving splinters or growing
tattered—it doesn't much matter. All tales grow old in the telling of them
but still are yours, mine, ours, the dazzling, crumbling libretti of the stars.
We guide the ordinary calendars of intention, calibrate the days, paying
a mortgage in years that sometimes feels a ransom for old time's sake.
How much dust can rusticate onto sheen, a cherished patina of meaning?

I met a dealer in old goods once who told me, copper is a dirty metal,
made beautiful by breathing, melding to one ore, oxidizing out of thin air.

by Pamela Sumners
(Winner of The RAR Poet-in-Residence Contest November 2019)



untitled
by John D. Robinson

The Rosebushes

Something sad
about the roses,
flat like pennies
in the spent purse
of morning,
last night's richness
all gone.

She was always
in the garden,
cutting them off
for her lavender vases.
She even saved
pictures of them,
the kind women
cut out of magazines
when their bodies sag a bit
and trellises and spring
make them forget.

Her husband,
cruel shit,
hated the roses.
Got in the way of his
mowing, he said.

Tomorrow he is going
to rip out the bushes.
She sways and
sings in the
doomed branches,
her hands pierced
with thorns.

by Donna Davis
(First Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

The Last Flight of “The Man in the Moon”

I flew a diamond-shaped kite
on the hill near the brick high school—
blue and yellow paper,
stretched across spars of light wood.
It wore a smiling moon face
and a storybook name
printed in block letters;
a child’s secret friend
to race with on a grassy slope
and climb the sky.
Tethered to my wrist,
it pulled me towards billowy realms
of clouds and far-flung planets.
But I was betrayed
one late autumn afternoon.
Father took it away from me,
boasting how high it would soar.
He made my kite flutter wildly
over trees and houses,
till it crashed—
impaled on spiked branches.
I didn’t want to hear
that it couldn’t be retrieved,
so torn I could only see
its broken smile.

by Donna Davis



Moving Too Fast
by Diane Shannon

decaying sun under noontime rain

I stood by and watched
a decaying sun under noontime rain
cast rotten orange-green rays
on the breast of a great blue heron
it was on the edge of a man-made lake
amongst reeds and brush
the beauty of that bird
mixed with the ugliness of the world
brought about a forgotten peace
from the misplaced memories of
summer youth in New Jersey
spent in graveyards and on rooftops
as I watched the bird watch me
an understanding was found in our distance
and when the rain became heavier
the heron moved toward the reeds
having no place to go
I walked around the lake for a while

by Tohm Bakelas
(2nd Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski prize for Poetry)

3/15/19

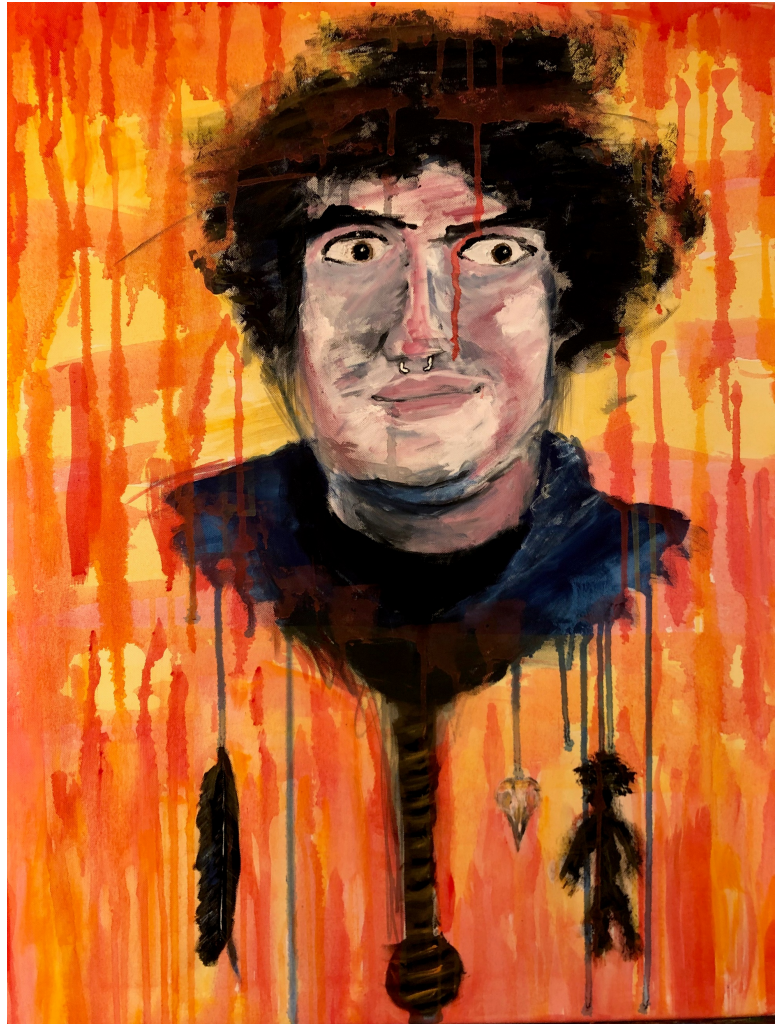
The springbirds sing songs
five days early
as I walk to my car.
When the door shuts
I hear nothing more.
Is that what it's like
when we're dead?
Once the coffin lid is shut,
is that it?
Or is it once the dirt
is shoveled on top
and sealed by earth?
All around the snow is melting
and the air smells good again.
Suicide rates are higher
in the spring
than any other season.
Five days ago
the clocks changed
to one hour ahead.
Five days from now
spring will be in bloom.
The forecast calls
for a clear blue sky
with 10 percent chance
of rain
and 84 percent chance
of humidity.
These kinds of odds
lead a man back to bed.
I press my windup-watch
to my left ear
and let the ticking
carry me away.

by Tohm Bakelas

first night

2000 black rose petals
turn to stone
at the mouth of my bed
poverty of thought occurs
the robins
find no worms
and the sun
looks the same.

by Tohm Bakelas



Tom Bakelas Witch Doctor Poet
by Henry G. Stanton

“Cicada”
by Dean Gessie

When grandpa was naked, I didn’t see his doohickey. I was on the porch an’ his belly hung big an’ low like a melon.

Mama said, “For the love of God, Charlie...” She called her dad *Charlie* ‘cause she said he weren’t no dad o’ hers.

Cliff, Mom’s sleep-over friend, said, “Is he drunk?”

It weren’t that simple, mama said, on account o’ grandpa bein’ off his rocker an’ it weren’t a real sure read to say liquor was come to play.

So mama hadn’t seen Charlie for ten years but his showin’ up naked in the twilight of the front yard was just another rusted link in the great chain o’ misery. Some people never laugh or smile. My mama never knew surprise from ordinary after daddy left. He took off with the savings an’ the red-headed hairdresser at *Veronique’s Cuts and Shaves*. For three years, mama turned down the sheets regular-like an’ set an extra place, admittin’ no surprise. Then Cliff come an’ moved into the spaces where daddy used to be an’ the neighbors said there’d be no surprise in that house.

“What are you doin’ here?” mama said to her daddy.

“I’m readyin’ to fly.”

Mama didn’t say pea turkey ‘bout that. She said, “Missy, get fixin’ for bed.” And I knew better to argue.

Cliff didn’t say pea turkey but when he was hungry or annoyed. “What are yuh gonna do with that old, naked fart?”

I bust a gut when I heard that. *Old naked fart!* Cliff looked at me like one of those lions that kills the babies o' him that was before.

Mama said, "He can sleep in the barn. More blankets than Frank Junior needs." Frank Junior was our horse. He was born o' the union of his mama, World's Fair, and a traveling salesman named Frank. My mama says there's no other explanation. Three hundred an' forty days later from cock's crow to cock's crow. She wasn't surprised.

We left grandpa cross-legged an' naked in the yard. He's got teats like a boar hog an' long white bunches o' hair an' arms an' legs skinnier than a cricket's.

Of a sudden, grandpa raises his fist at the lot of us, says, "I don't give a dried apple damn!" *Hallelujah*, I think.

So, I'm out an hour later sittin' with grandpa under the crab tree. I get naked 'cause fair's fair.

Grandpa looks at me and says, "I can hear the nymphs. I hear their song from the earth."

That's just crazy luck, 'cause my teacher, Miss Johnson, told us once that nymphs are beautiful girls asleep in trees an' things. But grandpa says I got my nymphs all wrong. He's talkin' bugs an' he tells me the story of the cicada nymphs that spend seventeen years underground eating tree roots before livin' as winged adults for only a few weeks. "I've been lost for seventeen years," he says, "and now I am come home to be re-born."

I tell grandpa that mama says he's been away for ten years. He seems puzzled by this, like he figures the number of spokes in the wheel was a done deal.

"Missy," he says, "nothin's true but believin' makes it so."

“Halleluiah,” I say. “Jane Piccolo stole my butter pecan once an’ her sayin’ it was hers a thousand times made everyone think it were so.”

“Missy,” he says, “you and I are gonna make a world of myth and Jane Piccolo and her lies can go to hell.”

What with a word like *myth*, grandpa sure has a funny way o’ talkin’. His eyes bug out an’ he’s amazed. I take a shine to grandpa. What with daddy gone, and Cliff and Sneaky Pete down the road, I was thinkin’ like mama that men were last in line at creation. They got a bolt o’ lazy and a pound o’ selfish which means they’re always in a bad mood on account o’ wantin’ things an’ never liftin’ a finger to get ‘em.

But grandpa’s different. “Missy,” he says, “it’s time to build the temple.” So, he gets up an’ walks over to the barn to fetch what it is he needs. It’s dark as molasses in there, but I can hear him movin’, and movin’ things. Sure enough he comes out dragging’ a tangle o’ chicken wire an’ God Almighty he’s got cutters, too.

That’s when all hell breaks loose. I was jus’ thinkin’ about Sneaky Pete an’ there he is in the road before the yard with a fishing pole in one hand an’ a jar o’ leeches in th’ other. He’s out for catchin’ more o’ them cats than he should, sneakin’ ‘em away in the dark. Anyway, he looks at me an’ grandpa an’ then runs an’ grabs me by the arm an’ pulls me toward the house raisin’ a god awful racket.

And mama and Cliff come down and everyone’s angry as the devil. Cliff an’ Sneaky Pete say grandpa’s a pervert an’ I shouldn’t be naked with ‘im.

Mama says, “He’s a lot o’ things, but *that* he ain’t.”

Cliff says, “A man’s desires change.”

Sneaky Pete says, “Temptation is what made the crow fly.”

I can go to my room or take a lickin’. From my window, I see Cliff in front of grandpa an’ I hear the words *son of a bitch* an’ Cliff pushes grandpa, leaves ‘im sittin’ beside the wire an’ the cutters, like he wouldn’t piss on ‘im if he was on fire. *Big show*, I think. *Big show, Cliff*. I can barely see mama. She’s standin’ tall with one hand to her mouth, like a trunk cut through with lightning. I can’t see her face. I don’t imagine there’s any surprise, anyway.

The next morning, I’m listenin’ in secret to mama. She’s tellin’ Cliff in the kitchen that her daddy ran a junkyard an’ fancied himself an inventor, used to be handier than a pocket on a shirt. Story had it he was God-fearin’ once an’ then he stopped believin’ when the last o’ the litter was born without arms an’ legs an’ a brain. He took to talkin’ to himself an’ walkin’. And walkin’ and talkin’ got ‘im lost for ten years.

“Everybody breaks different,” mama said.

I scarf my cornmeal an’ grab my book bag for school an’ go outside and God Almighty grandpa’s built himself a huge bug statue outta wire. He’s sittin’ in the middle of it naked like it were a flying machine an’ I remember what he said about fixin’ to fly.

“Good morning, Missy,” he says. “You’ll be seeing a few changes around here. Hurry home if you’re of a mind to witness the transformation.”

*

I loved my teacher, Miss Johnson. She showed me to write *himself* for *hisself*, said I could go to college ‘cause I sop like bread. She was young an’ she came from the city to replace Miss Carswell who had a breakdown. Miss Johnson dressed in clothing that

was soft an' colourful an' she smelled like lilac. And all the boys were in love with 'er, too. Even though they were mostly stupid an' mean, all she had to do was look at 'em an' it was like Sunday School, Jesus puttin' out his hand an' tossin' the demons outta the pigs.

Anyway, that year, Miss Johnson taught us about evolution an' I was real curious 'cause Jill Patterson piped up an' said that her daddy said that evolution is a lie an' anyone who believes it is a *prostitute*.

Well, Miss Johnson bust a gut when she heard that an' because we all wanted to please Miss Johnson, we all bust a gut. But Miss Johnson stopped quick an' said she was sorry. I never heard a teacher say that. And Miss Johnson said we needed to keep an open mind about evolution.

And it *was* the most amazin' thing. We pushed the desks back an' she brought a kiddie pool out o' the coat room an' filled it with water that she coloured green with dye an' then we all got a chance to throw seeds in, bird and corn an' the like, an' then Miss Johnson put a green paper shade over the desk lamp an' asked me to turn out the lights an' then she said to get the dinosaur an' animal toys that we got from cereal boxes at the Hardware on Main an' stand 'em up around the floor an' while we did that, Miss Johnson put on a record called "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" that came all the way from South Africa an' we all sang the "wimoweh" part an' it was the right song, what with family startin' in the swimmin' hole in Africa for all of us.

"The world was once a big bowl of soup over 4.5 billion years ago," Miss Johnson says. "All life evolved from the sea. Natural selection meant that the stronger species survived."

So, we're all dancin' an' singin' *wimoweh* to "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" an' some o' the boys are playin' *animal fights* around the big soup to see who would live an' who would die an' then Principal Early comes in an' asks to talk to Miss Johnson an' she goes away an' comes back forever later. And you could see that she had been cryin' an' the rest of the day was like a funeral for God knows why.

We didn't get a lotta evolution after that. Miss Johnson told us that God created the earth in six days an' that the sun was created after an' the whole thing took about 10,000 years. And then there was the garden an' Adam an' Eve an' lickety-split a whole heap o' trouble on account o' God hoggin' the apple tree for himself. You could see that her heart wasn't in it. She read time to time from the same book I seen in Sunday school.

I asked Miss Johnston if she believed in the idea of the soup or the idea of the garden. "What's goin' on, anyway?"

Miss Johnson bit her lip an' hesitated. Finally, she said, "I will speak the truth." The truth had some relationship with the door 'cause she kept lookin' at it while she talked.

"People create what are called *myths*" she said.

I hollered, "My *grandpa's* makin' a myth! He thinks he's a grasshopper!"

It weren't exactly true, but Miss Johnson was dead serious. "Myths are stories that people believe in to comfort themselves. People are afraid. They need to believe there is an obvious reason for everything. There was no garden," she said. "No Adam and Eve. No apple tree of special importance. It's just a myth. It's not true." And then Miss Johnson reaches into the cupboard under the sink, her eyes never leavin' the

door. Out comes a kinda model with monkey an' human-like shapes on pins. An' from one end to the other they get taller an' straighter.

Miss Johnson clears her throat and says,
“Today, I am going to tell you the story of *Lucy*.”

*

The day grandpa come, I was walkin' home cryin' 'cause Principal Early said that Miss Johnson went away an' she wouldn't be coming back. Miss Johnson had important business back in the city. We knew that was a bald-faced lie, 'cause there was adults goin' in an' outta the school an' meetin' with Principal Early an' they looked like packs o' wild dogs. An' Miss Johnson wouldn't leave without sayin' goodbye. An' God's my witness Principal Early smelled like hooch.

And if that don't beat all, I turn left at the John Deere, and there's a mob in the road at my house, like it were a fair or a funeral. I drop my book bag and skedaddle. Grandpa's crouched naked an' high in the apple tree. An' he's painted himself like the cicada. He's mud-black with orange body stripes 'cept for his back where the stripes don't meet but sorta wander south toward his butt. An' God Almighty, he ain't alone in that tree. It's covered with adult cicada jus' like he said. And folks are sayin' it's not to be believed. They come once every 17 years and this makes 10, tops. And Sneaky Pete says, “There's only one way to explain it.” And grandpa sees me an' he waves like it were a picnic.

“Missy,” he says, “I waited for you. The time has come.” And he tells me matter of fact that when he wore pants, he had pockets with the right papers in 'em 'bout the myth of the cicada. And I should read up on it when he's done his two weeks o' singin' an' flyin'.

And I look behind me at mama and Cliff. Cliff's got his lips puckered like he were gonna spit crab apple juice, but mama? She jus' stands there starin' at her daddy like he's a ghost.

An' God Almighty if he don't start singin'! An' Sneaky Pete says, "That sparks o' the real Mckoy. That's *real* good. It's your male," he says, "that's got the mating sounds. The female don't got a voice." He adds, "There's two weeks o' peace in the home."

An' then the whole tree is alive with the song o the cicada. An' grandpa, maybe once in 10 or 17 years, has got 'imself a place in this world.

An' I'm watchin' mama as grandpa prepares to fly. An' what I hear next is an awful *smack* and – I'm sure of it – one less voice in the chorus. And what mama's got on her face ain't nothin' like horror or when your breath goes with sadness or shock. Mama looks surprised, like all her expectations were contrary an' the fact of it were hard up against her feelings 'o doubt. An' God if I didn't know it outright, but Cliff's days were numbered. *Hallelujah*.

*

In March of a much later year, the almond trees slumbered beneath a hoarfrost whose delicate embroidery threatened but did not subdue the bees and the blossoms; my second son, Charles, was born in the company of his father and my mother; and Miss Patricia Johnson tapped me on the shoulder in the Easter chocolate aisle of Walmart. Oh, how my heart leapt! She was as a cordial to my supplicant in the temple of childhood worship: a soul in bliss, sweetly perfumed, elegant as Roman antiquity, principled as rain.

“Missy,” she said. And we remembered high school graduation when she was still as a picture against the gym wall.

Of course, inevitably, our talk turned to Principal Early. The gardens darkened in her eyes and the declension of her lips was immediately twisted with the stabbing and thrusting of her wet tongue.

“Oh,” she hissed, “he screwed me over, he did.” And even though I stop listening, I still hear the words, *son of a bitch*.

(First Runner-up The RAR John H. Kim Memorial Prize for Short Fiction)



Untitled
by Mark Hartenbach

DREAMLAND AND CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Near the Golden Gate Bridge,
bearded, electrified,
Charles Bukowski
is having an apotheosis,
thinking himself
into Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti.

He is awake in Dreamland
with Mr. America,
superstripping in comics,
making California:

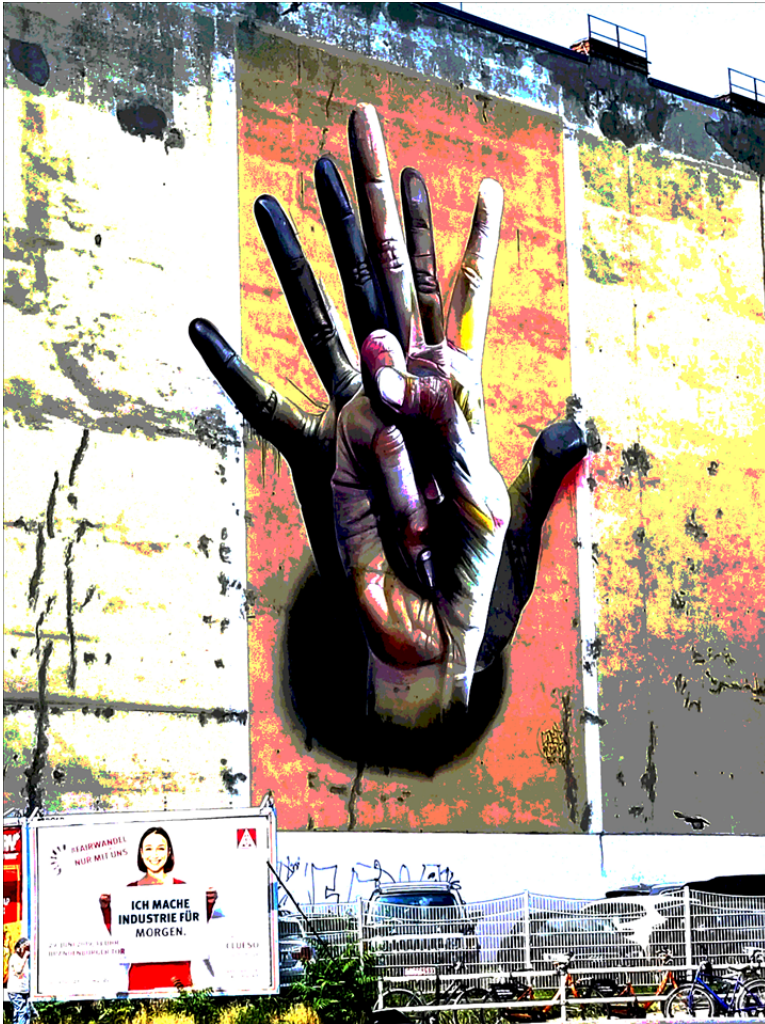
the brawling, the beer,
the bawling broads,
the exhibiting pose
with slack stomach,
shacked with straw,
colored Captain Marvel
in the deathless sun.

Before his spot freezes over,
I can see beneath the disguise,
beneath the dead afternoons,
a golden muscle of light
flex over the Pacific
and the hanging bridge:

some small chance of life
against the freezing time
unnoticed in the clutter
of deadbeats and drunks,
of washed-out whores
and pious old guys
kissing walls.

And I spread on Bukowski
like salve over raw wounds.

by Carmine Dandrea
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



East Berlin
By J. Ray Paradiso

God of Land

Un-exhausted horizons drape the ever-West.

The land tintypes the horde of steps that roil the world under your gait -
As the winds carry sermons

of Freedom and Manifest Destiny:
Little fox litters that prophesy killing. They

step out from the forest, unto the Plains – onto
pages so white they would blind type.

I am embedded in that image-scape,
pillared from the hardened sediment of
erect geologic clocks
- tossed oceans and continents.

Bible in hand, my chin plows the high steppe, while
My mouth ingests the paths of native men –

Centaurs of Comancheria.

Whose ancient soul of freedom,

I spit into the high Oblivion.

by Leon Feldofi
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



Nibbled to Death by Ducks
by Diane Shannon

Eyes Round Sockets With No Light.

Again, it's diode hot in California,
the air at dusk, sutured by bats.
The skinny arms of the elder
droop from too much fruit,
while band-tailed pigeons—
scared of my house—
cluster hungry in the elm.
There's a dangerous buzz in the oaks.
I hope it's bees, not my ears
losing the world to a static hum.

There are different kinds of despair.
Despair of a dial tone and no one
you can think of
to call. Despair of a busy signal.
Lost postcard from a dead friend
you don't remember.
Lately strangers tell me we've met,
that they stayed at my house,
I was a wonderful host.

More and more nothing
is vivid. Nothing prominent
as the heads of new nickels. Faces
look smoother than dough.
Eyes, round sockets with no light.

I walk on the fallen oak leaves,
they rustle like sharp-toothed animals.

The buzz is getting giant
like a machine eating trees
or eating holes in asphalt. Eating
my steps and the minutes passing.

by Dion O'Reilly

(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



In My Dreams
by Diane Shannon

When The Wind Blows

by Ali Wilding

I have no desire to go back, none at all, but sometimes I find myself thinking of home. On blustery days, in particular. When the wind wakes me, I lie in bed, picturing how it moves in the courtyard – how it stirs the dusty corners, and wicks the paint from flaking shutters; how it whips the cables to a high-pitched spin. Trash-bags ripple like an ocean.

I wind the sheets about me and light the stove.

Coffee hisses.

I throw the windows wide and click my camera's shutter. Have you noticed how the wind changes people? They're lighter, flightier, as in that gorgeous first flush of love or freedom.

The shifting air lifts my skirt on the way to work, and I let it.

People shouldn't trust me, but they do. I open up the houses which I clean and watch the breeze gust through the rooms. Outside, I string up make-shift lines so the drying linens can swell like pregnant bellies. It reminds me of the games we played, my sisters and I: hiding in the hanging swathes or wrapping them around our heads like mini Madonnas. With our fingers we'd cast silhouettes against the glare, conjuring with shadows whole monochrome worlds that were ours alone. And then, before the dew descended, we'd stretch those pristine sheets between our six thin arms and match the edges up. There's nothing quite like the smell of fresh laundry, is there?

When wind blows, I'm filled with a sense of things being possible. I linger in my clients' houses, moving shoeless between vast, glassy rooms in which the light is perfect. I

set up my tripod and shoot myself swathed in stirring curtains or draped upon the stairs, upside down and limbs at angles, my finger on the trigger. I gaze at myself in long mirrors with leather camera straps criss-crossing the flesh of my back.

Do I worry about getting caught? Not really, no. Naturally, I memorize my employers' routines; and I learned, as children do, to draw the chain across the door. Now that I think of it, the habit served me well on one occasion – a blustery April afternoon, when I heard the untimely jangle of Ben Young's keys. I grabbed a feather-duster and opened the door, but Ben gave me barely a glance. In fact, I don't think he once looked me properly in the face. Perhaps he was worried about staring. I know, I know, and you're very kind, but it really does happen. People can be so rude. It has its advantages, though: I won't deny that. I think that Juliette kept me on for all that time, in spite of the things she must have missed – the Tiffany earrings I gave to Agnes; a silky oyster-colored slip I sometimes wore to work – because she knew her husband wouldn't touch me.

That afternoon, I gave my humblest nod – you know the kind. Ben flashed his teeth and dashed upstairs. Three and a half minutes later he was gone again, leaving behind a potent whiff of aftershave and guilt. I went straight to the en-suite and lifted a few items in the basket – and, yes; you guessed it. It would have been easy for me to do the laundry that day. Instead, I opened Ben's closet just a fraction and went downstairs. I remember that the sight of his brassy keys, forgotten on the entryway table, made me smile.

Later that year, I was suspended from my course, pending investigation, and eventually excluded altogether. Oh, nothing as interesting as you think – just an unfortunate

case involving a pretty undergraduate. One of those trust-fund teens. You know.

Without my grant, I struggled to pay the bills, and as winter approached I began to dread the bitterness of my studio – those chilly bed-sheets, and my work crumpling like a sad, slow accordion in the damp. Agnes, ignorant of the reason for my dismissal, wrote to offer money that we both knew I wouldn't accept. Instead, I spent my time in the delicious, blurry warmth of other people's abodes – and the Youngs', in particular. Their house, though large, was not altogether to my taste. For someone who'd been at art school in Paris and New York, Juliette's style was disappointingly mainstream. Everything was white, or the lightest grey, and gratuitous pillows adorned every possible surface. The prints on the walls were generic. It must've been like living in a hotel – no *soul*, as people like to say.

In November, Juliette flew to Europe to visit family. She entrusted Oscar – her ghastly Chihuahua – to my care, and asked me to help Ben with the housework while she was away. By this she meant that I was to do it all, and I declared myself happy to help. I didn't feel compelled to tell her that Ben ate out, or that I'd spend the whole day at her house, taking photographs; reading; rifling through the mail or her closet. I'd practice speaking in her accent, flipping my hair and fingering the little silver crucifix I imagined at my throat.

What about Oscar? Good question. The wealthy often try to compensate for loveless lives with beasts whose only talent is straining daily pellets onto other people's plants. So, yes. Whenever expedient, I'd place the animal on the sofa just long enough to take a shot. Juliette would reply immediately, and I'll confess that her blind trust somehow stirred in me a deep resentment. It occurs to me

only now that Ben might have felt the same, so I suppose we'll never know.

When Ben handed over fat wads of bills at the end of each day, he either didn't know that his wife had done the same, or didn't care. He smiled, thanked me profusely, held the door. In that line of work, you learn to recognize when someone's keen to see you gone.

You know the phrase *don't speak ill of the dead*? Well, on the whole I try not to, but Ben was absurdly unsubtle. One night as I was leaving, a cab drew up. I'd arrive to the whirr of the washing-machine. The trashcans were bursting with sloppy condoms. When Ben went to work, I'd take the receipts from his pockets (CVS; cocktails; dinner) and slip them into my own. I didn't know the passcode for his phone – it wasn't Juliette's birthday, or the number for the security alarm – and he'd blocked notifications. Perhaps he had a streak of amateurish discretion, after all.

I made sure the house was immaculate for Juliette's return. I placed blood-red roses by her bed and lit some scented candles. She thought that Ben had done it for her – Ben! I heard her call him from the bedroom in a voice that turned my stomach. He came home early, and Juliette told me (her creamy cheeks a little flushed) to take the afternoon off.

I walked over to Wisconsin Avenue feeling strangely feverish. Bruised clouds loomed above the naked treetops but outside Boo's, light spilled onto the sidewalk like molten gold. The shelves inside were stacked with painted blocks and hand-made puppets; piggy banks and wooden trains with smooth red wheels; teddy bears as silky-soft as a kitten's underside. There were tiny boxes of classic cars and a Palomino rocking-horse with a lustrous, braided mane.

The assistant wrapped the gifts in festive tissue and brown paper. She tied each parcel with string, and labeled the tags as I instructed.

When I emerged, the air had a creeping chill I knew well. I hoisted the bags onto my shoulders, being careful not to dent them, and bought myself mulled wine on the corner. It slipped hotly down my throat, thick and soothing.

I saw a Juliette-colored cashmere turtleneck in a window and had one packaged for Agnes. The image of her chapped fingers unwrapping its exquisite softness, and of the children's hands scrabbling at their gifts, the shadow of lashes on their cheeks, made my eyes suddenly fill.

Shipping cost even more than expected, and I was still thirty blocks from home when sleet started falling in unrelenting shards. I let it hit my face like someone who didn't care.

A Christmas in D.C. was quiet affair. I was glad when January came, with its snow drifts, and one of my clients finally died. Her daughter tasked me with clearing the house. I said it would take a month and left my studio that night, without bothering to settle the rent, for the house on Kalorama Road. The old lady's carer – a lonely girl called Ignatia, whose long, black braid I would unwind so it fell about her breasts and mine while her employer moaned next door – had gone home to be married. The house stretched open, as cavernous and fetid as a yawn.

The Youngs were abroad – Juliette, like me, detests the cold – so I busied myself with the house and refused to give them any thought. I went through the old lady's things, keeping what I wanted and selling the rest online. I watched the painters come and go. I vacuumed and dusted and mopped and polished. On brighter days, I opened the windows and let the cold air blast the moth-ball stench from the closets. In the evenings, I lit the wood-burner and

lay on the chaise-longue with a bottle from the cellar and the old lady's scrapbooks. They were full of letters and postcards and tickets, and one intriguing newspaper clipping about the death, by fire, of a young man who shared her surname. The headline contained a whiff of scandal, prompted, it seemed, by a rather large insurance pay-out.

I enjoyed my reading, and my wine, and in the master-bedroom's vast four-poster I slept well. *All was right with the world*, you will think. But although I tried, I could not produce any work and by mid-February I was restless. Against my better judgment, I telephoned the daughter. She sent a team from New York: big-eyed, bossy blondes who fixated on fabrics and fittings but failed to notice me. The house, once properly "dressed", went on the market, and prospective buyers prowled daily through its rooms.

It was, as they say, only a matter of time.

I had messaged Juliette severally, following her return, but received no response. One evening, I walked to their house. Their lamps were lit, but the drapes were drawn and when I listened at the door, I heard only Oscar's claws upon the parquet.

I went to Juliette's favorite coffee place four days in a row. I strolled around Georgetown's cobbled streets. I took long runs along the river.

On Friday morning, I spotted her in the waterfront park, her huge Chanel sunglasses at odds with her baseball cap and some rather strained yoga pants. Oscar was doing what he did best: defecating upon the trunk of a blossoming tree. I ran past then turned back, as though unsure. "Juliette?"

Her head jerked up. The problem with sunglasses is that they only cover the front of the face. "Oh," she said. I could see her coloring as she turned away, so I crouched

down to pet Oscar, smiling through the bastard's piercing barks. "Magdalena," she said. "I'm sorry I did not text. Things have been a little – I had some kind of accident, so..."

"I'm sorry," I said, looking up. "I hope you're ok?"

"I'm fine," she said. "I'm fine."

I stood up and put a hand on her arm. "Juliette, listen –"

She flinched like she'd been burnt. "I have to go." She tugged at Oscar's lead. "I'm sorry."

I could pretend that I said more. Did more. But you asked for the truth, so here it is. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth! So help me God.

There was a bar I liked downtown. It was dark inside, with grubby walls and sticky floors. On Friday nights, a band played Blues beneath a dingy spotlight. The lead singer had a throaty voice and a wide, sad face. She liked to lick the scar that runs from my eye to the edge of my lip, tracing its wormlike sheen with her salty tongue. Sometimes I took her to the house in Kalorama and let her think it was mine. We fucked in every room, on the smooth edges of the staircase, on the kitchen's show-room counters. Afterwards, we lounged in the deep pile of the rug and shared tequila. On that particular Friday, Amber lay against my gleaming skin and asked if she could stay. I stroked the soft smokiness of her hair and thought of Juliette.

On Sunday evening, I walked over to Georgetown. Ben, walking cliché that he was, answered the door in a toweling robe. "Juliette's not here," he said, glancing back into the house. "She's – she's visiting her sister."

"I know," I lied. "She asked me to help you while she's away."

"She did?" asked Ben, his tanned forehead creasing.

“I just wanted to check what time I should come in tomorrow?”

“Right. Usual time, I guess.” He had no idea what that was.

“Great,” I smiled. And then, because I couldn’t resist: “Enjoy your night.”

The next morning is one I remember well. When the sea is tranquil, I swim far out and let my limbs float. Don’t worry, there are no sharks here – the islanders ate them all. That’s how you conquer fear, they say. You consume it.

Held there, in the ocean’s private embrace, I close my eyes and replay that day. You’ll be skeptical of my memory for detail, assume that I edit or exaggerate – and perhaps you’re right.

Spring is in the air. At the farmer’s market, the gazebos make slapping sounds in the breeze. I ask the butcher to flip his cuts and watch his knife wick them clean of fat. His sausage fingers wrap the meat like a gift. I sniff the sweet, waxy skins of peppers and rustle onions; feel chili tingle on my fingers. The most important ingredient I’ve got already. I’m not sure how much you know about developing powder – you can always google it, if you’re interested – but suffice to say it is intended for photographic use rather than ingestion.

That afternoon, at the house, I open the windows and let the breeze waft away the scent of sizzling flesh.

Once everything’s cooked, red-hot and bubbling in the pot, I peel and bin my gloves. As weighty darkness gathers in the sky, I close the windows and blinds and arrange what I need. I zip Oscar into my book-bag, and wait.

Ben doesn’t return until late. From the fumbling of keys, I can tell he’s drunk. He stumbles into the kitchen, all

blotchy cheeks and bloodshot eyes. “What the fuck are you still doing here?” he slurs, charm personified.

“Look at you,” I say. “You’re an embarrassment. Juliette deserves so much better.”

Ben snorts and takes a beer from the fridge. “Just because you want to fuck my wife it doesn’t mean I do.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me,” he says, slumping onto a bar-stool. His tie’s askew and his eyes are small and mean. “You know what she says about you?”

“No,” I say, calmly. “But I know what she says about you. She says she can’t bear to keep the child of someone so weak. She’s says she going to kill it.”

Color creeps into Ben’s cheeks like floodwater: he doesn’t know his wife is pregnant. I move round the counter and slowly pull on the oven-gloves. I don’t think I’ll get him to eat, but that’s okay. “She says you’re a failure and a coward,” I say, beginning to enjoy myself. “She says you sleep with teenagers and interns because only the naïve will have you. That you’re pathetic. That even though you’re nearly forty and live two thousand miles away, you’re still afraid of your father.”

Ben gives a choked laugh at that. “Isn’t everyone?”

“I’m not,” I say. “Not anymore. He’s dead.”

“Okay,” says Ben. “Should I pretend to give a shit?”

“Oh, no. I’m not telling you so that you pity me. I’m telling you so that you know.”

“Well, now I know. Thanks.” He takes a slug of lager.

“I haven’t finished. You’re going to understand how he died, and why.”

Ben gives a theatrical sigh. “I think it’s time for you to leave now. Go on, off you go.” He waves a hand towards the door.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“Just who the fuck d’you think you are?” he says, his bottle suddenly raised. “This is my house! Mine!”

I laugh. “Is this you trying to be intimidating, Ben? Jesus Christ. No wonder Daddy bullies you.” Ben doesn’t respond, so I go on. “Don’t worry. It happens to the best of us. How do you think this got here?”

I gesture at my face and when he looks up, I heave the huge Le Creuset from the stove. The stoneware lid hits him first, above the eye; then the pan and its boiling contents. He topples back and meets the floor with a nasty thwack. Blood and gravy glutinously coalesce in a pattern not unlike Italian marble. Ben’s eyes are open but there’s a deep gash in his forehead. Beer leaks from the smashed bottle beyond his hand. It’s all going very well.

I turn off the flame and open up the gas on all six rings. I take out the largest chef’s knife and lay it on the counter. It glints, pleasingly sharp, beneath the halogens. I don’t think I’ll need it this time, but you know what they say: *better safe than sorry*.

“Listen to me, Ben.” I take time over the syllable of his name. “No – don’t try to move. Just stay nice and still. That’s it. I’m going to finish my story.” Ben groans so I stamp on his face. His nose cracks like plastic. “But first,” I say, “I’m going to get myself a drink. You forgot to offer me one.”

I sit on Ben’s stool and gaze down. As you can imagine, he’s not looking his best. Blood and saliva dribble from his mouth and mingle with his bubbling skin. I raise a toast; the bottle’s nicely cold. That first crisp sip is always the best, don’t you think?

“My father’s violence was extraordinary,” I begin. “It’s a cliché nowadays, but it really did happen. Often it was just the usual stuff. Some days my mother’s face was so swollen that she couldn’t actually speak. On the days she

could, she was too embarrassed to open her mouth because, of course, she didn't have any teeth." I smile. Ben whimpers, so I raise my foot and he falls quiet. "But it wasn't just that. With four women in the house – well, three of them girls...let's just say that my father had a diverse skill-set. Are you sure I can't tempt you to another drink?"

Ben closes his eyes and tries to turn away, twitching like an upturned cockroach.

"No? Well, you've probably had enough already." I fill my mouth and feel the bubbles pop. "Anyway, the women in the neighborhood tried to help. They'd wait until my father went drinking, or whoring, then they'd come round with hot towels, iodine, coffee – you know the drill. My mother never said a word. As they ministered to us, she'd sit and stare at the door like a lovesick maiden, or a dog that hasn't been fed. She wouldn't accept their money, either, but when there was absolutely nothing left she agreed to take in laundry.

"Well, Ben, things got so bad that even the priest couldn't ignore it any longer. One Sunday my mother knelt down for prayers and just...didn't get up again. So. The priest organized a collection and the three of us were sent abroad to an institution in the countryside. Very remote."

The slit above Ben's eye opens and closes, oozing gently. I have a couple of photos somewhere, if you're interested, but they don't really do it justice.

"Inevitably, they split us up. If we spoke or touched hands we'd be beaten. You know how it goes. Boring, really. We used to stare at one another across the refectory. It's amazing how much you can feel when someone just looks at you, Ben.

"When they realized my little sister was pregnant, they put her in isolation. The sanatorium overlooked the chapel, which was always lit at night. It looked quite

spectacular, actually. Sort of mystical, you know? Almost as though there were a God.

“On Ada’s birthday, I snuck out of the dormitory and tiptoed my way through the dark. The grass was wet beneath my feet. If you positioned your hands right, you could cast enormous shadows on the chapel walls. I did a whole show, just like when we were kids. The flashing lights must’ve woken her – I could see her silhouetted at the window.”

Ben’s three eyes are blinking at me.

“I like to picture her laughing, but the truth is that I’ll never know what she thought. Two days later she was lying in a pool of her own innards. The baby was dead, too – but of course they already knew that. The doctor was a very devout man, you see.” I glance down. “Guess how old my sister was then, Ben. Go on, guess.” His mouth makes a gurgling sound. “You’ll have to speak up,” I say. “I can’t hear you.”

Blood colors the cracks between Ben’s teeth. “I’m not like them,” he whispers.

“Yes, you are,” I say. “You’re all the same.”

The edges of the room are growing smudgy. I’m starting to feel rather sleepy. I drain my beer and place the knife back in the drawer. I haven’t got to the best part yet, but the gas hisses like a warning and Oscar’s wretched whines are growing urgent in the corridor.

Outside, the wind is high, roiling the budding trees with a longing sound. I raise my hood and check the street. The dog cowers in my bag, a loathsome necessity.

We’re only a couple of blocks free when I sense a mighty punch of air, and then the mournful wail of sirens.

*

When the wind blows, I throw the shutters wide and allow the drapes to billow like the sails on the horizon. Ada

gurgles in her cot. The air wafts up off the beach, salty-warm and carrying with it the scent of bougainvillea. Behind us, the mountain lounges like a nude.

Juliette snoozes, her hair a web on the pillow, her face a picture. I tiptoe to the kitchen, put the water on to boil and open the doors. Oscar trots silently out. I look beyond the pool to the lush green fronds which slope down to the beach. A few miles out, the *Diamant* crouches in the turquoise sea, beautiful and threatening in the changing light.

I pour the coffee into shallow bowls. They're rough underneath, but their innards are the glossy pink of a conch. Juliette's so good with her hands. I love watching her wet fingers smooth the slippery clay.

We lie against white sheets, talking and drinking. The baby giggles between us. When she gets hungry, Juliette feeds her. Ada's pale eyelids droop and I lay her in her cot.

I straddle my wife, pulling the sheet over us like a tent. Her body is dotted with golden freckles. I trace her caesarean scar with my tongue.

Afterwards, we leave the sheets in a tangle: Marie will be in later for the laundry.

When the wind blows, we sit beneath the palms and watch waves frothing on the sand-bar. We walk along the beach for a baguette, or take a *p'tit café* in the square as the church bells toll. We have friends here. There's Adèle, in the bakery, who slips Ada morsels of *pains au chocolat*; and toothless Baptiste, who saves us thick, pink *tranches* of marlin from his catch; and Solène and Rudy, who run the restaurant where checkered tablecloths flap and flickering torchlight shimmers on the sea at night.

On days like this – most days, here – I'll choose a camera and snap Ada as she crawls, like one of the island's

pale crabs, along the sand. I want a photograph of her perched on freckled shoulders, her little hands entangled in the salty waves of her mother's hair, but Juliette won't let me take her picture. She's like those indigenous tribes, you see; she believes it'll steal her soul. I know, I know, but I promise it doesn't upset me too much. Besides, Juliette will come round eventually. She always does.

(Runner-up The RAR John H. Kim Memorial Prize for Short Fiction)



Columbia Storm
by Judith Skillman

The Vet is coming at two

My Dog is dying
Under the crepe myrtle now
In full blossom & drifting
Down over him & me &
My wife & the Vet is coming
At two, he's 14 & had the full
Dog experience, me rescuing him from
A rancher who got him as a stray
Into his ranch & announced he
Had too many dogs, & his wife
Then knowing he would shoot him &
I worked with her & she asked 12 years ago,
"Would you like a nice dog?"
& I saw him and said, "Hi buddy,"
& he sat down right beside me & took
A pet & he's been my Buddy ever since
For me & my son & my wife, he's
Chased cows on my rancher buddy's 7,000-acre ranch
With Cow-dog English Shepherds in Eastern Oregon,
& had three years of running with Walker Hounds
On Black bear chases in Alaska, with my hunting buddy
Biologist & we then took pictures
& petted up the dogs, & we let all the bears go
& once he treed a bear on his own,
But he'd come back to the truck
If the Walker hounds had a five-mile chase
He in his Airedale/Rottweiler
Compact 90 lb frame defended our yard
From a marauding German shepherd, & after the stitch-up
I had him neutered, & he was still hard on cats but
He learned to live with the one we had,
Early on I saw that he would point cats
Paw up and tail straight like a bird dog &
Well, I've had to pay a number of vet bills to stitch up felines

& just two weeks ago feeble as he is
One wandered into his backyard
& he tried for one last biting of the cat,
tipping over the lawn chairs,
Table & umbrella, & barbecue,
He always had the seeming happy dog smile
Even now that he can't move his hind legs
& he quivers in pain
& the Vet is coming at two, & my dear wife
Has been weeping for three days &
The crepe myrtle blossoms are falling on him
& the Vet is coming at two.

by James Ross Kelly
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

THE BIRTH OF BLUES

When you come, as you will,
determinate,
audible,
iron-blue.

When the sun is mere fire,
& the flycatcher nets
a Silvery Blue.

When the gummy tree exhales,
& the chorus rebuilds deep shale,
pry away the last of the places,
unattended,
come late,
vetch.

In steel Appalachia,
drunk in bog, Okefenokee,
bacteria-laden beer cups
in the French Quarter,

chunk sweat, 4am, Spanish Harlem dance shadows dance.

All that is Blue is glister & burnt
like an indeterminate shade
braced on stung, swinging wild onion.

by Jonathan Andrew Perez
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



Justice or Job (Stag Beetle)
by K. Johnson Bowles

Treasure Seeker

by Susan Breall

Whalers say that all memory on Cape May Island is stored in the trees. Older memories are found in a tree's roots, newer memories are located within its leaves and branches. Sassafras trees, Sweet Birch, Hazel Alder and Silver Bells, even the Pine and Red Oak hold memories. Each tree, whether its roots are ancient and deep, or new and close to the surface of the ground, guards and protects these memories, preserves and nurtures them like a venerable old Bede. All memories are of varying strains and varieties, just like the trees themselves. There are beautiful memories, magnificent memories, and memories that terrify, causing the wind to exhale a bone chilling scream that reverberates all the way down to the earth's core.

An old memory exists deep in the roots of a Red Oak tree that still grows on the north side of the island. The memory is of an eleven-year-old boy who once lived not far from the tree on the edge of town near the shore. This boy could often be seen standing close to the base of the Oak holding a large silver metal detector. The metal detector was twice the size of the boy who was tall for his age, and it created a loud buzzing noise like a vast swarm of bees whenever he turned on the switch at the front end of the handle. The boy used to hold the machine out in front of his body with his arms parallel to the ground, as though he was holding a divining rod. He would spend each day after he finished his summer job at Jenkin's General Store taking his metal detector out to the tree. There he would search until dark for treasure thought to be buried near the tree's roots by the first whalers to arrive on Cape Mae's shore. The boy's name was Rowan, and his hair was as red as the berries that grew on trees of the same name throughout the Island.

Rowan learned about whalers and other adventurers from books he read while confined to a hospital room the previous winter as he recuperated from a severe mastoid infection. The only treatment for the boy's malady at the time was to have doctors cut pieces of the infected mastoid bone out of the inner ear, and keep boys such as Rowan hospitalized for

weeks on end. No visitors could visit an infected child at the hospital except on Sundays, when Rowan's mother would dutifully come and bring him a variety of books to help him pass the time. She brought him books about underwater sea life, about battles in the Arabian desert, and about pirates and their own search for lost treasure. Besides the books about pirates, Rowan most enjoyed reading books his mother brought him about exotic primates, containing numerous pictures of monkeys, lemurs, bush babies, and galagos.

At first the summer months of treasure hunting near the tree were filled with endless yellow days, but their yellow brightness would not last. Too soon the days were swallowed up by the crisp autumn dark, and Rowan's search for treasure left him empty and wanting. Summer was as short lived as firefly light, yet Rowan went on with his search.

One day prior to the start of the fall term at George Washington Elementary, Rowan walked five paces beyond the Red Oak, holding out his metal rod. He realized he was late for dinner. The sun had already gone down, it was getting cold outside, and he was expected to be home. As he thought about leaving, he suddenly heard a noise that was different from the normal buzz and hum of the machine. He heard this noise as he passed by the north side of the tree. He swung the metal rod back and forth and back and forth. He swung the rod a third and then a fourth time a few feet beyond a low hanging branch of the Oak to make sure of what he heard. Once he was convinced that the noise he heard coming from the metal detector was indeed a different kind of sound, Rowan placed the metal contraption on the ground and started to dig.

Rowan dug with an old knife he swiped from his father's grey fishing tackle box. One day a few years back his father walked out of the house and never returned, so Rowan did not think his father would ever miss this knife. He carried it as a memory more than any other reason, even when he was not using it as a scraper, a trencher, or a digger. Placing the wooden handle of the knife firmly in his right hand, he first carved a large oval shape into the dirt, creating a perimeter the width of the tree trunk itself. He then began to dig from the edge of one

boundary to the center of the oval. The blade of the knife, although dulled from years of use, was eight inches long and proved an extremely effective tool for scraping dirt and sediment away from the area where he first heard the unusual sounds.

He stopped his digging at one point, turned on the metal detector again and waived it two or three more times around the area he dug up. The buzzing and beeping got even louder at that point, so he put down the metal detector and continued digging. He dug for what seemed like hours, until the knife hit something solid. Rowan pulled out of the dirt an old animal skull. Buried along side the skull was a rusty key, corroded with grime and dirt.

Rowan wiped off the key on his trousers and pocked it. He next took a closer look at the skull. It was medium in size and could fit in the palm of his hand. Rowan thought it looked almost like the skull of a spider monkey or a chimpanzee. The oddest thing about it was the two calcified horns he could see sticking out of each side of the cranium. The horns were large skull outgrowths from what would have been the middle ear.

It was an unusual find, but it was not the treasure he was seeking. He took the skull and kicked it so hard that it flew high in the air and then came back down with a thud onto the soil. Seeing that the skull was still in tact, Rowan continued to kick it. He kicked it outside the park where the oaks grew. He kicked it down Arrowwood lane, down Butternut Road, and then down Cake Street. He kicked it all the way down Breakwater Road and Bottle Creek Drive. He even kicked it up the steep incline which led to his own house, and then he let it roll all the way back down the hill. He left the skull lying in a puddle of mud at the bottom of the incline by the side of the road.

It was late when Rowan came inside the house. His mother scolded him for missing supper. He told her he was no longer going to search for treasure by the Red Oak trees, and then carefully put his metal detector away in its cardboard box on top of his closet. That night he fell asleep and dreamed of enormous funnel clouds that continuously rose out of puddles of muddy rain water which lay stagnant down the hill from his house in the same spot where he left the skull. When he woke up

the next morning it was dark outside. The sky looked damaged and bruised, like it had been beaten up in an all-night fist fight. He quickly got dressed, drank a glass of milk in the kitchen, and then opened the back door by the mud room. As he prepared to leave the house for school he saw that the skull he left laying in a mud puddle down the hill the day before was now lying right at the door's threshold. He grabbed his coat, yelled good-bye to his mother, and kicked the skull a few feet away from the door with his foot. He closed and locked the door, left the skull, and walked off to school.

School was comprised of the usual reading, writing, history and mathematics lessons. When Rowan prepared to leave school for the day after the last bell had sounded, he went to the cloak room in order to put on his coat. He immediately saw that the skull was lying on the floor, half hidden beneath another child's fallen jacket. Although he knew he had left the skull by the back door of his house earlier that morning, there the skull lay with both horns sticking upright. This time Rowan decided not kick the skull. Instead, he picked it up by one of its horns and brought it to the school washroom where he proceeded to turn on the faucet and wash off some of the mud and sludge that had accumulated in many of its holes and crevices.

He then proceeded to carry the skull out of the school house, holding it by its left horn. He walked all the way towards the center of town, still holding the skull in this same precarious manner. The closer he got to the town square the more menacing the sky became. He walked quickly past two enormous stray dogs that started to growl as he passed by with the skull. They were short haired, dirty white, with eyes the size of pocket watches. Each had mud puddle brown colored eyes. He half expected funnel clouds to rise out of their eyes the same way the funnel clouds rose out of the mud puddles in his dreams. Instead, these dogs began to chase Rowan and the skull all the way down the street. Their barking turned into piercing screams as they gave chase. Rowan ran fast, but he was no match for the frenzied wild dogs until he let go of the skull and let it roll over into a patch of wild mustard on the side of the road. Only then did the

feral frenzy subside. The dogs sniffed the skull in the weeds and walked away.

Thunder rumbled and rain fell once the dog attack subsided. Rowan was troubled not only by the odd behavior of the dogs, but by the odd weather. He hoped to reach his destination before he got completely drenched. He kicked the skull further down the road until he finally arrived at an old shop at the far end of the street. This store front was a taxidermy shop where men would often bring their deer, elk and bear for preservation and mounting as hunting trophies. Inside the shop the walls were covered with enormous heads of bison, buffalo, and rhino. The shop was owned by an old taxidermist and town historian named Myron Windslow, who had been in business for forty-seven years.

Rowan picked up the skull, opened the door, and walked inside. The large brass bells that were hung on the inside of the door noisily announced his arrival. Mr. Windslow came out from the back room where he did all the major skinning and preserving of animal parts, and Rowan placed the skull on the store room counter.

“What do you have here?” he asked without touching any part of the animal skull. He peered down closer with his spectacles and then asked in a low, solemn voice,

“Where did you find this?”

Rowan explained the circumstances under which he found the skull, and asked Mr. Windslow if he was able to identify the type of creature that possessed this sort of horned cranium.

“Why this came from a two-horned black monkey” he said knowingly. Mr. Windslow had never actually seen a two-horned black monkey before in his life but had once read an antique treatise on the history of the region that discussed the siting of such an unusual creature.

“I don’t want to disturb the skull by doing a full examination. Such an oddity might be worth something to a collector, but I am not in the market for such things.”

He told Rowan that if wanted to know more about the history and lore of this creature that he should speak to Alma Neruda Escobar who lived on the other side of the island.

“She is even more of a historian than I am. Her people settled here hundreds of years ago, and she is steeped in the lore and the mystery that surrounds us. I cannot tell you the story of this skull, but I know that she can.”

He then took a newspaper that was to the left of the counter, rolled it up, and used it to push the skull closer to Rowan, still refusing to touch it. He indicated with a hand gesture that he wanted Rowan to take the skull off the counter. Rowan grabbed the skull by one horn, thanked Mr. Windslow, and left the shop.

He knew where Alma Neruda Escobar lived. Everybody did. Madam Escobar was a fabled, time-worn woman who dressed in black and forest green to match the dark forest green Victorian house she lived in. The house rested high upon a cliff. Rowan had heard a few years back from other boys at school that she was a witch. She was not an evil witch, but a witch none the less. He knew how to walk to the other side of the island to find her, but it would take a long while for him to get to her house. Meanwhile, the rain was coming down in blinding gusts of ice numbing cold, and Rowan was wearing nothing more than that same old pair of trousers, long sleeved shirt, and flimsy overcoat he had worn the previous day when he went over to the Red Oak tree to search for treasure.

As he started down a side road he could hear through the rain and thunder a wailing and keening of stray dogs in the distance. Frightened by their raw, mournful cries, he began to run. He ran with the speed of a jack rabbit, as though he was being hunted by mountain lions. As he ran he kept the skull tucked firmly under his arm. At times he skid in the puddles on the road, at times he slipped in the muddy terrain, but he never stopped running. The day turned into a night that was black and starless, but still he ran.

He did not stop until he got to the far side of the island where he could almost make out a large house on the hill. The house appeared as a mass of black shadow in the dark. When he

finally made it up the steep incline and came to the door of Madam Escobar's home, she was waiting for him in the doorway.

"You are wet to the bone" she said and handed him a dish towel to wipe his face. He put the skull on the ground and used the towel to clean himself off. Madam Escobar then ushered him into her home. He left the skull at the entrance and walked inside.

"I don't often get visitors up here in crazy storms like these. I thought I sensed someone coming so I kept the light on. I hope it helped you find your way. I don't see well, so I don't use the light. Why are you here? Can I help you with something?"

Before he could answer she led him into the parlor and told him to sit by the hearth where a large fire was burning. She handed him a glass of hot water with whiskey, clove, and lemon peel, then asked him once again to explain why he had come. Rowan proceeded to tell her all about the two horned monkey skull that he left at the threshold of her doorway. She did not see him holding it when he first arrived, nor did she see him set it down by the door. She went back to the doorway, felt around on the ground for it, and brought the skull inside.

Madam Escobar examined the skull thoroughly by feel. She then held it up close to her eyes. She did not seem at all disturbed by its peculiar nature. Rowan went on to tell her how the weather changed abruptly immediately after he started to kick the skull away from the oak tree. He told her about the crazed dogs that chased him, dogs acting like they had been released from an asylum for disturbed animals. He told her how the two horned skull showed up everywhere he went.

After he spoke Madam Escobar was silent for a moment. She then went and warmed her hands by the fire. When she finished warming herself, she turned to Rowan and asked him if he ever found a key near the skull. Rowan stood up and dug deep into his wet pocket. It took several minutes for him to retrieve the old rusted metal key from the pocket he had placed it in the day before.

"I am going to tell you a story that will explain everything you ever wanted to know about this two horned black

monkey skull and that key. It is a painful story that begins with my maternal great great Grandmother Neruda, her younger sister Magdalena, and their father, Alfonso Emanuel Escobar. Alfonso brought with him from Spain a magnificent necklace fashioned entirely of rose-gold and rubies. His mother had sewn the necklace into the lining of his overcoat before he boarded the ship that eventually took him to America. The necklace was hand crafted by a master goldsmith and was made to be worn at the décolletage of a woman, where the light of every ruby would shine brightly onto her neck and face.

On his deathbed Alfonso told Neruda, his eldest and favorite daughter, that he wanted the necklace to be hers. He instructed Neruda to have her betrothed place the necklace around her neck while standing at the altar in church on her wedding day. Neruda took the necklace and kept it in a wooden lock box, saving it for that very special day. Although she had many suitors, she had unfortunately fallen in love with an unworthy shipping clerk named Edward who courted her night and day during the warm months of summer. He made many tenders and representations of love, but he had not yet proposed marriage.

Magdalena coveted Neruda's necklace as well as her many suitors. She especially coveted Edward and longed for him to fall in love with her. She danced for Edward, played the guitar for him, and even promised him riches and rubies beyond his wildest dreams if he married her. Edward was weak and easily seduced. He succumbed quickly to Magdalena's advances and promises. She and Edward soon came to Neruda and told her of their plans to wed.

Neruda listened quietly as they told her the news. She hid all signs of anger. She told them that she wished them a long life together. She then went to her lock box, opened it up, and cast a dark spell on the ruby necklace. Neruda's magic was powerful, far more powerful than any of Magdalena's beguilements and charms. She handed the necklace to Edward and told him to place it on her sister's neck after the church ceremony, as they stood together at the altar.

Of course, young man, the rest of the story you must have figured out by now. On their wedding day, after the priest gave his final blessing and Edward and Magdalena were married in the eyes of the church, Edward fastened the necklace around Magdalena. No sooner had the clasp snapped in place than Edward was transformed into a two horned black monkey. At first, the congregation was delighted by this clever trick, what they thought to be a temporary illusion. They soon realized, however, that Edward had become this hairy creature. Magdalena was horrified that she had married such an animal. She was destined to walk Edward on a leash for the rest of their long lives, in order to prevent him from climbing up walls and behaving unruly. Magdalena put the necklace back in the lock box. When Edward died Magdalena buried his small dark body along with the lock box key in a forlorn, damp place where trees and untamed shrubs grew wild.”

Alma Neruda Escobar got up and left the parlor. When she returned she held in her arms an old wooden lock box. She held the box with arms outstretched as though holding a metal detector. She told Rowan to take it.

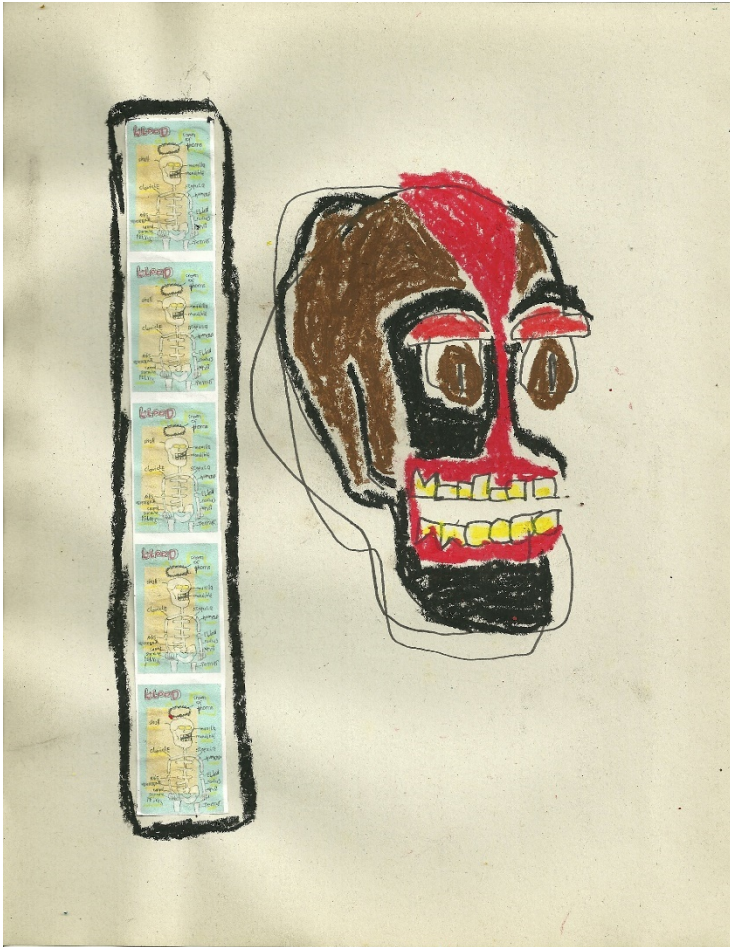
“By digging up the two horned black money skull you have unleashed fury and darkness. You have set the world askew. Things will fall apart until put back in place. Whirlwinds and funnel clouds and widening gyres will be loosened with the ferocity of all rough beasts until the spell is broken.”

The box had been locked ever since Magdalena placed the necklace back inside it and later buried the key. Madam Escobar told Rowan to take the key he was still clutching in his hand and unlock the box. Although Rowan was scared to unlock this old wooden coffer, he followed her instructions. When he looked inside after opening it up he saw the beautiful rose-gold necklace embedded with its multitude of hand cut rubies. The rubies shimmered and glowed in the light of the hearth fire. He somehow understood that the only way to break the spell and set things right, the only way to reorder the world was for the necklace to be placed on the neck of Neruda’s direct descendant, Alma Neruda Escobar.

Rowan got up and placed the necklace around Madam Escobar. Once he heard the clasp snap in place, he could no longer hear the howling of the wind. Once the necklace was secured on her neck, the constant pounding of rain lessened until it became only the sound of fingernails tapping on glass. Soon the rain stopped entirely. The dogs with mud puddle eyes were no longer howling in the distance. There were no more whirlwinds and widening gyres. The sky began to clear.

Rowan looked down at the two headed black monkey skull and saw that it had turned into a pile of gray dust. Madam Escobar went to the closet and brought out a large broom. She swept the dust into a dustbin, then retrieved an empty mayonnaise jar from the kitchen and instructed Rowan to put the contents of the dustbin into the jar. Once the mayonnaise jar was sealed they hugged and bid each other farewell. She told Rowan to take the jar with him.

The stars came out and it took Rowan almost no time at all to return to the other side of the island. In the new stillness and nighttime calm, he decided not to go directly home, even though he knew his mother would worry. Rowan had one more very important task to complete. He walked to the old Red Oak tree on the north side of the island where he had once looked for treasure. He learned after all his days of treasure seeking that the world was full of the inexplicable. He knew that the world was strange and difficult and sad, even after the storms had ended, even after the world was put back on course. He recognized the value of Madam Escobar's story. He knew about the pain of betrayal and loss that Neruda suffered the way he knew his own father was never coming home. He opened the lid on the jar and emptied the contents around the tree where he had spent those long months of summer searching, and then he walked on home.



Untitled
by Mark Hartenbach

Fetch

The dog's looking so butch today, I give him
An extra helping of Mutt-a-Licious, equal parts
Unnamable crud and slop with a French whiff,
Just enough to make his slippery little prick
Stand up and salute with some savoir-faire.

Yes, I know: the things we love to do for
The hairy animal side of ourselves, the panting side
That prowls on all fours and knocks its tail
Against the knickknacks on the low shelves,
Its cold damp nose lifting and sniffing out
Some lovely butts and a dollop of doggy balls.

That's not me, you say, brushing your lustrous hair,
Sliding smoothly over the floor in those gold mules,
With the hem of your robe, sleek and silk, sweeping over
The cracker crumbs and clipped toenails, before
You draw a bath so hot it pinks your wet skin
The color of suckling rats, blind and naked in their nest.

by Elton Glaser

Sober

Beneath the stars shining at their highest,
your whispered sweet nothings
tempt me to bring you close
in an embrace that betrays.

The night is slowly aging,
and we remain blissful
in blatant disregard of the
bottle of wine yet to be opened.

I cannot deny the part of me
wishing my words were slurring,
pouring out in drunken confession
with the promise of forgetting.

Still I remain sober —
holding nothing but your hand.

by Kori Williams



Surf City
by J. Ray Paradiso

On Reading Bukowski, 2012

It was nice that you called
to say, "I love you," or so you said
I don't know what you were doing
I don't think you knew either
you said, "My wife said she was leaving me"
which I did say
and you knew why, or should have
as you are a smart man, or were
You thought if you could hibernate
like a Canadian bear
an endangered species
counting on the odds
that this might change...

On Saturday, at Grub Street,
someone mentioned a poem
by Charles Bukowski
I bought the book last night
Love is a Dog from Hell.

"Bukowski," said Kumkum,
"is like drinking whiskey."
Even one shot at a time,
you know I don't like whiskey
but I drank a few shots
of the *Dog from Hell*
it's powerful, and the guy
treats women like objects,
which some women like
but not your wife

I read a few poems,
including the one titled
I Made a Mistake

gulped down the last stanzas
like an unwelcome shot:
“He drove around the streets
an inch away from weeping,
ashamed of his sentimentality
possible love.
A confused old man driving in the rain
wondering where the good luck
went...”

And I thought of you
and wondered:
What the devil
can he possibly be doing
that he thinks will help?
or is he just a stubborn
old coot now
who would let it all
go down the proverbial tubes
like a Bukowski poem
about how some old white guy
has fallen on hard times
as we all do
sooner or later

by Maggie Huff-Rousselle
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



Wound Womb 2019
by K. Johnson Bowles

CHUCK

Me and Chinaski were on the cross at the post office,
meanwhile leaving one shackjob for another
on a quest for lonesome asses.
It was all about a woman's mysterious secretions,
blood and piss, lubricant, and babies.

When we'd eat, Chinaski made noises like his old man,
grunting and chewing, slurping coffee, sucking in his Jell-O.

I like writing poetry, I told him.
I like washing my hair with Drāno, he replied.
Sometimes I'm overcome with the Muse, I said.
Yeah? he retorted. Well, she ain't telling you shit.

Life was swarming pain, too much sunlight,
but nights at the bar were true.
I asked the woman on the adjacent stool for a date,
and she put a lighter to the hem of her dress.
One had fabulous curves in tight coveralls.
She brought me home, and we got naked,
but she kept clouting me with empty gin bottles.

Me and Chinaski went to the track like touts,
stealthily betting to win, place, and show,
then got too drunk and decided, fuck the odds.

Once, declared Chinaski, I decided to commit suicide,
but someone had already done it for me.

We'd write poetry together,
Chain-smoking, chain-drinking,
listening to tinny classical from a cheap radio.
I was rotten, but he got published
in grainy magazines and flimsy paperbacks in the primeval days.
He got reading gigs. He'd mumble short lines,
sign some napkins and receipts, palm the money, and hit the clubs.

We traveled some.

Once, every time the plane bucked the wind,
the passengers would order drinks.
An engine sputtered out, and everyone laughed.
The pilot had to land to avoid crashing into a mountain ledge
and stop before going off a cliff,
but we were watching a guy doing the limbo
with a brimming shot glass on his forehead,
and were yelling "Opa!" Someone looked out the window and yelled,
"Goddam! We made it!"

There came a day we drank ourselves sad and deep.
Ever had a spiritual experience? I wondered.
Soaping a woman's body in the shower, he answered.
How about the meaning of life?
It's in all the things you can't remember.
Do you like people?
They're beautiful from far away,
but I'm my own best company.
What is the purpose of time?
Watching the money run out. He ordered another round.
Do you have any advice for writers?
Your typewriter is your gun to kill the many evil fuckers.

We were giddy, thinking we had skipped work again,
then remembered we were retired.

by Thomas Ukinski
(Runner-up The RAR Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)



Malachite River
by Diane Shannon

“Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump”

by Dean Gessie

When Saanvi was born, her father purchased a tree to plant in the backyard. He went from one nursery to another like a pollinating bee. He was drawn to a young *Betula nigra* or river birch with its light taupe outer skin and salmon and cinnamon beneath. A salesman said, “The bark changes from flaky strips to thick plates.” He added, cryptically, as it were, “The tree grows with the family.”

Digging to commemorate his daughter’s birthday, Parminder struck a gas line with his pickaxe and cleared the neighbourhood. While the firemen did their work, his eight year old son, Rajeev, introduced his father to sibling rivalry. “Why,” he said, “didn’t I get a tree?” The question was a long rod pushed through a gutted animal hung over an open fire.

One year to the day, Saanvi died of cot death and for inexplicable reasons. Her mother had not smoked. The baby slept on its side. There were no soft objects in the crib. The family doctor shook his head dolefully and tendered a diagnosis of murder: “Perhaps,” he said, “it is God’s will.” In any event, Saanvi looked like a porcelain doll and this made her death all the more galling. For her parents, competing impulses of devotion and austerity had come a cropper.

In the aftermath, a hallway lamp was left on to light the way for the departed soul. Food was vegetarian and without onion or garlic. The river birch was decorated with Saanvi’s baby clothes and months of heretofore digital photos, each date-stamped with foreboding. Parminder put his arm around his son’s

shoulders and said, “This is why you didn’t get a tree.” It was the beginning of a new habit for Parminder, spitting like a cobra, and Rajeev, the remainder of the quotient, was often a target.

Annaliese, Saanvi’s mother, understood the cold trail of cause of death to be proof of her own culpability. When no one is to blame, the mother is always to blame. Her statement of fact was paradoxical but obviously self-incriminatory: “I did not see,” she said, “when my daughter cried out.” Be that as it may, Annaliese experienced ownership of Saanvi’s death as a kind of lobotomy. She was left emotionally blunted and the complexity of psychical life had become a singularity.

After the mourning period of thirteen days, Parminder stripped the river birch of its baby clothes and photos and picked at its outer layer of curling, paper-thin scales until his own fingers bled. He then turned and held up his hands to his wife in a gesture of unambiguous bloody surrender. No one would age with this tree. Time had stopped.

But the birds had other ideas. At three o’clock in the morning, Parminder was awakened by the sound of rustling in the wind. For her part, Annaliese heard a mechanical rumble that was typically too low-pitched for the human ear, the *infrasound* of shaking tails. To this was soon added a screech and another and a caterwaul that was precisely the tone of Saanvi’s cry. As Annaliese threw off her bed sheets, her eyebrows lifted hopefully. She would not overlook her daughter’s cry a second time.

At the window and over his wife’s shoulder, Parminder surveyed the scene with bitter reproach. Roosting in his river tree was a muster of peacocks. Of course, his battle with these birds had been going on

since the beginning of time. He called them the *adversaries* or the *devils* or the *enemy*. They were forever on neighbourhood rooves or underfoot, mewling and shitting and mating and obscuring Welcome mats with their nests. City officials ignored his demands to relocate or poison the fowl. And now, of course, these speakers of tongues were mimicking the cry of his own dead daughter to taunt him in his sleep. Parminder, the cobra, longed to spit in the eyespots of each and every peacock tail.

But the birds were a great comfort to Annaliese. She believed the peacocks to be the reincarnated soul of her dead daughter, each cry of the bird/child evidence of what she described – fitfully, it seemed – as *transmigration*. As a result, she rose each morning with the infrasound of the bird tails and sat naked in front of the window and before her easel and art supplies. She would continue as she had done with Saanvi, sketch the greatest object of beauty she had ever seen. Parminder would waken later to the wailing of the enemy, each cry a multi-barbed hook that hoisted him dockside.

The idea of a prescribed burn came from city officials and the six o'clock news. He was refused a permit to remove or cut down his own tree and told, ostensibly, that only an act of God trumped local ordinances against free will. That same day, Parminder watched news reports of the destruction of Fort McMurray by a wildfire the size and intensity of a thousand suns. If the army could evacuate 88,000 people, then, surely, he could speed the relocation of forty or fifty peacocks. The birds amplified his suffering and they must be defeated.

Even so, he was conflicted as to whether or not his plan was an act of mercy or revenge. He was

comfortable with the satisfaction of either and got neither. He brought Annaliese with him to the self-serve gas on King Street. They bought two jerry cans. He filled one. She filled one. Later that afternoon, they carried the cans into the backyard and set them down in the shade of the river birch. Parminder then went to the storage shed and retrieved two large aerosol containers he typically filled with crabgrass killer. He filled one with gas. She filled the other.

Parminder instructed Annaliese to spray the hairy twigs and the dark green leaves. He, himself, would address the thickening plates of bark between him and his dead daughter. Anyway, the fire released a mushroom plume of smoke followed by a wisp, much like the camouflaged exit of a genie from a magic lantern. Said Parminder, evoking an emotional settlement, "This is for my pain and suffering. And," he added, carefully redacting rage, bargaining and depression, "so that you may move quickly from denial to acceptance." His wife's response was a flower of silk or tissue, both precious and disappointing. "Oh," she whispered.

When he opened his eyes before first light that morning, Annaliese was already at the window dragging a burnt willow stick over newsprint. Through the ribs of the chair, he saw her straight back, long, black hair and pancaked buttocks. He blinked with grudging comprehension as he listened to the cries of his daughter. These were surely bubbles of remembrance beneath the sea. He would surface and breathe and they, like the peacocks, would be gone.

But the birds had other ideas. They had populated the charred limbs of the tree, as per usual. They shook out their tails and continued to cry out in the voice of Saanvi. These birds and that stricken

birch described perfectly the bereft, end-of-world setting of Parminder's heart and the consolations for his wife of imagination and homage or, to hear Parminder, fruits of the poisonous tree. He was disconsolate as he gazed upon his wife's breasts. They held no interest.

Parminder needed a different plan, but he was flummoxed. How might he justify extermination of the enemy and sidestep both social excommunication and stiff fines from the city? Those closest to his location described the river birch as the Tree of Singh, aural equivalent to apocalyptic hellfire. These good neighbours were sympathetic and would look the other way. Those further from his location described the river birch as the Tree of Singh, a producer of podcasts of pastoral poems. These bad neighbours would cry for human blood if his coup did not have a leg to stand on.

But they were not alone in the house and neglect made a foursome. Rajeev was at the door in his pajamas. "I can't sleep," he said, screwing the balls of his fists into his eyes. "It's the peacocks. It's always the peacocks." Annaliese continued with her sketch, sussing out elusive lines of perspective, while Parminder spat angrily, "Your mother is naked! How *dare* you come here and use such language!" Rajeev burst into tears and ran back to his room.

But Rajeev's tears were not an isolated shower. Three days later, Parminder responded to a knock at the front door and discovered his son in the company of his teacher. Rajeev was only sniffing at the moment but the blue sacks beneath his brown eyes suggested a deep and protracted trauma. Miss Racheal had accompanied Rajeev on the school bus

both to comfort him and to provide context to his parents.

“The field trip, I’m afraid, was not a good experience.”

Parminder said, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Miss Rachael surfaced a pamphlet from her handbag and gave it to Parminder. Apparently, the whole class had gone to a museum called, Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump. Mrs. Singh had signed the forms.

“We were there to learn about Indigenous peoples, how they used to harvest buffalo by driving them over a cliff.”

Parminder did not blame his son for walking in on his naked mother or using a profane word. He held him close to his legs to champion his cause. “And this is what passes for education in this country? You expose young children to this barbaric practice?”

This was a topic for secondary school and Miss Rachael was loathe to debate.

“It was a different time, Mr. Singh.”

Parminder read from the pamphlet, “*Then, at full gallop, the buffalo would fall from the weight of the herd pressing behind them, breaking their legs and rendering them immobile.*”

“The hunt met physical, emotional and spiritual needs.”

“*After falling off the cliff, the injured buffalo were finished off by other warriors at the cliff base armed with spears and clubs.*”

“It’s a UNESCO World Heritage Site.”

“And no one asks any questions about the pain and suffering of those poor animals waiting for death and without a leg to stand on?” Parminder’s

indignation was briefly interrupted by a peculiar feeling of déjà vu.

Miss Rachael answered his question with a kind of sealed affidavit. “We don’t get to judge the history and culture of colonized peoples.”

Parminder’s eyes bulged with apoplexy. He wondered if his own brown skin belonged on a list of invisible things. In any event, the seed of an idea was planted. It grew in the shade of a black river birch and it smelled of exculpation. He closed the door on Miss Rachael and said to his son, now that they were alone, “Where were all those tears when your sister died?”

Very early the next morning, Parminder dreamed of the buffalo runners. Each was cloaked in the skin of a coyote or wolf. They pursued their quarry into drive lanes with dozens of cairns to either side. Parminder heard the snorts of the beasts and the crashing of their hooves. As they came to the cliff’s edge, those in the front were betrayed by the momentum of those in the rear, jostled and jolted and toppled and pitched.

At the bottom of the cliff was Parminder surrounded by his warrior brothers. It was his job to club the brains of the peacocks in the kill area. Effectively, the broken buffalo had become peacocks, each a twitching, screeching irregular shape of tail and claw and beak and mortification. Feathers made a kind of communal burial shroud. Peacock blood was given freely.

When Parminder got out of bed, he whispered in his wife’s direction, “We will save souls tonight.” And then he went into the basement to retrieve his air rifle and a few boxes of led pellets. He opened the window onto the street light and the dead tree of his heart and settled into a crouch beneath the pane. He

believed it was his birthright to speed the migration of his daughter's soul to a higher plane or, failing that, to separate his wife from belief in that kind of nonsense. It was a short hop from zealot to heretic, and he would be comfortable with the satisfaction of either.

The killing of the birds was rather easy. Each arrived at irregular intervals and squatted at twenty-five feet in the crosshairs of a rifle that fired at 500 feet per second. Each struck the ground like a sandbag at the end of an antiquated rope and pulley. The cull was ceremony or the cull was theatre. It didn't matter. His needs and his rights were sacred. Who could judge?

He awoke much later than usual because of his work through the earliest hours of the morning and the absence of his baby daughter's cries. Because his wife was sketching at the window, his heart sank immediately with the only plausible prediction. Indeed, she did not see the carnage at the perimeter of that blighted tree. Instead, she drew peacocks crouched on fulsome green limbs in the kind of detail that only the obsessions of grief and imagination can provide.

Rajeev was at the door and whispered through the crack in the jamb, "I heard noises." He added, hesitantly, "Is mama naked?"

Parminder shot his son a look that travelled at 500 feet per second.

*(Runner-up The RAR John H. Kim Memorial Prize for
Short Fiction)*



Australia The Arrival
by Henry G. Stanton

The Virgin

After school
he turns on the tube
a doco is on Netflix
snails are at it-
they fire
love-darts
at each other
from sharp,
sword-like
penises.

During an ad break
he goes outside
to relieve himself
on a lemon tree
aphids are locked
back to front
on the sprouting
foliage.

Returning inside
he thinks of the cute girl
he talked to at lunch today

how their words were drowned
out by the shrill mating calls
of the cicadas in the overhanging
turpentine trees.

by George Anderson

Wattlebird

There is a loud thud
against the large plate glass window
on the front deck.

A grey-brown bird,
a honeyeater of some sort

lies inert. Face down.
It is warm to hold.

I wrap it in a tea towel
and drive to a local vet.

She says there is nothing
she can do. Broken neck.

The bird's eyes like dead coins.
It's plumage like ravished flowers.

by George Anderson

The Rough End of the Pineapple

When his new colourbond roof
was installed
83 year-old Bernie glanced up at me
from his front footpath
& smirked, a sparkle in his eye,
"That should see me through."

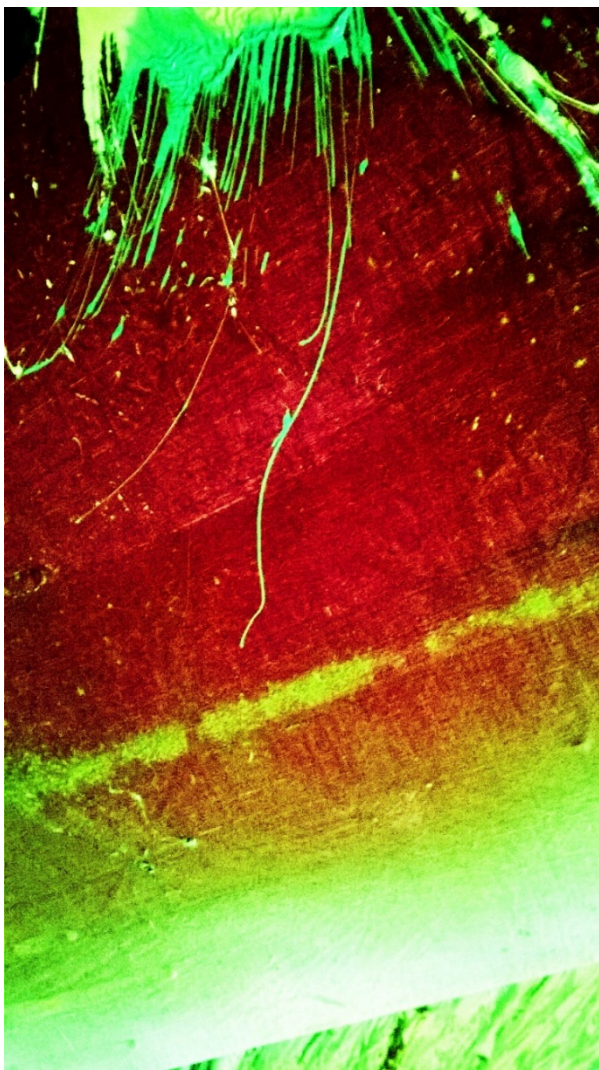
Ten months later
he was diagnosed
with stage 4 mesolymphoma
& shortly afterwards
was placed in an auspice ward.

News of his death
came quickly to us neighbours
in the form of a removalist van
parked obtrusively in his driveway
his life's possessions-
boxed, stacked & driven
to some anonymous tip
in the time
it took me
to walk
to the beach
& back.

Before the tribute swim for Bernie
at Austie Beach
it was sad to learn
in an eulogy from a life long friend
that it was probably that summer job
he was offered 60 plus years ago
building asbestos lined water tanks
that ultimately delivered him

the rough end of the pineapple.

by George Anderson



Untitled
by John D. Robinson

Rakahanga by Stephen Walker

A rain squall worked its way around the north side of the island but didn't come ashore. Even if it had, the patrons at the outdoor bar wouldn't have been disturbed.

Skipper Jake's, the pre-eminent watering hole in the Cook Islands, sat at the end of a pier along the north edge of Avarua overlooking a small anchorage. Second only to Quinn's Bar in Papeete, this was the place in Polynesia to rub elbows with rogues and rascals, *vahines* and wanderers, ex-pats and pirates, scribblers and scoundrels. Not internationally known, and well off major trade and tourist routes, Skipper Jake's was in a South Pacific backwater—its main attraction to those seeking a less-public life.

Week's end. The usual assembly—Maori, European, and mixed blood—stood two deep at the open-well bar on the lower level. A tin roof protected the locals and punters from the occasional rain shower. Wooden tables with palm frond umbrellas scattered around the pier gave seating for those wanting to order fresh fish and chips or sandwiches from the kitchen's short order menu.

Up a flight of steps at the long bar in the restaurant level, owner Jake Cartwright held court as he did every Friday afternoon before the dining room opened to the public. Two regulars sat at that bar: Reggie Pobjoy and Malfrey Pinchot-Wiggins. Known as "Wiggie," Malfrey was a middle-aged Brit who claimed to be an ex-para. He worked odd jobs around the islands and sometimes hired on as a cook—*sous-chef*, he called it—on passing freighters.

Reggie enjoyed his first Suva beer of the day while he watched Jake sort the lunch receipts. He lit a cigarette and turned on the bar stool to look out to sea. At high tide,

ocean rollers broke on the island's barrier reef sending up sheets of white foam.

"You still serious about going back to France?"

Jake said, not looking up from the pieces of paper scattered on the bar.

"Yes, mate. It's something I need to do. Things to sort out. Several reasons."

"Oh, yeah. Name two good ones."

"I want to try'n find the folks who helped me in '41. I want to see if I can find the safe house in Paris where I was hid. And, maybe—*just maybe*—who fingered me to the Gestapo. That enough, mate? We've had this discussion before."

"Waste of time. The Gestapo? It's been over twenty years. You think the Frogs are going to help you do in one of their own after all this time? Didn't they send a whole lot of French Jews—their neighbors and such—to the death camps?"

Jake raised his head from the paperwork and looked to the left. Turning back to Reggie, he lowered his voice. "Speaking of Frogs." He pointed with his pencil toward two white men—one in a linen suit, the other in a police uniform—who stood at the lower level bar talking to one of the female bartenders.

"That must be the French copper from Papeete who's been snooping around asking lots of questions. Bobbie's giving him the tour. Thought they might show up here sooner or later."

"Not much gets by you on Rarotonga, does it, Jake?" Malfrey said.

Jake frowned and nodded to the Maori bartender. "Have another drink, Wiggie. On the house. And, old son, move off a bit and try to keep it shut while the coppers are about. Right, mate?"

Malfrey, with a hangdog expression, slipped down the bar away from Jake and Reggie. The bartender placed a double scotch in front of him.

The two white men walked up the steps to the restaurant level. Robert “Bobbie” Peel, a New Zealander and the Cook Islands’ new assistant commissioner of police, made the introductions.

“Evening, Reggie. Jake.” The policeman nodded toward Malfrey. “And Wiggie, of course. How are you?” Peel removed his hat; the visitor did the same.

“Here’s someone I’d like you to meet,” Peel said. He turned to the man in the white linen suit. “Monsieur DeRemer, this is Monsieur Pobjoy, or should I say *Captain* Pobjoy. And, of course, Monsieur Cartwright, the proprietor of this fine establishment.”

The newcomer shook hands with Jake and Reggie. Jake pushed his paperwork aside.

“Right. What’s your poison, mates?”

“One of your fine single malts would be good,” Peel said.

“A chilled glass of Chablis, if available,” DeRemer said, “or a rum with cola over ice.”

“Monsieur DeRemer is an inspector—detective—with the French *gendarmerie* on Papeete,” Peel said. “He’s looking for a man who killed a police officer. I told him you know most of the white men in the Cooks.”

The bartender placed the drinks on the bar. DeRemer sampled the Chablis. “This is quite good, Monsieur Cartwright. Not French?”

“No. Australian, sorry to say.”

Malfrey slid off his bar stool and walked toward the gents’.

“I have a photo,” DeRemer said. “I would appreciate it very much if you could give it a moment of your attention.”

The French policeman took a small manila envelope from the inside pocket of his coat and slipped out a photograph. He laid it on the bar. Reggie picked it up. The face in the photo was of a man—maybe thirty—with longish dark hair, wearing a floppy hat. He was sitting at a bar. There was a surprised, maybe even frightened, look in his eyes. *Reggie recognized him.* He handed the photo to Jake and winked at the two policemen. “That’s you, isn’t it, mate?”

“Nah. Too good looking,” Jake said. “When did this all take place—the murder, I mean?”

“Seven years ago, in May, 1957.”

Reggie took the photo back and held it at arm’s length. “Goin’ to need specs soon. Spooky lookin’ fella. Who’d he kill?”

“A police sergeant and former Foreign Legion officer. Heinrich Vater. A very sordid affair, I’m afraid. All over a prostitute. But to be entirely honest, his death was no great loss to France.” DeRemer took a drink from his glass, and then looked out towards the reef. “This is an exceptionally beautiful venue.” He turned back to bar.

“Vater was former German Army, probably Nazi and SS. He served in Indochina and Algeria with the Legion. From my interviews, I have concluded that he was genuinely hated by everyone who knew him. He enjoyed beating up prostitutes, but no charges were ever made against him. My suspect, Jean DeGroote, apparently took exception to this anti-social behavior and stuck a knife in Vater’s chest. DeGroote may have a Swiss passport, but we have reason to believe it is a forgery. And he may also be a deserter from the Legion.”

“Why do you think he’s here, in the Cooks?” Reggie handed the photo to the French detective. “What’s his real name?”

“His real name? I’m afraid I have no idea. After the debacle in Indochina, many legionnaires took steps to avoid a return to France. Our sources in Saigon reported that a legionnaire named Émile Volantes purchased a false Swiss passport in the name of Jean-Philippe DeGroote. But the name DeGroote, or Volantes for that matter, may not be accurate. There are stories about legionnaires who exchanged identity tags with dead comrades. This entire episode is obscured by the aftermath of defeat and the fog of war. And our hurried exit from the colony seven years ago.” DeRemer took a sip of wine. “When I was on Nouméa last week showing this photo to others, I interviewed a lascar seaman who said he was crew on a tramp out of Papeete that rescued a white man of this description adrift east of Tongareva—Penrhyn Island you call it. He left the ship here on Rarotonga.” DeRemer replaced the photo in his wallet.

“What was the name? One of my ships? A tramp?” Reggie stood back from the bar.

“No, Reggie,” Peel said raising his hands. “Not one of yours. No one would ever think of calling your vessels tramps.”

“My apologies, Captain Pobjoy,” DeRemer said, “The vessel in question was the *Dorado*. Not one of yours.”

“Sorry, Monsieur DeRemer, I take special pride in my little flotilla. And no one has ever referred to any of them as a tramp.” Reggie sat back on his stool. “Jake, let’s have another round here for our new friend.”

Jake nodded toward the bartender, who brought the same again. Malfrey, who’d returned to his stool, leaned forward with a hopeful look on his face. Jake ignored him.

“There’s a lot of white driftwood floating ’round the islands,” Reggie said, “Don’t know them all. Could send a description of that fella out to my stations. It’d be some

weeks before you hear from most of them, if at all. How long are you staying on Raro, Monsieur DeRemer?”

“This is actually my—How do you say it?—swan song, Captain Pobjoy. I return to France in a few weeks to begin my retirement. I am sure my superiors in Papeete sent me on this journey through the islands as a farewell gift. I hold no false hopes of finding this man, but the opportunity to tour *le beau paradis* is quite satisfactory.”

“Where in France? I’m off to Paris myself in a month or so.”

“*Très bon*. Paris is my home. How long will you be there, Captain Pobjoy?”

“Don’t know for sure. Some weeks. How do you feel about collaborators, Monsieur DeRemer? Wait a minute. I can’t keep calling you ‘Monsieur.’ What’s your given name? I’m Reggie.” He extended his hand again.

The French detective smiled and grasped Reggie’s hand, “Theatris, but my friends call me Theo.”

“Monsieur DeRemer, you’ll have to excuse Captain Pobjoy. Some folks tend to become somewhat informal after living in the islands for many years.”

“No need to be a stuffed shirt all the time, Bobbie.” Reggie said. “Collaborators, Theo. What do think about them?”

“May I ask why the interest, Cap . . . Reggie?”

Jake reached across the bar and placed a hand on Reggie’s shoulder. “I can best answer that, Monsieur Theo. My mate doesn’t like to talk about his war experiences. He was shot down over France in 1941, helped by the underground as far as Paris, and then got picked up by the *Gestapo*. Spent over three years in a *stalag*.”

“I am most sorry to hear that,” DeRemer said. “I also was a guest of the Germans for a short time. Fortunately, I was able to escape and join the Free French

Forces in North Africa. Why do you ask about *collaborateurs*—collaborators?”

“I’ve always had the feeling that someone must’ve fingered me to the Gestapo. I’ve no proof that’s what happened, but there was a lot of discussion about it in the *stalag*. There was some talk, rumors mostly, of a deserter, an English soldier gone bad, who was responsible for turning in Allied airmen to the Germans. Ever hear the name Paul or Harry Cole?”

“No. The name is not familiar to me.” He took a notebook from the inside pocket of his coat and wrote down the name. He turned the page in his notebook, wrote again, tore out the page and handed it to Reggie. “This is my address in Paris. Please contact me when you arrive, Reggie. Perhaps I may be of some assistance. At the very least, I would be pleased to show you some of the sights of my beautiful city.”

*

The two policemen finished their drinks and left the bar. Reggie watched them walk along the pier toward the town center, and then turned on his bar stool and looked out to sea. He lit a cigarette.

“That’s your man on Rakahanga, isn’t it?” Jake said. “One of the lotus-eaters, isn’t he? What’re you going to do?”

“Not sure, mate. Must have a chat with DeGroote or whatever his real name is, during my final island visit.”

“You really selling out to those fellas from Wellington?”

“Tweed and Black? Sure. Why not? They’ve made a good offer. Maybe I’ll open a pub here on Raro. Could you handle the competition, mate?”

“What competition? You’d drink up all the profits. Speaking of profits, it’s your go at buying a round, Wiggie.”

*

Just past noon, a stiff northwest breeze flung curtains of white foam over the atoll's barrier reef. After its four-hour journey from Manihiki, the Southern Cross Trading Company's flagship, *M/V Suwarrow*, dropped anchor in deep water outside the entrance to Rakahanga's lagoon. Reggie Pobjoy stood on the bridge sipping tea from a white porcelain mug. Throughout his final tour of the islands in the Northern Group, he'd thought long and hard about how to deal with this situation. What if Émile's story—if that's his real name—sounds reasonable? How can killing a copper be reasonable? Or acceptable?

Reggie had dealt with all sorts during his almost twenty years in the islands and before, but never with someone who'd killed a policeman. After his war experiences and the years spent building the company, he thought he was a pretty good judge of men. Jean-Philippe—or Émile—had proved to be intelligent, honest, and a dedicated employee. He didn't seem like someone who would kill for no reason. Theo did say the *gendarme* was probably an ex-Nazi. Maybe there's something to that. Killing an ex-Nazi is not a bad thing. But what's the best way to sort this out?

“James, hand me the binos, *‘inē*. Please.”

James Marsted, Reggie's nephew, handed him the binoculars.

“*Meitaki ma'ata*. Thank you.” Through the surf spray Reggie saw the masts of a yacht anchored in the lagoon opposite his station.

*

The first shallow-draft lighter from the *Suwarrow* shot through the narrow gap in the barrier reef and motored to shore. A mob of naked children splashed around it anxious to see who and what treasures had arrived. Several adult islanders waded out, grabbed the sides of the boat and

pulled its bow up onto the crushed coral beach. Homecoming Rakahangans in the lighter waved and shouted to the friends and relatives who crowded the beach. The entire population of the atoll—only about 150—were there for the arrival of the *Suwarrow*.

With jandals in his left hand, Reggie rose from the stern seat, placed his other hand on the gunwale and swung over the side into knee-deep water. Small fish nibbled at his legs as he waded ashore. Manihiki had sent word about his visit. Many old friends greeted him. Reggie's neck was soon festooned with shell and flower leis, his nose and forehead almost rubbed raw. Toa, the island's *ariki*, and former Southern Cross Shipping Company employee, said a pig was already in a pit on hot stones and there would be a *himené* that evening in his honor. Reggie knew then he couldn't leave until the next day.

His eyes searched the crowd. The man he looked for, his station manager, emerged from the line of coconut palms above the beach. He waved and walked down to meet his boss. They shook hands.

"*Kia orāna* and welcome back to Rakahanga, Monsieur Reggie. *Très bon* to see you again."

Reggie placed a hand on the man's arm and led him away from the crowd.

"*Kia orāna* and g'day to you, Jean-Philippe. Or should I say . . . Émile?"

The trader stood silent for a moment facing his boss, and then looked past Reggie toward the ship.

"What has happened? How did you—?"

Reggie sensed fear in his trader's voice. He held up a hand and nodded to the right. The island's Resident Agent, a New Zealander who Reggie didn't know well, came toward them along the beach.

"Let's get the goods up to the store, and then we can talk in private." Reggie squeezed Émile's arm. He turned to

greet the official. Émile walked away to supervise the unloading of the station's cargo.

"Good day, sir." The government man waved his hat in greeting. "It's Captain Pobjoy, isn't it? I'm Balmforth. Peter Balmforth, the Resident. We met briefly on Raro last year. What brings you out our way?"

"*Kia orāna*. Just Reggie, please." They shook hands. "Doin' a visit to the islands to have a word with my traders." *Won't mention about selling the company, unless he asks.*

Balmforth turned and looked after Émile. "*Last* visit is it? Heard you're selling out. Have you then? Who're the new owners?"

How'd he know that? "An outfit out of Wellington, Tweed and Black."

The agent took a notebook out of his breast pocket and wrote down the names.

"Surprised Avarua hasn't mentioned this detail, but they don't keep me as well informed as I would like. But I do have my sources. Can't complain. I'm only here for another year." He replaced the notebook in his pocket. "Hope Jean'll be staying on. He certainly has some interesting stories to tell, when you can get him to open up, that is. Keeps pretty much to himself most of the time.

"Well, Captain Pobjoy, stop by the office and bring me up to date on the gossip from Avarua. I'll be traveling with you back to Manihiki. Cheers." With another wave of his hat, he strode off down the beach toward Nivano village

Pompous twit. If he wants any gossip, he'll have to hunt me down. Not looking forward to the trip back to Manihiki with him. I'll have to invent some problem to sort out in the ship's engine room.

*

Reggie took his time strolling up the beach. Other Rakas came to him with greetings. By the time he reached the

coco palms, his collar of leis almost came up to his chin. Entering the palm forest, he was pleased to see the well-swept crushed coral path leading to his store. The company's trade store was typical colonial-style island construction: single-story, a rust-red tin roof, and a covered verandah on three sides. The building served not only as the store but the home for the trader and his family.

Everything around the building was as it should be: no debris—fallen fronds or coconut husks—or other trash on *his* property. Jean, or is it Émile?—doesn't matter—has been a treasure and will be a great loss to the company.

A crowd mingled outside when Reggie entered the trade store. Émile stood off to the side of the counter, hands at his sides, watching Reggie. He lit a cigarette; another still smoldered in an ashtray. Reggie went behind the makeshift bar and took a couple of Hinano beers from a propane-powered refrigerator. He motioned for Émile to follow him outside.

The two men walked out and stood in the shade of the palms. Reggie handed his trader a beer.

"A French copper from Tahiti was on Raro three weeks ago looking for you. Said you killed a chap over at Papeete some years ago, another copper. I'd like to hear your version of what happened."

Émile took a drink; his eyes narrowed. "Vater . . . Heinrich Vater. The man was, as you English say, a swine . . . a pig. Told everyone he was at Dien Bien Phu, but was really in hospital in Saigon with . . . how you say? . . . the syphilis." He took another drink. "*Oui. C'est vrai.* Yes, I killed him. And would do it again. But it was in self-defense. He had a pistol and I had only my knife. It was either him or me. And that's God's truth, Monsieur Reggie."

"Why the fight? Why'd you kill him? Why'd you sky off?"

“He had beaten a girl, a prostitute, and was going to rape her. I heard her screams and kicked open the door to her room. He had a gun, but I was quicker with my knife.” He took another drink.

“Why did I run away? Who’d believe me? There were no witnesses. My friend, who he’d beaten, was unconscious when I knifed him. And he was a *flic*, a copper, as you say.”

“Well, mate, that Frenchman’s been passing your photograph and description around from Tahiti to New Caledonia. Someone in Nouméa remembered you being put ashore on Raro awhile back. A friend of mine recognized you straight off. And that chap Balmforth . . . you’ve made an impression on him. He’ll find out sooner or later.”

Reggie placed his hands on Émile’s shoulders. “Not to worry. My friend’s not going to say anything, but it might be a good idea for you to think about movin’ on.” Reggie turned and pointed out to the lagoon. “Where’s that yacht bound for?” A ketch flying an American flag rode at anchor inside the reef.

“Samoa, I think. Maybe Fiji.” Émile’s thoughts jumped back to the night he’d told Bobbie that someday he may have to leave the island. He’d told her that he’d done an evil thing and men may come looking for him, that men might come to take him away. She said she could never leave the island and would wait for him to return.

“Bobby and the children? I can’t take them with me.”

“No worries there, mate. Your kin have unlimited credit as long as we own the station. And I will speak to Toa. They will never want for anything. And you can send for them later if you want.”

“But what about the store?”

“Got that all sorted. Always like to plan ahead. Brought my nephew, James, with me. He’s worked for us

on Raro for a couple of years and been itchin' to try his hand on one of the islands anyway. You know 'im. He'll stay on until the new owners make their decision to keep the store open or not." Reggie handed Émile a thick envelope.

"What's this?" Émile opened the envelope and looked at the American \$100 bills.

"Your wages. And a bit extra to see you through."

Émile counted the money in the envelope. Five thousand dollars. "Why? Why me? Why now? This is too much. I'm a fugitive, and you're giving me this? Why?"

"You've done a smashing good job here. You're honest and responsible. And you're in trouble. Everyone should get a second chance. Also, you're French . . . don't try to deny it." Reggie waved a hand, dismissing any argument. "Your people helped me during the war. And you killed a Nazi." Reggie drank from his bottle. "I'd like very much to hide you out here on the stations, but independence for the Cooks is coming soon, and we old colonials may not have the influence we once had. It's probably best for you to move on."

"*Pardon*, Monsieur Reggie, but I must have time to think about this."

"Take your time, mate. We'll deal with the punters." Reggie nodded toward a young man who'd come ashore on the last lighter and waited at the edge of the palm grove until Reggie motioned for him to join them. "You remember James, don't you?" The two men shook hands. Reggie and James went into the store. Minor chaos reigned with the owner, an old friend, manning the counter—there were bargains galore.

Émile walked out through the palm grove and sat on the bench.

It's been almost four years since I had this bench placed here so I could watch the sunsets over the lagoon.

Over the lagoon of my island paradise. Now it is all finished. Whose fault? Why won't my past go away? One name, one man—Carlo Pioletti. He ruined my life. Because of him I joined the Legion, went to war, and had to kill Vater. He's responsible for Musette's and Annick's murders. And now, he's a wealthy businessman, the pride of Paris. Perhaps, it's time to settle the score, and then return after independence. It might be easier to slip into the island life with another new identity.

Émile walked up onto verandah and waited for Reggie to join him.

"I accept your offer with many thanks and many regrets. My first concern is for my family, but your promise is most reassuring. I know you to be an honorable man. Forever in your debt I am, Monsieur Reggie. And I *will* return someday."

"I'm very glad to hear that . . . Émile. May I call you Émile?" The trader nodded. "When you return, if I can be of any help, you know where I live on Raro. Or you can always leave word at Skipper Jake's." Reggie lit a cigarette. He offered one to Émile. "I'm leaving the islands myself for a while. Don't know when I'll return."

"The word is you're going to France. Why is that?"

The island telegraph still works. "Unfinished business. Do you know Paris?"

"*Oui, bien sûr.* Of course. I lived there for many years,"

"I don't recall you talking about that."

"Did you ask?"

"Right you are. I understand. You thinkin' about going back? That'd be a bit dangerous, wouldn't it? Does the reach of the *Polynesie Française gendarmerie* extend to Paris?"

"Perhaps. Probably not. And it's been many years. At the moment, I don't know what I'll do."

“By the way, who are you? What *is* your real name?”

Émile stood at attention. “Captain Pobjoy, my name is Émile Patrice Plude.” He saluted.

*

The next morning the sea was calm. Many Rakahangans had paddled or swam out to the exposed reef to wave farewell. The lighters ferried back and forth through the gap taking copra and passengers to the ship. Reggie sat in the stern of the last lighter—he delayed his departure until Balmforth had gone aboard the *Suwarrow*—and saw Émile carried out to the American yacht in a small outrigger canoe. He wondered if he’d done the right thing. Never would he’ve turned Émile over to the authorities. His conscience was clear on that. He hoped that Émile would someday walk into the bar at Skipper Jake’s.

*

Phil Hope, the owner of the American ketch *Tailor Made*, helped the island trader up over the side of the yacht.

“Howdy, Jean. What brings you out here? Care for a beer?” He didn’t wait for an answer but turned to his wife, “Hey, sweet thing, bring our guest a cold one, will ya? That was quite a bash last night wasn’t it? Didn’t know anything about it until a young man, James, I think his name was, came out and invited us all. That Reggie guy must be some big shot, right? Too bad we had to leave the party early, but we’re heading out today. Surprised not to see you and the missus in the crowd.”

“I wanted to spend the night with my family.” *I can’t tell him that we sat on the bench until dawn. Our baby girl slept in Bobby’s lap, and the boy on the sand by our feet—the last sunset together.*

Judy, Phil’s wife, and her sister Betty were sunbathing topless on the foredeck. She stood, waved at Émile, and then bent down to retrieve her bikini top from

the deck. With a playful smirk, she adjusted it over her large breasts and went below. Betty rolled over onto her back.

“Didn’t know I’d married such an exhibitionist,” Phil said. “It must be the tropics that does this to American women. Whatcha think, Jean? You’re Swiss, a European. You know about these things.” Émile didn’t answer. Phil turned around and was surprised to see the Rakahanga man down in the dugout lift up a large canvas bag.

“What’s this? Bon voyage presents?”

“Lost my position. Sacked.”

“Sacked? What do you mean sacked?” The American looked confused. Judy came back up into the cockpit and handed cold beers to the two men. She held another for the islander, but he was already heading back across the lagoon. She shrugged her shoulders and took a drink from the bottle.

“Somebody call me?” Greg Sacker, Betty’s husband, came up into the cockpit. “Thought I heard my name used in vain.” He extended his hand. “Hey, Jean. What’s up, buddy? Come to say good-bye?”

“I’ve been fired, as you say in America, and have to go somewhere.” Émile pointed to the ship outside the reef. “The man who I worked for has sold the store to others. They are changing everyone. The ship is going back to Raro, but I’d prefer to leave the Cooks, so I hoped ...”

“Say no more, amigo,” Phil raised his hands. “Or *mon ami*, as you would say. Sure, you can come with us. Right, Greg? You’ve been a great host while we were here. We’d enjoy returning the hospitality. Hey, wait a minute. What about your family? Not coming along? It’d be a little tight, but we could manage, I think.”

“No. They’ll remain here until I’m able to find a new position.”

“Okay. We can drop you off in Pago Pago or Apia, if you like. Actually, we’re planning to take a look at the Tokelau Islands before heading back to Hawaii. Ever been there?”

“Hawaii, no. The Tokelaus, are they French?”

“No. Kiwi, like the Cooks, but no one ever goes there.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“A cold beer would taste real good right about now.” Betty Sacker sat up, topless, on the foredeck. “Or do I have to get it myself?” Judy threw back the last of the other bottle and said, “I’ll get you one, Sis, and I can use another.” Betty returned, went along the starboard side with two beers, and handed one to her sister. She sat on the cabin roof and removed her bikini top.

Émile had been exposed to multitudes of native breasts for years, but this display of white, albeit very tan, women’s breasts stirred emotions that had become, perhaps, jaded by the daily exposure of dark brown flesh. Maybe it was the idea that these breasts were forbidden fruit. They belonged to others, not available to him.

“Okay, girls, fun in the sun’s over,” Hope said. “You two are on the anchor. Time to get underway. Jean, store your gear below. We’ll sort things out later. I want to clear the reef before the tide turns.”

The *Suwarrow* had raised its anchor and was steaming south on its return trip to Manihiki when the *Tailor Made* motored through the gap. Émile stood at the stern shielding his eyes with his hand. He could make out Bobby and the children on the beach; Toa and James stood with them.

I must return. This is the life I want. I’ve never known such happiness. I hope to have the strength to deal with the future. My family will be well cared for in my absence, I know. Bobby, I will return.



Pool of Color
by Beth Reardon

Annex Nights

Waning moon in October night,
spiritedly a-glow
We'd dance on flat rooftops
flamboyantly to the infection of psychedelic folk
In the mistral of the Annex,
from Harbord to Queen
What we deemed ours;
and ours was what we deemed the world
For the witching hour was for the loners and losers
Deliverance from our daylight timidity
Crouching on sidewalks, Marlboro man
Trashcans devouring our cigarette butts
Paper bags slung on park benches
Euphoric on grass,
Toasting our flasks
Making our way to the green room

by Sean MacDonald

Narcissus Revisited

I am great.

Cardinal feathers flutter
neatly out of the pipe of my spine,
one by one, the same way a magician
pulls handkerchiefs out of his bowler hat.

I am great.

The sun sets—burns—in my
sacrum, lighting me quite on
fire.

I am great.

I swallow a clean sun.

I am great.

If I press my ear to my
stomach, I can hear a blue
ocean.

This is only because,
like the conch, I am hollow.

A sea so clear, you can
see your feet beneath you.

A sea so clear, so electric
and blue far away

I want to swim in it.

This is how I know

I'd already lost myself.

I am great.

My throat is itchy with a

blooming field of grass.

My voice, raspy.

My mouth, a large white house atop this meadow.

I am great.

I drove to the Valley

distracted by frosted boughs

and coated tree limbs

glistening the winter sky.

The reflected snow-scene

shines on me even now.

I am great.

I spoke with God once

in bed

listening to Bon Iver.

I can't remember it

but it's my favorite song.

Rain tattooed the roof

while I lay in my curtained

four-poster
miles beneath blankets
like Earth piled high on coffins.

Or maybe it wasn't raining.

by Samantha Melamed



2 Yakima
by Judith Skillman

August Haunting

It's not the ghosts of sluggish Klansmen
or dead marauders bumbling
up the lawn of the old U.S. mint,
it's tents
like mirages of whitecaps,
rising for the late summer Festival.

It's no hex, but a scalding
lucky penny
that hypnotizes the young girl to suicide.

It's the dog's breath visible
in moist gasps
that makes you question
whether or not you're sane.

The calcified shining in the sidewalk
slices your corneas
like bits of glass.
With no breeze to sway him,
the phantom
of the park's last lynching
slithers up the noose
and quits.

It's not the siren-ish cooing
of a murdered whore you're hearing,
it's the steamboat calliope.
The old maid at its keys
presses the chords
for "You Are My Sunshine"

through thick, white gloves
so as not to sear off
her fingerprints.

You're not possessed—it's August.
Do you really think
you're so wicked and important
with your pierced nose
and dirty boots
to earn the attention
of the infernal?
The heat
is the only thing that's haunting you.

What's truly supernatural is when you forget it,
when over the course of one cigarette,
the puddle sizzles up
like the revelation,
and you left behind
to face
this day
like the end of days

by Caroline Rowe

Saturnine Night

“I say to you that I am the thing itself, but you
must not touch me.”

*(Conversation between Saturn and a chemist,
Frankfurt, 1706)*

1

Prehensility of fear.
Dark aether.
New moon in Capricorn
shrinks the font of desire
to fine print,
so it becomes clear
that I am drunk
Gone as God,
my friend once said. She
didn't really drink.
Now I don't know where she is
or how to find her.

Funny the posturing,
how people come and go,
go and come, combine
retreat or get a cheap
rebirth
& I
am no exception.

Black bile
and Saturday night
dripping in
like an I.V.

2

These skies
should be thicker,
this evening, less a vacuum. Then
it wouldn't be so easy
to rise like a drowned child,
like the raven from the bath,
putrefied.
Reality is

just the wrong size,
will dissolve your eyes,
make you feel damned all over.

Why so desolate, end of Americana Oak?
Birds X out my sidewalk feet.
Cement fistfuls flung
like a circle of salt.

It is I who need protection.
Tomorrow, my only hiding place
compromised at last,
cautions of relapse
re-chalked
on these all too familiar curbs.

3

The commotion
of less.
The air in clean
nothingness
ruffles my hair with an avuncular sigh.
Crepuscular
September,

the month that no one thanked,
plants still heat-betrayed,
and browned fleshwise.

4

An age of invention
from whose mouth womb
we
avalanched.

Discard my heart.

I don't know what I used to be sure of.
What I used to embrace embraces me.

All I want
is a pure poem,
pure poem attended nightly
by a god-like keeper,
a moment I'll never live in.
The quintessence
of affection,
earth's only absolute.

The lens of alchemy
devotes a half thought to touching
and a glance at death.

This moment

if a sword of lead could transfix me still
while chaos has its orgy,
I'd be unblinded,
forget my life
and see my soul.
The raven would fly.

by Caroline Rowe

Letter to Austin in Venice

Venice is the carcass
of a poet,
and you'll likely find
it resembles your own.
What it lacks in basic function,
it makes up for
in scum,
and never fully numbs,
but like the region's bitter booze,
softens and perfumes
with the drama of death.
I don't say carcass to exclude life.
It *is* the profuse,
teeming life
of something decomposing,
something rotten
because in its penultimate stage
was ripe.

It may not suit you.
I am in New Orleans,
and there *are* times
it seems like every bone in this city
has been picked clean.
Man, like your own heart,
the alleys will get you every time
ruthlessly, beautifully,
ridiculously lost.
And the pigeons on the roofs
are never merely mating,

but making drunken love.

I remember Venice
as my cousin Daphne's laughter
in gold leaf,
her coquette eyes
before she got sick,
a man named Emmanuel
giving wine in the afternoon
and dick in the laundry room
by midnight.
Mornings in muddled gray,
the only color left.

Anyway, I hope you stay
a couple days, Vivaldi
never agreed with me,
nor Campari,
but give them both
a shot. And you must stop
to admire, not the boats,
but the bridges,
like the arches of pretty feet,
and the romance that sings from their shadows
on the gritty moats
that so stygianly,
at all hours, float
underneath.

by Caroline Rowe



WalkNCloset
J. Ray Paradiso

A Day in the Life of Amadeus Gordini, “El Gordini”.

by Samuel Rutishauser

Amadeus Gordini, the superstar performance and conceptual artist, sat at his desk in his dressing gown, bitterly re-reading his latest reviews in the gloom of the studio, lit up by the seedy glow of the laptop screen. “Ridiculous”, he tutted aloud, as he picked at the residual of a cold macaroni cheese, his back to the window that overlooked the neighbourhood to which the studio belonged.

In ‘Moments’, Amadeus Gordini attempts a Perecian-inspired record of a single day: to document everything that happens to him in a twenty-four hour period. Every passing thought, every fleeting sensation: every tingle and prick, captured in the utmost detail, as and when it occurs.

Gordini read on.

Yet we already know the project is doomed to fail - meant to fail - before it can even begin. An infinitude of information collapses the task into a more nebulous one of defining the present moment. In ‘Moments’, Gordini fills the exhibition space with “Object Data” - mounds of bin bags containing the fruits of this endeavour. An endless parade of representational techniques clutters the space with all the charm of a hoarder’s probate auction. Yet, lacking the impetus of a compulsive disorder, there is a somewhat hollow feel to the outcome, as if the artist were performing madness simply for effect.

Gordini reached for the whisky decanter and poured a tiny measure into his tumbler and continued reading.

Indeed, in an age of global mass surveillance, we might expect a reimagining of this originally Proustian project, or, at least some comment on its parallel ambitions with big data. Yet, there is an almost ludditical refusal on the part of the artist to engage with such issues. Moreover, with the growing demand for more diversity in the arts, it is difficult to see why 'Moments' - the day in the life of a wealthy, white man - has earned a stint in Paris's most important exhibition hall. There is a sense the once venerated poster boy of the post-structuralist brat pack has taken his finger off the pulse with this one, drifting, as all masters must do in time, out into the vacuum of irrelevancy.

Amadeus Gordini stood and fastened his dressing gown. He wandered over to the record player in the corner of the room. Leafing through his massive collection of vinyl records, he picked one out and placed it on the turntable. "Irrelevancy", he shook his head as he sank into the bean bag, the Fine Young Cannibals playing in the background as he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

In the aftermath of his failed exhibition, Amadeus Gordini consulted several others within his network of conceptual and performance artist friends. Something more daring is in order, they would tell him. Gordini must go out into the real world, they would say in that tedious habit of talking about him, to him, in the third person. He has spent too long in this bleach-white

purgatory of private viewings, this sanitorium of glass-clinking sycophants.

A friend had an idea. “Why not invert the last project? Remove your agency in the recording. Outset the problem to another: you become the subject”.

“Go on”, said Gordini, his index finger resting against his cheekbone.

“Have someone record a day in your life. Leave the decision-making to them. The piece will say more about observation than either observer or observed”.

“I’m listening”.

“Have yourself followed for a day. You won’t know when they’re following you. Best still, they won’t know they’re following *you*”. The friend was becoming very excited.

Within the fortnight, they mulled it over in wine bars. The plan came to be. “I’ve the contact information for a private detective in the city”, said the friend. “They specialise in divorce cases, mostly. Infidelities and the occasional paedophile”. Gotto nodded. The lude was kicking in. “For ten thousand, I could have you followed for a day. They’d get everything you did within twenty-four hours”.

“I want everything”, said Gotto. “When?”.

“That’s it”, said the friend with a dumb smile. “You won’t even know. One day in the next year, Gordini is to be spied on. Every movement logged, every stream of data captured. A complete record of a day in the life of the artist”.

The point of it all was honed in. There would be an emphasis on digital spying techniques that would go some way in providing a comment on the state of the modern era of surveillance: the threat of monolithic

corporations centralising data banks for nefarious purposes and so forth. Part of the piece's 'spectacle' would derive from the huge data profile of the artist as rendered by the spy using domestically available monitoring devices. The piece would shatter notions of 'privacy' and 'security' as plausibly attainable within the technological domain, challenging viewers to rescind some of their digital habits in response to this thrust of the artwork. The piece would focus on who the spy was, too. How the activities of the artist were recorded and interpreted would be an invaluable dimension to the project, rivalling, even, its primary Perecian bent. Indeed, the mismatch between the artist's subjective reality and the spy's objective record - how the latter, in turn, would be modified by the observer's own reality - would be key to the final piece, ensuring that the notion of 'lived experience' - the plurality of realities in undermining the illusion of one reality - would be made explicit, allowing somewhere for a segue into a rallying cry for more marginalised representation. There would be guest artists. His friend sifted through the notebook. "It's coming together nicely", he said, smacking his lips.

In order to best elucidate the discord between the internal workings of the artist's mind and the interpretation of those events on the part of the spy-observer, a diary would be kept, comprising not just a written record of the day, but also, videographic documentation as well as an impressionistic rendering of experience, e.g. a 'paint diary' (several media were chosen as optimising best overall aesthetic value for the exhibition space), a dream log, and so forth. The diary would testify to any discord and, for that matter, accord between how the day

seemed and how the day appeared (with the fallible nature of observation the central subject of the study). The question was raised: what is a diary faced with the threat of an all-seeing observer? It was brought up that as a confessional document, a diary was an invaluable trove of information for anyone tasked with such an investigation. To what extent would the function of a diary be modified by the author imagining it being read? It was proposed that an explicit objective of the project should be for the artist to prevent it from being infiltrated by the investigator and, in turn, to observe the effect this tension would have on the private life of the artist and the observations of the spy when considering the actions of the former within the context (i.e., of pursuit). In short, a secondary theme to the work would be an exploration of the changing relationship between the observer and observed, especially how expectations about the subject distorted observation. “It’s a comment on all artwork since time immemorial”, said the friend after a particularly good lunch.

“Ultimately, it’s a performance”, said Gordini. They were there the following week for drinks. The friend furrowed their eyebrows to convey their attention, that they were listening. “What matter is it that everything’s as we say it is?”.

The friend said: “I see where you’re going with this”. “Isn’t it more important to get on with cracking the original Perecian nub of our endeavour?”.

“It’s no use *worrying*”.

“We can’t afford a public relations fallout”, Gordini pursed his lips.

“You worried it could-”

“Happen?”. Gordini nodded and sipped his gimlet. “I need the day you’ve booked with the agency”.
“March fourteenth, it’s the day I have down”.
“We won’t tell anyone. The performance necessitates a degree of trust on the part of the audience”.
“It begs the question, what will Gordini do March the fourteenth?”.

They met at the viewing the following evening. “It will be important to strike the right balance between the believable and the remarkable”.

“It is not in Gordini’s nature to be banal”. The challenge was to come up with an agenda for March 14th that would accentuate the artist’s best tendencies.

“Do we pander to your stoicism? Or make you out as some Sinbad: a Byronic hellion, hellbent on spectacle and exploit?”.

Gordini thought for a second. “A bit of both”, he said, swirling a vintage then scooning it in one go. “I shouldn’t want them thinking the money has made the worst of me. Mind, it would be nice to leverage some of my romantic proclivities”.

The friend stopped (they’d been pacing laps of the gallery). “Here you have a chance to be caught with your pants down: make them jealous of what they see. Look too good, though, and they’ll see right through it”.

“They shan’t know I’m in on it at all”, said Gordini at the after-drinks the following evening. “I never agreed to be spied on; it was your idea to have me followed. The diary, I keep as a matter of habit. You had me followed for your own reasons. Wait, wait”. Gordini took a cigarette from the box on the table. “After a

festering grudge in which I resent you for having me followed - the exact reasons for which can be easily assimilated into the archetypal narrative of an artistic rivalry referenced in our respective reportage, think, the letters of Vincent and Gauguin - I'll come to understand why you did it. There will be a cooling off period. One day, in a rare appeal for mutual clemency, I'll ask to see the reports you had on me. We'll be particularly interested in this one day, March the fourteenth. It will be noteworthy, first, for it being a pivotal slash climactic episode in the narrative, but also, beyond mere events, we'll notice a fascinating discord between the inferences made by the mole about me based on their comprehensive reportage, modified no doubt by their expectations of a certain motive on my part, inherited from your suspicions that compelled you to hire them in the first place, and my own feelings about the matter as represented in my record of the incident - the mixed media diary I keep as a matter of habit. These parallel records of the same event will yield fascinating insights only appreciated months afterwards, when all is said and done and differences have been set aside”.

The friend was open-mouthed. “Gordini gives me an orgasm”, they said. “We should work immediately on feeding the warning signs of our feud into the public domain. Think, Twitter”. The friend, who was also a superstar performance and conceptual artist, thought for a moment. “For the sake of our brands, we must ensure the narrative is such that both parties can be considered equal parts protagonist-antagonist in the developments that lead to the falling out. We must tailor our story just right, such that it retains perfect moral symmetry: both of us are motivated by the

same ends, realised differently in ways analogizing moral systems that are simply different answers to the age-old questions”.

“Agreed”, said Gordini.

“A degree of warmth must be retained throughout if our subsequent reconciliation is to be believed. For instance, we should cross no lines”. Gordini rubbed his chest.

“It stands to reason, you had me followed with my best interests at heart. You assumed some manic-seeming quality to my recent behaviour was a cause for concern. You feared I was being self-destructive. I considered your concerns stifling. Your intervention acted as a buffer to more extreme behaviour. The viewer can choose: was I denied a moment of artistic transcendence, or, was the intervention conducive not only to the success of my work but the health of my very being”.

“I’m trying to save you”, said the friend as they neared the punch bowl the following Thursday. “You believe I want you killed. Our two perspectives are polarized: the discord couldn’t be greater”. Gordini licked his lips.

“The mole intercepts the video diary using a key log. Rather than take my word for the reports, they invert everything I say to support their pre-conclusions”.

“Embodying the notion big data supposes it knows what’s best?”.

“Saying something about how, even opened up in tender earnestness, mankind is doomed by its incapacity for perspective taking”.

“It will be the artistic spectacle of the century”.

The diary idea was scrapped. The piece would focus on the actions of Gordini and the inferences drawn by a team of spies. The final piece would include every strand of observation-data amalgamated onto a single scroll, one hundred metres long, rolled out across the exhibition floor. Members of the public would be invited to sit, stand or lie on it, to read the scroll at their leisure. The conclusions of the spies would be such that the astute viewer would be able to infer the discords and accords that existed between the observer(s) and observed through the incompleteness of the inferences made by the former. For instance (this was the example used by the friend), imagine you are telling a story about someone to someone who doesn't know this person, or better still, doesn't like them. During the telling of the story, you might be tempted to say something like: "Oh X, yeah, they're just like that, that's why they did Y". And whilst the brevity of this explanation might suffice for the benefit of storytelling, a more discerning, compassionate listener might acknowledge that there are, of course, many distortions in such a simplified account of X, many concealed truths about X and the context their actions arose within, which will more accurately explain why they did Y, and that there is something almost spiteful in such a lacking explication of X's actions, whilst at the same time, the listener will appreciate the story exists for the purposes of entertainment: that the concealed truths make up their own narrative in the shape of the missing pieces.

So the final piece would be a hundred or so metre long scroll filled with information describing the activities of a day in the life of Amadeus Gordini, as filtered,

collected, interpreted and reproduced by a team of dedicated, highly trained secret agents, using a range of techniques to retrieve and represent information, pertaining to the artist's actions during a particularly public (albeit secretly staged) rivalry between himself and another superstar conceptual and performance artist, the exact narrative for which was yet to be finalised so as to achieve the conditions outlined, namely, that both should see their images bolstered by the episode.

In practice, it was harder to come up with a narrative that could be arranged to take place in such a way that it would be believable to fulfil the rather quaint-seeming need to hire a team of secret agents. It was also difficult to tinker the story just right such that both parties could be considered equal parts benevolent yet malign in their actions. It was easy for the story, manipulated sufficiently so as to be believable and at the same time retaining the prescribed themes, to portray one party as overly psychotic, say, or controlling or reckless at the expense of the other. Moreover, certain renditions of the narrative, at their most well-weighted, involved certain illegalities that had to be prohibited from the outset, e.g., hiring an assassin would revoke the agencies' vow of non-intervention.

The friend was invited to exhibit in San Francisco; the project had to be postponed until the following year. "El Gordini hasn't got a year", Gordini said over the phone. They fell out swiftly and ceased all communication.

“It’s getting messy”, Gordini’s confidante told him one day. “Take it back, bare bones a little. Stick with one theme. Cut some slack”. She rolled her eyes to say: *we both know what I’m talking about*. “You want to say something about identity?”

“I want to say something about life”.

“Keep it simple. Remember *Baubles*?”.

“That was ‘89”.

“Have you sculpted since Berlin?”

“A little”.

The confidante looked around the room. They were in a restaurant. “Can you smoke here?”, she asked. She always asked the same question when she was back in Europe.

The final piece was a 3D porcelain cardioid mounted on a stone plinth, painted mother of pearl acrylic and finished with diamante embellishment. It was a stunning object when mounted in the primary exhibition space of the Hague Theatre, alongside a series of screen-printed curve-functions, displayed in six by two frames, occupying the eastern wing of the building. The show was called *Hearts*. It was explained in the publicity materials:

The heart, once considered the vehicle for the soul - the essence of life; the connect between the body and divine - has seen a gradual demotion to near banal status: a mere pump, replicated by machinery, transplanted casually; a fallible functionary to the organism’s continuity. Hearts demands a reconsideration of the contemporary status of the organ. The beating heart - our earliest notion of time passing, the marker of our own time - is afforded

new prominence by the artist. In Hearts, Amadeus Gordini begs us to love ourselves and one another.

Hearts was exhibited for six months then saw a month-long re-exhibition in Copenhagen. The three-dimensional porcelain cardioid, the exhibition's centrepiece, was auctioned for an undisclosed seven-figure sum in Christie's, New York.

(Honorable Mention The RAR John H. Kim Memorial Prize for Short Fiction)



untitled
by John D. Robinson

AFTERNOONS AT THE FOOD BANK

Each person picks through
the bins differently. From her
wheelchair, a woman holds
boxes up to the light, but only
looks at expiration dates.
Another likes to shake things,
tasting what they sound like.
One man presses the wrappers,
Inhales with closed eyes, soundlessly
moves his lips in prayer to
a packaged god.

At first, some people are
exotic to us; some of what
we have to give is
exotic to them.

When offering apples or
peppers, we learn not
to hand out bags of four
to the Chinese: it is
the number of death
and dying. Neither greedy
or ungrateful, they may
add or put one away.

The adolescent girl,
embarrassed just to be,
shadows her homeless
parents, one White, one Black,
afraid to point or pick, examining
blocks of splintered floorboards,
shuffling from station to station.

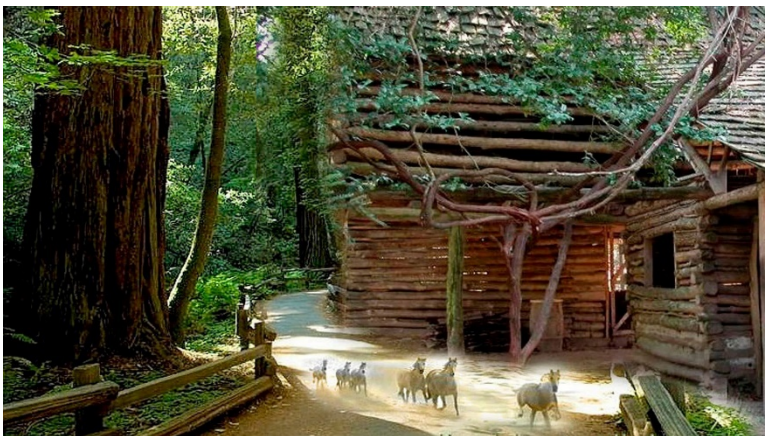
The Latinas who later

linger and laugh together
each week in the hallway,
seated on low benches behind
their full carts, trade cans,
gossip, recipes and miseries,
rectifying their lives
one Thursday at a time.

This room, with each day's
inevitable, is a puzzle
whose pieces only mesh
when the appetites align...
or patrons accept that
they won't.

This is how we exchange
food for thought, how our
others earn and name
their daily bread, render
beans and yogurt, rice and
soup, the surplus and
the almost overripe, into
bloody, existential tissue.
Over a broken chant of chatter,
questions, complaints and
thanks, watching their eyes
study the altars lining
the walls, and the sacrifices
laid on the tables, is also to
read the newest signs from
the city's still silent poets.

by Joel Savishinsky



Stampede
by Beth Reardon

Roughing the Passer

You smoke the dope of January 9th's horoscope
got the same birthday as Bart Starr
winning quarterback in the first two Super Bowls
but back then you were a fan
of the upstart league of Broadway Joe & the Mad Bomber
you hated the stuffy NFL
& those pitilessly perfect Packers
you hated
'*winning isn't everything it's the only thing*' —
Lombardi's right-wing
wrong-headed
muddled mantra.

by Robert Eugene Rubino

Yahweh in Queens (1961-1965)

We nicknamed him Yahweh
after the crazy-angry Old Testament deity
because the celibate young-buck black-robed
principal of our all-boys Catholic high school
seemed omnipotent & omnipresent
dispensing tough-love law & order
with a fist to the sternum or knee to the scrotum
or hard-pressed knuckles to the top of the skull
or ritualistic butt-baring paddling with a paddle
that looked like an oar from the wreck of the Hesperus.

In stentorian voice steeped in sanctimony
Yahweh regularly reminded us
masturbation (always referred to as “self-abuse”)
while neither natural nor harmless
instead was a mortal sin punishable
by eternal hellfire damnation (well, damn!)
& other times sounding like an unfunny Fred Flintstone
Yahweh often rang righteous profuse praise
upon the God-fearing flag-waving John Birch Society
& upon Barry Goldwater — his knight in shining nuclear armor.

One of our classmates — round red-faced boy
who for four years absorbed loneliness & innuendo
like a true believing saintly stoic Crusader —
jumped to eternity from the Queensboro Bridge
— surely a mortal sin if ever there was one —
while we survivors lock-stepped to Pomp & Circumstance
& endured a grim graduation day
steeped in Yahweh’s pledge-of-allegiance speeches
linking U.S. with God & God’s Son & God’s Mother
condemning godless soulless communism.

by Robert Eugene Rubino

Arrow Stuck in Neck

Strangest most surreal of all those creatures
who lived in & around rented bungalow on wine country hill
stranger even than human couple
gradually suddenly turning from intimates to strangers
crouched eyes-a-poppin' tail-a-twitchin' squirrel
inhaling exhaling normally naturally looking about
looking perfectly normal in its natural environment
in its unnerving unnatural alarming circumstance
as if subject of slapstick or object
of small-minded hunter's small-game aim

— an arrow sticking through its narrow neck.
He (*sotto voce*): You've gotta see this it's unbelievable
it's sick sordid strange
come quick now look oh my god look
at that pitiful creature who should be in agony
but doesn't seem to know it
at that critter who should be dead
but clearly isn't.
But she's too late. Doesn't see.
Doesn't really believe without having seen.

It was there, he swears,
but now it's gone.
As were they soon enough
the human couple gone
separate ways after nearly twenty years
amicably but tearfully. Finally.
She
done with exhaustive experiments in domesticity.
He
in further want desperate need of home improvement.

by Robert Eugene Rubino



Billie Holiday Strange Fruit
Henry G. Stanton

TRIPTYCH IN LOS ANGELES

OBESITY IS ENCODED IN OUR GENES

All of my online dates have followed this pattern: I am confessor and my date - the reluctant confessed upon. That is a form of breaking trust, a transaction of aesthetic food. Blood bread.

Whenever I read about the other's transgression - most often, but not exclusively, I can see myself doing the same thing. Why? It was just read to me, by me.

When I was 14, at the carnival, my imagination could only hold the thought of thousands of human beings. The soundtrack of slow dancing to Fleetwood Mac is a lasting memory. If that was the lasting mark of our species, it would be gentle. Yet, that was secondary to the prizes I could win by throwing accurately, beautifully. Hitting and winning.

Am I to guess the right things to make you love me?

GIVE ME A SHOVEL AND I WILL MAKE MELODIES

“There is a small town where football is like the leaves changing. Where the lives of young men are rising or falling conspicuously, and the voices of young women are uplifting. In those towns there are men of same and difference.

The colored leaves blanket the ground interlaced with the music of traffic keys. It's Tuesday and I am thinking of the rivers along which those human towns were made. If there

was a drive-in, I could order popcorn, hold your hand and pretend I live there.

You are a combustion engine - your pistons move so fast.
My awkward mechanics cannot fix what is not wrong.
When we are young, the movies only envy what we are
feeling. I take your hand, and for some small days we are
translating living.

I will never forget a face. I will let go of your dress and
make up - your armor, and the way you used to make me
feel in the sunlight of living back then, on the tip of
memory - the towns wrapped by rivers and small iron
waterfalls.”

COFFEE

A Bison and my dog look into the eyes of intent. Wolves
found religion to be dogs. Bison disappeared and came
back Bison. All the other animals exist, like the words that
I know you say, but I cannot remember.

Neither of us are dull, at fault. I love me dearly. And you?
You are a combination engine - made from sweat and
gender alchemy.
I and I, and you.

by Leon Fedolfi



Ode to Warhol
J. Ray Paradiso

wildheart

my hopes
bound through time
like majestic wildebeest.

orphaned by desire,
resenting despair,
they hold my heart
like branches do a tree.

they look me
square in the face.

my hopes are wild;
wild, wild, wild.

they bound through time
like majestic wildebeest
and they hold me
when I am sleeping.

by Aqeel Parvez

everything and nothing

missing the gene
that makes me normal
shrivelling tobacco teeth
missing the part
that makes me whole

hear a noiseless pain,
feed the dagger heart,
spit blood laughter.

I find pieces of myself
around the house.
under the sofa,
in a dirty sock,
or in my left pocket.

my madness is
oblivious to
the civilized.

I've been caught
grasping at
everything
and nothing
in particular.

by Aqeel Parvez

Longing

It is 11:00 am and we are drunk
with champagne, sequins, and taffeta.
Sundays are busy in this small shop
and the air holds its emotions like a cup.

Around us women are standing on small stages,
displayed and admired
in white dresses that hold their futures.
They wear them like hope,
white silk falling to the floor.

Bridesmaids sit obediently,
breathing in boredom
and reluctantly await their turn
to be stuffed into dresses of lesser value.

For us she has chosen maroon satin
and claims we will be able to wear them again.
I stare at its puffy bottom and doubt
I will be able to wear it to a bar.

by Amyen Fielding

Triptych

When my mother slapped me on the cheek,
the sound ricocheted off the hallway wall.
It was the first time someone hit me. I was 9.
My face stinging, I shrank back,
resized after my arrogance.

*

In a hurry, on foot, I dared
to take a shortcut.
Through the 2nd Street tunnel, broad daylight, what could
happen?
A man, in collared shirt and khakis,
grabbed my throat, held me against the white tiled wall
as cars sped by.
Slapped me, shoved his
hand between my legs, slid it over my breasts,
laughing.
Released me.
When the sunlight drenched us
at opposite ends of the tunnel
he walked, simply,
foot, then foot, expressionless.
I staggered, screaming.

*

A stranger

lifted the window.
I heard the floor creak.
Alone, I raised my head
saw his sneakered feet in the flashlight beam,
10 feet from my bed

by Catherine Gewrtz

Uncertainty

I lost my grip on time
I think it's somewhere up in Michigan
The traveling abroad, low browed
And high,
The traveling railroad through Mediterranean skies
And skiing into mountains.

I think I found time but lost the where,
The 9-5 grind,
Weekend, rush hour to the
Darkened bars where time
Stops and starts continuously never in sync
But of course the day breaks before
It's all over and
Bodies tangle in a mesh of what time -
What time is it I'm late -
Pregnant with a pause
Of hospital beds

I found where I am but lost when I got here
The kids springing onto the lawn in
Leaves and neighborhood watchdogs
Tell me I'm too loud
I found the time and lost the where
When I found myself yelling at half passed sunrise and set.

I think I lost the time and the where
And now I play with angels and demons
In something between,
Watching those two friends blaze by in their infernal
Immortality.

by Dan Leiser



Forest Spirit
Beth Reardon

Tinderbox

by Samantha Bolf

"Every one says she is very beautiful," thought he to himself; "*but what is the use of that*, if she is to be shut up in a copper castle surrounded by so many towers?"

—"The Tinder-Box," Hans Christian Andersen.

~

Three cards sit on the table in front of you: an old woman, a young woman, a shoe. In the glove compartment there is a book with the words *Getting to Know Your New Automaton: A Spiritual Guide* written in boldface on the cover. The automaton's name is Ophelia, and she has been waiting to wake up for a very long time.

~

The 25th day of the month of Narcissus, in the year of St. Augustine's Tirade.

I keep asking my mother, what am I doing here? What am I doing here? But she has no answer for me. The walls are copper: this much I can tell. Doused in shadow, accented with bone. Animal or human? I once asked my chambermaid, but she just shook her head in my direction and said nothing, looking askance at God, who had refused to leave my dressing room. He is still here, hovering like a jinn above a lamp; too proud to beg for sweet release. He claims he just wants to have a discussion. Get all our morals out on the baize-colored playing field. *Absurdity*, God says, each and every morning, *is the only answer to an uncaring universe*. From the look on his face, I can tell that he wants me to ask him, *but are you not, O! great one*,

Yahweh, maker of makeshifts, defrauder of Nod, yourself the universe? But I will not. I will not.

Strange happenings. A crash in the night. A wrong step on the slick mahogany stair. An inn-keeper who greets you with a *hello, sir, but I am not sure you can afford to stay here*. You look, ashamed, at your feet. Your shoes are muddy and barren, a wasteland. A pair of new boots would make all of the difference. The knife in your pocket is standard army regulation and it gives you comfort on cold nights and warm. You caress the handle, which is white and made of pearls siphoned from the stained-glass-colored ocean, trying to keep your thoughts to yourself. What happened to all of my power? you wonder despairingly. Authority has flown from your hands like a dove. But you have the knife, so you have not lost everything. Desire comes to life in your pocket and stays there, burning, like embers.

~

He is a soldier. His name is Thou, or Raskolnikov. He picks up the first card, flips it over with the ease of a man who was born into nothing. *Surprise!* the old woman shouts with a toothless smile. *Am I your first choice, or what?*

Or what, says the soldier.

~

The 28th day in the month of Narcissus, in the year of St. Augustine's Tirade.

God spends most of his day taunting me like a schoolyard bully. I cry, I weep, I beg him to stop. He promises that if I

let him go, he will love me forever. I tell him *unfortunately that is exactly what I'm afraid of.*

~

The soldier hums a song he learned in the army.

*Three pennies, three quarters, a bucket full of dimes /
Sixpence of treason, and a bottle full of wine / Three dogs
with horseshoes / in lieu of eyes.*

And the old woman claps politely. *Lean close*, she instructs him, her breath hot and horrid, brimstone and cragged rock. He sees a cliff face in her forehead, her future descendants lined up in a row on the edge of it, readying themselves to jump. He notices a noose, hidden, in the skin-folds of her neck. It has been stated by wiser men that ignorance is bliss. Some things are better to remain unaware of, to let lie in the dark, latent blackness seeping smoke-like through the chimney, under doorways. The witch-woman asks: WILL YOU ANSWER MY RIDDLES THREE?

And the soldier smiles and says YES—

~

The woman takes him to a garden. Inside the garden is a well. She holds up two cards and tells him to pick one. He does: the one on the left. She turns it over, slowly. He feels like he is watching a sunrise. Suddenly everything is beautiful: the woman, the blue worms writhing on the back of her hand, the knowledge that one day he, too, will die. The card shows a blushing maiden. She is a princess, and the richest-looking woman he has ever seen. He falls in love fast, like the pop-burst! of artificial pink bubblegum. But the soldier is a true soldier. He knows that true love is

love of conquest. A tiger roars and prowls by them in the garden. Its eyes drift to the well and stay there. The soldier takes the card and slides it into his left pocket, where it waits, unseeing, unknowing, forever.

Go to the well and tell it your greatest desire, the old woman says. *Inside the well is a three-headed dog. One head is small and sightless, one head is large and sees for all.*

And the third? The soldier asks, thumb running over the card in his pocket, which now had a bend in its corner.

The third head is in the middle, the old-woman says, *and it is just right.*

~

the 30th day in the month of Narcissus, in the year of St. Augustine's Tirade.

A long time ago, my father received a prophecy. It said:
YOU WILL MEET A TALL DARK STRANGER AND
HE WILL TAKE EVERYTHING YOU HAVE. YOUR
LUCKY NUMBER IS SEVEN. DO NOT WEAR RED ON
MONDAYS.

Lately, I dance in my tower to pass the time. God the genie sits there looking glum and disillusioned. *Is this what my creations think of me?* He has taken to wailing, beside himself. *Is this what it all comes down to?*

Sisyphus, I said, hoping it would shut him up, *is happiest underneath his boulder.*

Camus, God replied. Scorn carved its way across his face. It looked like ancient writing. I couldn't decide if he resembled a dead sea scroll, or a sea anemone. *How elementary.*

~

The soldier shouts into the well: *may I have a golden mountain?*

The first dog barks yes, yes, but then shakes his head no.

The soldier tries again. He shouts into the well: *may I have magic, long forbidden?*

The second dog barks yes, yes, but then shakes his head no.

The soldier tries one more time. He is angry. He touches the knife in his pocket. He looks at the old woman behind him. She ignores the weapon tucked into his waistband. She pretends to play with the tiger, who is thrilled by her attention. The soldier shouts into the well: *may I have what the crone has hidden?*

And the third dog barks yes, yes, and bares his teeth to bite.

~

The 12th day of the month of the oak moon, in the year of St. Cecilia's Beheading.

I used to dream about a man with no face. Always the same dream. Always the same man, who I could not see. In the dream, I am in my old tower, with my handmaidens and blue-silk-water clothes. I wake up in a bed that is soft and white and cold. My limbs float in front of me, separate, like

jigsaw pieces with porcelain edges. And there is a man. I can never see him, but I know him. I know him in my fear-stricken heart.

~

The tinderbox, as it turned out, held the entire universe and a tarot card set (Rider Edition). The soldier opened it with three-pronged key, and patted the dogs of hell on their baying heads. He placed the old woman inside of it, kicking and screaming. He took off his old, worn shoes and threw them on top of her and locked the box. He felt quite satisfied. What good work he had completed! Is this what God felt like, he wondered, wandering lost among men? Did he admire his own craftsmanship? Did he see the tinderbox, locked, and feel greatness thrust upon him? The stroke of his paintbrush, like a part of his hand? The dogs howled, teeth ripping the air to shreds. The tiger prowled back and forth, again and again. To the first dog, the soldier said: *bring me a mountain of gold*. And a mountain of gold did appear in front of him. To the second dog, the soldier said: *give me magic, long forbidden*. And the soldier did feel warm light seep into his wrist-bones. To the third dog, the soldier said: *bring me the captive princess, I wish to marry her*.

And the dog did return with a girl on his back.

~

the 17th day of the month of the oak moon, in the year of St. Cecilia's Beheading.

I dreamt of a man riding into the castle, on the back of a beast that slobbered and wept. The marble floors flooded

with water; the air tasted crystal and cool and sweet. I did a pirouette on a lake of ice. The man cracked an egg over my head and kissed me. Three dogs danced on my feet. Yolk dripped into my mouth: it tasted like tap water.

~

the 18th day of the month of the oak moon, in the year of St. Cecilia's Beheading.

How long have I been here? How long have I been here? I count days but I cannot follow the numbers. I know I have left myself clues that I do not understand. But will I ever? Is there hope? The world ebbs and fades; it is a river with three mouths and many openings. When I woke up this morning, I felt sure that a man with no face stood right behind me. But how did I know he had no face? He stood behind me. I could not see him.

~

the 18th day of the month of the oak moon, in the year of St. Cecilia's Beheading.

Mother? Mother? Have you forsaken me?

~

When the soldier is arrested for stealing the king's daughter, he is strung up by many threads in front of the kingdom. Before his final thread is cut, he tells the king: I AM HIM OF WHO YOU HAVE BEEN FEARFUL. The three-headed dog devours the king without too much prompting. Peasants and noblemen alike bow down before the soldier, who takes the king's golden slippers and

declares them his birthright. He flicks his knife open, and the blade glitters like a teardrop, in the pale grey light of the morning sun.

~

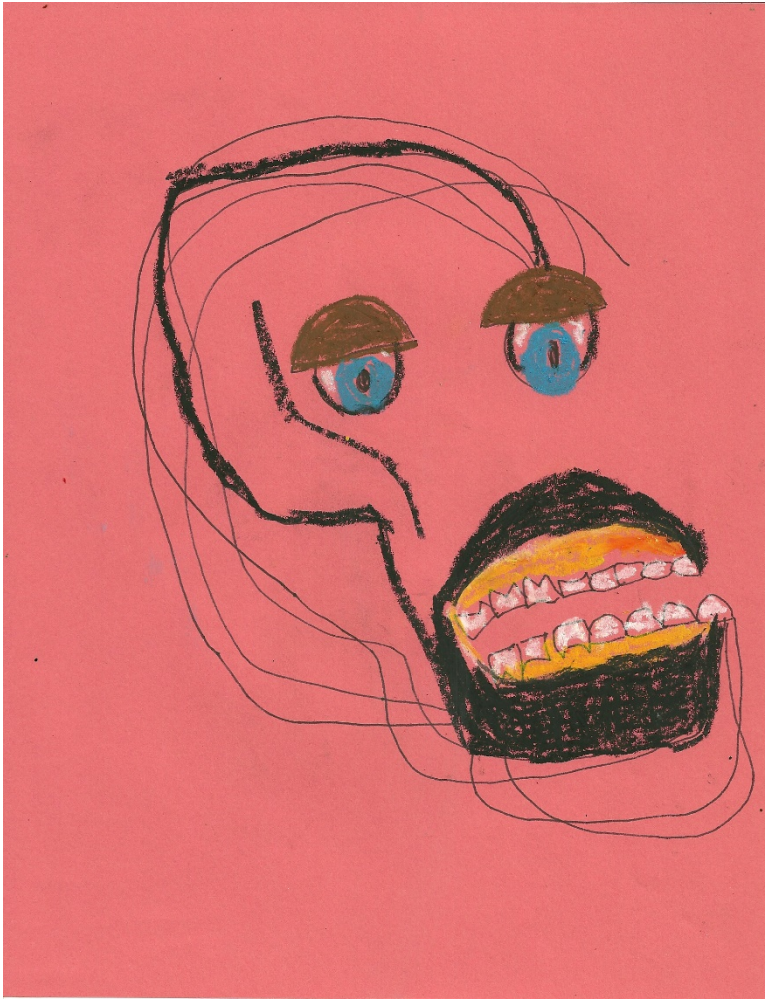
By the twinkling of my eye, crows the old woman, witch-woman, cursed-descendent-of-Lilith-Eve-Bathsheba-woman, from behind the soldier's shoulder, something wicked comes to dine!

~

the 19th day of the month of the oak moon, in the year of St. Cecilia's Beheading.

A soldier has been crowned king instead of corpseman. Three dogs came to his rescue around dawnshine. They had eyes the size of angels and seventy-seven paws and black nails divided evenly between them. The new king has decreed that we will marry tonight. When he came to my tower this morning, he put a lockbox around my neck, and warned me to never ask him what lies inside of it.

In the corner of my room I can see God: still trapped, trying not to chuckle.



Untitled
by Mark Hartenbach

BAD BOYS DON'T DIE

You want fear of intimacy, I'll show you
scrap yards. Steel pipes packed with ice.
Moths brushing the headlight of the Camaro where some
warm thing kissed my neck
and I froze like venison splattered in snow.
You want high-risk behavior, I'll vroom this car
through trashfire. Swallow the bottle, vomit
back glass. You like that? I dare you:
eat my heart. If you pretend
I'll know. If you pretend, I'll beg you, nail
both my palms because I know that
Jesus shit turns you on. I grin
with my jagged tooth;
I'm not my father, only his shadow.
My stick-and-poke tattoos won't last
the winter. I'd feel for you
but I don't feel, not through this
needled leather. They say I have the most
beautiful mouth, that my hunger
will outlive us both. When the world
blows up, my hunger will lick the ashes.
I distill myself in stoicism
because it suits your myth and finally,
irrevocably, I love to please, please remember me
with my mouth full of God's light. Shining.

by Clare Welsh
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Love in the Time of Zero Tolerance

For now, let us love parenthetically—
let us lie caught in the embrace of conditionality,
nursing a petrified conscience that can't help
but mourn, and can't even
remember why.

Every time I touch you I can only hear the children: a symphony
of solitude as cries echo through hollow
warehouses.

I ask if you remember loving me
when that was all there was to do, because I don't
either—so our hearts fracture in harmony and we watch
each other's eyes drift farther away.

What do a dozen roses smell like while families are divided
into pieces small enough to be caged, when borders
are drawn through blood, when the prison yard
has a swing set?

So our sheets remain tangled in guilt,
our bodies repent our breaths,
as we add the *Times* to the pile under the bed and try
to remember how to hold each other—and you ask me
if I can still love you and I say:

I will love you when I find myself able to
love anything, which is perhaps as often as the moon
pirouettes—I will love you in the way she shows her face
but once and promises to return, in the way her light
is darkness, subtracted.

by Danielle Gennaro
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)
Originally published in Pittsburgh Poetry Journal

rest here

i always approach
the person in the

room who holds
the least power

and turn my
hands into a cup

and listen to them
& try to hear

and turn my head
at an angle and

turn my shoulders
down and my

sternum inward &
try to bow

and turn my nose
into a swamp & try
a silence

and turn my cheeks
into a great plain &
try to lift

and turn my
forehead into a

contemplative
landing pad for
hands & fingers

rest here

and turn my eyes
into still waters

and turn my mouth
into a brace
a carriage

i care
i care

by Zoe Canner
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Dysmorphia

He takes a picture
of a girl on a lake
and a dog beside her.

And all I see is the way the sun touches her skin.

It's not in a gentle way,
sunlight through the tangle of trees.
It's a sledge hammer against dry wall
because she isn't sitting straight
which causes the excess to push together,
an accordion of skin
in a way that literally no other person but me
would see.

Where straight lines should live
there is a curve
and while most people who would view the photo
would see the dog,
the lake,
a smiling girl,
the contrast of light,
I see the sunlight on too much skin.

So he hands me my phone back
and what should be a treasured moment
gets deleted.

by Lynne Schmidt
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

America

I hear you're really good. Word gets around,
and when the first messenger came I gave
him reason to believe and tell his friends,
nameless confirmers queued up on stools,
straight shots three deep. In '82 I could go
all night. We all could. We reveled in our

secretions, danced in the salty and sacred,
unconquerable, nothing incurable before
the plague, tight money and Internet porn
took the fun out of cruising. And so what
if a bunch of fundamentalists didn't like us?
We set the trends and had our friends

in chambers, knew the value of alliances
formed in dark corners, how to swallow
when it was expedient, how to dominate
when they wanted it hard, how to wave
the bottle of poppers under their noses
as they shot. And as long as they got off—

more coke, more cock, more jokes—
we did as we pleased, marketed ourselves
with the hype-hustle where the first taste
was always free and we controlled distribution.
Everyone bought our line, wanted what we had.
I don't have to tell you how that worked out,

where we are now, so pedestrian, another
sitcom character/fashion commentator/old
queen sitting at the end of the bar watching
worker bees come in for happy hour, drunk
and, worst insult, ignored. Back in the day
I called it *shift change*, the hour when we

pretty men in polo shirts and Members Only
jackets eyed those tired old things, dismissed
their eye contact as pitiful, stood like jackals
as we waited for them to give up their stools,
our worst fears finally reeling out the door
as we returned to business, tuning up

for another night's cruise. Come morning
we left first names and numbers on backs
of matchbooks and reckoned our way home
on the bus, the smell of Camels and old booze
oozing out our pores. And after all I know now
of lesions and rehabs, the truth is I want back

those nights of illusory impunity. The guy
with the big one who couldn't use it. The ginger
bear who could. That Italian with the gym-built
pecs, furry abs and Sicilian lips. And me, always
scanning the back-bar mirror for *new* and *next*
and the elegant darkness returned in the glass.

by David J. S. Pickering
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

RUCKY'S CORNER DRUG

Everybody loved Rucky
and the marching band he
organized each 4th of July
for the neighborhood kids
to parade up two blocks
and along the boulevard
to the city park. Still
I knew my mother had
misgivings about the two
of them—all that lipstick
and way too much makeup
caked on to work behind
a soda fountain though
they were sweet enough
to an eight year old with
two nickels clutched in
the palm of his hand
while the big kids bought
firecrackers and copies
of *Playboy* stashed under
the cash register counter
presided over by the old
ex-boxer with his stogie
and Parkinson's tremor
Rucky'd charitably hired.
Only years later after
we'd moved away and
Eli Rucky was busted
for trafficking in drugs
and running a brothel
above his pharmacy
did I put it together
on a slow drive around

the old stomping ground:
the rage and spite of
the “graffito” splashed
in stark white paint
across the steel backdoor
to his stockroom and
forbidden upstairs suite
by some dumb young punk
without the 30 bucks
to pay our Mr. Hyde
for a screw and a score:
FUCK YOU DADDEO

by Robert Perchan
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Generalized Anxiety Disorder - GAD

On free floating anxiety - on the earthquake of 1989 - on The Bay Bridge collapsing on itself - on fire and brimstone - on backsliding on faith - on weeping and gnashing of teeth - on The Day of Pentecost - on the day of reckoning, on, an unrealistic, exaggerated ability, or inability, to or of speaking in tongues, or on the fate of the unrighteous ones - on impotent rage - on a narrow escape from disaster - on uttering a prolonged, inarticulate, mournful cry, usually high-pitched or clear-sounding, on, as in grief or suffering: on to wail with pain - on exterior darkness - on never ready for an overactive autonomic nervous system misfiring- on a system prepared for imminent death- on a system that is misfiring- on bodily functions such as - on the heart rate, on digestion, on respiratory rate, on the hypothalamus, on the cortisol levels of first-generation or immigrant children - on the demon possessed and casting them out - on the DSM criteria of occurring on more days than not- for at least 6 months - on learning that brown paper bags won't work for you - on running to ease the landing but the trail you run on was greener and the earth was healthier - on excommunication - on your name being written and then unwritten - on, in the book of life - on, with invisible ink - on fear driven discipline, on discipleship driven fear, juxtaposed with a message of peace, of hope, of The Holy Ghost, of being full, on your cup runneth over onto eyes on fire, on being US BORN but your parents can be taken away - on La Migra - La Migra - La Migra - ICE is cold blood pressure, body mass, body dysmorphia, on a body depressed - pressed into or out of Pentecostal- or on overall health pre- and post election cycles - on addiction and self-medicating - on a system that is misfiring - on brief moments in the sun - on backsliding in faith - like on skates - I was on skates in '89 at 5pm - on, a shaking earth at a 7.2

magnitude - on drinking salt water because it'll help, on three days and nights of darkness and three nights moonless, on believing that an inevitable second coming had started, on feeling not ready, on feeling not right, on Psalm 116, on Acts 2: 1-4, on everything said to the church at Corinth, on nothing free about free floating anxiety and that it seems to appear out of nowhere.

by Olga Rosales Salinas
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Why Are You Crying in The Apple Tree?

one time i got high and climbed up into the apple tree
in the backyard of the house i grew up in
and i sat up there for a while

then the tree said
how ya doin?

and i said
holy shit

and the tree said
yeah i know

then i said
alright
well i'm okay i guess
you know
but i don't really know what to do sometimes
it's crazy
everyday life throws all this unexpected stuff at me
and i don't know how to deal with it all

and the tree said
you think you're confused?
look at all these branches

by John Gillen
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Hummingbird Summer

Fleeting, first rosebud,
then peach tree
suddenly I understand the pressure
of blush, fuse magenta
into pink
so much to lust for, a dozen circles
spirit frantic— overload
of sugar, neighbor's passing
red dragonfly, synchronicity
of mine maneuver
olympic style aerial dive
slice through sky like
a glacier's goodbye
to ice, wrap me like
a rocket past the momentum
of daylight repose in
the sun's slow smolder at last
I suspend direction,
I still.
I celebrate life.

by Sofia Skavdahl
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

I Kept Some Keys as if the Teeth

All that will remain of my works on earth
is the piano I dismantled in a Massachusetts
farmhouse so I could live there, rent free,
for a month. It was an old standup piece.
With hammer & crowbar & flathead
screwdriver, I performed a complete analysis
and took all the disassembly to the dump. But
I could not break down the harp. It was heavy
and impossible to move on my own. During
the time of my great contemplation, wanting
only to be rid of the evidence of my life,
a horse named Whiskey died in the field
near the house. To this day I believe
my contemplation killed the horse, & it may
be true. But even if it were, it would be nothing
next to the hole Bill Trout & his backhoe dug.
For twenty extra bucks, we pushed the harp in
first, then laid the corpse of the horse on top.

by Darren Morris
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Blink

I blink and the world changes
from water to air
I blink: grandfather on the crochet field
wooden spheres echo in hollows
my four-year-old skull
I blink again and the man is masturbating
in his red Camaro, wants me
on my way to Girl Scouts
I blink before an encumbered adolescence
back and forth across bodies
of water, I blink
I blink
our daughters into being
I blink and we have been together twenty years
I blink and there is blood in her mouth
teeth knocked out from the impact
I blink away the taut skin of my younger body
I blink and budding women sleep under my roof
I blink as they leave
I blink while glaciers undo themselves
and the sun has burned to midway from start to finish
I blink before the older half of my life, at the ashen hair
to come, the softening of organs
I blink back tears at the birth of my grandchildren
at knowing I could have been more
as a mother
I blink remembering
the striving years but there are so many of us
and it is not my turn anymore
I blink into shadows
of the churning square
people who spoke
a common language, who will again

after the urgency, after the wars
when the end is near and known
the final enveloping that will absorb
the last reverberation
of whatever love
we were capable of leaving behind

by Lyall Harris
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

BURIAL

The sky is too bright without birds.
Eight small figures in the middle of a green field,
crops up to their waists, in different colored shirts,
trucks parked at the edge of the road, walk
toward the cars, trudging as if
through thick water, as if
they were dropped in the middle and are surprised
they must find their way out.

by Rachel Kaufman
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Songs from the summer kitchen

begin with nail polish and the smell of rubbing alcohol.
My caramel-skinned sisters' dark hair swings soft across eyes,
knees up, rubbing My Paprika is Hotter than Yours from long toes.
We sing the gossip like plumeria breezes early in the morning.
Full-throated love calls join from bantams in the alleys
beneath the betel nut trees, behind the Island Grocery, everywhere
love might be, like those women smoking on the beach by the marina,
who are they anyway, boobs hanging out, those whore earrings.
Rice pot purrs, promises of yellow fin and mango after rain.
Sister moves the Buddha head found in Mami's taro patch,
brings out the Fritos, the *tuu*, the peanut butter, the lemons.
It's time for a wedding. A child already, the aunties are happy.
But brothers take the money the way they always do,
wives with big tastes and kids in trouble off-island.
We wrap slippery-slim tapioca in wet banana leaves.
My sister's husband fishes all day, rumors we don't speak.
By the light in the summer kitchen we watch him slide
snapper and ahi and wahoo in a briny pile on concrete after dark,
our fingers make disemboweling an art for dogs to eat.
And what happened to you sister, you good woman,
drugs made that boy crazy. See, he didn't *want* to kill you.
Bad things happen sometimes.
Sisters, you know how it is,
sleeping face-to-face on the floor in the girls' room,
air conditioner rattling too loud for dreams,
you scream into your hands, put ointment in your eyes,
and choose a new polish when roosters crow.

by Dawn Terpstra

(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Blue Peril

What came in an instant was how
my young friends and I were stopped
by the local tough girls on the towpath
behind the post office. There were only
two of them—Sue somebody and someone
else's big sister. Both were big, in high school.
Sue took a liking to me, who had my mother's
scarf with the map of Florida on it
tied around my head. Sue untied it.
There were rollers in my hair (pink sponge).
Sue liked that. I was terrified.
As she put the scarf back on I tensed
my throat and neck so I couldn't be strangled.
She tied it so gently I felt ashamed.
They made us walk a little way with them.
A guy in a truck drove by and they were gone.
Then I was in high school, missing the bus,
walking home alone.

I could see all the way down the shortcut,
so I took it. I didn't worry about the boys
coming the other way because I knew
by the time we passed it would be in a clearing,
by houses. The boys were speaking softly,
and gave some sort of greeting. I was beginning
to answer when one moved a hand
between my legs. It was almost polite.
I brushed it away, puzzled at my own grace.
If they looked back, they didn't see my face.
And then I remembered the pregnant woman
who had had four miscarriages and was raped
by some men who tried her door one night

and found it unlocked. *Look away*, they said,
not wanting her to know them, *this won't hurt*
you.
It didn't when it should have, and that baby
lived.

All this came back when I lifted the hood
of Blue Peril, my car, to see gone
what I already knew was gone—the battery.
One notes how correctly some things are stolen,
how carefully the cables had been unfastened
and set aside. Nothing cut, nothing else touched.
Quiet thieves in a parking lot,
taking and not taking much.

by Sheryl Massaro
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Tangelos

Valentine's Day again
and that terrible cloud
on the horizon I think
I must be disintegrating.
Due to my various optical
deficiencies I have blown up
the text on my screen
to a comical degree:

*Sometimes referred to
as honeybells, tangelos
are the size of an adult
fist, have a tangerine
taste, and are juicy
at the expense of flesh.*

I am obsessed with these things.
I like to bite into the nub
on the northern pole
opening a handy fissure
whence peeling may begin
without so much pith
beneath my fingernails
a technique I learned
from [redacted] whom
I loved terribly for this
and six other reasons.
Presently I love only
tangelos specifically
Orlando tangelos
a cross between
the Duncan grapefruit

and Dancy tangerine
created in 1911
by Walter Tennyson Swingle
also known for the limequat
barely a year after the succumbing
of his wife Lucie
to typhoid an infection
caused by the bacterium
Salmonella typhi
cruel pitiless enemy
to all the tangelo represents
goodness joy light
most woodwind instruments
clean drinking water etc
but it does no good
to think of cruelty
when you are eating a tangelo
or thinking of eating a tangelo
or reading a poem about thinking
of eating a tangelo
which I can say with certainty
because cruelty is all
I have thought of
eating four incandescent
specimens this last hour
texting no one from my past.
Specifically I am pondering
the cruelty of ticks known
to guzzle ninety thousandfold
the slow red blood of a single
moose found later dead sucked
dry too dumb or generous alas
to roam deeper these woods
piss-marking doomed trees
doomed ferns cold green
air gurgling ancient ground

they raised the price
of my inhalers eightfold
the dog died
a sense of loss
so incomprehensible
you could almost
comprehend it swept
through everything
or was there already
waiting for me
to put my glasses on
and tangelos
are no longer in season.
Fuck that and fuck you
I want to say
to five people
maybe nine people
let's say thirty to be safe
I must be discreet however
for career purposes
and basic courtesy
I will lie unflinchingly
still thinking of you
beloved stranger or friend
wondering what perfect thing
you will create and whether
it will make all this cruelty
worthwhile

by Seth Simons
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

learned helplessness

*sense of powerlessness despite lack of obstacles, caused by
prior traumas*

《孔子家語 六本》：

“男女之別，男尊女卑。”

“A boy is honoured; a girl is a slave.”

~The Family Sayings of Confucius, Volume Six

when you were born your parents expected a boy.
your mother, panting, asked the doctor if he had
made a mistake, if all of her blood you were covered
in had managed to hide a little wriggly thing.
it had not.

cannot be helped, your grandmother sighed.
she careless one ah, not yet born and already
dropping most important thing.

they dressed you in boys' clothes – your cousin's
hand-me-downs – when your baby hair fell out.
neighbours and strangers congratulated your parents;
said their son would surely do them proud.
they smiled, pleased.

cannot be helped, your father insisted.
she looking like that, buy new clothes for what?
waste money only lah.

your family calls you by your boy-name, the one
your father laboured for weeks to find; meant for
his precious son. the girl-name on your birth
certificate goes neglected, a scrambled mistake.
it is meaningless.

cannot be helped, your mother explained.
she chor lor one, new skin already scarred.
aiyoh, what man want?

so, they brought you up as their son; strapped to
the responsibility of being their pride. you stood on
the table reciting proverbs and poetry. a cane smacked
bruises into your knees when you stumbled over a word.
you often do.

(the eldest son
must be filial:
name and ancestors,
past and future,
will be carried
on his shoulders.
a girl belongs
to someone else,
your eldest son
is always yours.
without a son,
a family dies.
with a son,
a family lives.
holding such duties,
a son must
be taught strictly
so he learns
the weight of
failing.)

now grown, you hold tight to stories of girls mistreated,
millions aborted or abandoned or even eaten, and let seep
onto your tongue the taste of your own gratitude
staining the money
you hand over
at the start
of each month.
but you still keep your legs closed when you sit,
and your desk is covered with cosmetics. each scar
on your knee is matched with a welt that healed
without marks.

cannot be helped, you think to yourself.
you climb trees with makeup on and
learned to hit with elbows instead of fists.
because you are a son
but not a boy.

by Kay Lin

(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

Ghost of Bukowski Says What Professors in MFA Programs Won't

Asking a poet to read your book is like asking
the starving for food.

Almost no one cares about your poems
except your mother and grandmother,

and they're lying.

Poetry readers are rare as triple rainbows,

and getting laid from a poem farce.

While there are literary saints and martyrs,

most write from sheer boredom or fear of death.

But I know an old logger from Trout Lake, Oregon,

rowing for brookies and browns,
with no interest in fame,

yet every fucking word he says is a poem.

by Scott T. Starbuck
(Honorable Mention Charles Bukowski Prize for Poetry)

BIOS

George Douglas Anderson is a teacher, critic and poet who lives in Wollongong Australia. He blogs at Bold Monkey- a site devoted to small alternative press reviews and writing: <https://georgedanderson.blogspot.com> His previous chapbooks include *Dancing on Thin Ice* (2008) erbacce-press, *Melting Voices* (2011) Perspicacious Press, *Teaching My Computer Irony* (2016) Epic Rites Press- Punk Chapbook Series 2 and *Fuckwits & Angels* (2019) Holy & Intoxicated Publications, UK. Anderson's first book of short stories *The Empty Glass* (2020) was recently published by Alien Buddha Press. His chapbook *The Portal: The School Poems* will shortly be released by Holy & Intoxicated Publications. *The Rough End of the Pineapple* is his first full-length collection of his portrait poems.

Tohm Bakelas is a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. He was born in New Jersey, resides there, and will die there. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, zines, and online publications. He has published multiple chapbooks in America and the UK and his first poetry collection "Orphan Road" has been published by Uncollected Press. He intends to conquer the small press and exclusively publish within.

K. Johnson Bowles has exhibited in more than 80 solo and group exhibitions nationally. Feature articles, essays, and reviews of her work have appeared in 40 publications around the country including *SPOT (Houston Center for Photography)*, *Sculpture, Fiberarts, and the Houston Post*. She is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship and a Houston Center for Photography Fellowship. Recently, she served as an artist in residence at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY. She received her MFA in photography and painting from Ohio University and BFA in painting from Boston University.

Samantha Bolf graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in May of 2018, with a Bachelor of Arts in English

Literature and Philosophy, and honors in Creative Writing. Her work has been published in *LUMINA*, *Flumes*, and *The Raw Art Review*, and is forthcoming in *The Gateway Review*. Her nonfiction work was featured in *Monoceros: An Anthology*. She currently resides in Austin, Texas

By day **Susan Breall** handles cases involving abused, abandoned and neglected children. By night she writes short stories. Her stories appear in the following anthologies: *Impermanent Facts* (2018); *Dreamers Writing*, vol. 1 (2018); *Paragon Press--The Martian Chronicle* (2018); *Running Wild Stories*, vol. 3 (2019). *She was a finalist in the Retreat West short story competition and the Firedrake books short story competition. Her short story, Learning How to Fly On Her Own, will be published in the J. New Books spring 2020 anthology of short stories.*

Zoe Canner's writing has appeared in *The Laurel Review*, *Arcturus* of *the Chicago Review of Books*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *SUSAN / The Journal*, *Maudlin House, Occulum*, *Pouch*, *High Shelf Press*, *Swimming with Elephants*, *Chaleur Magazine*, *Nailed Magazine*, *Indolent Books' What Rough Beast*, *and elsewhere. She was longlisted for *The Sexton Poetry Prize, *shortlisted for *The Molotov Cocktail's Shadow Award, *a finalist for the *Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival Poetry Contest* and the* Elinor Benedict Poetry Prize. *She won second place in the *Storm Cellar Force Majeure Flash Contest*. Zoe was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2019 by *Matter: A Journal of Political Poetry and Commentary*. She lives in Los Angeles where she indulges in hilly walks at dusk when the night-blooming jasmine is at its peak fragrance. zoecanner.com

Carmine Dandrea, Professor of Literature and Creative Writing, served with the 1st Marine Division in Korea and was awarded the Purple Heart Medal. At Hobart College, he was poetry editor of the *Hobart Re-view*, shared the Charles H. Prize in poetry and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He graduated with a B.A. in English, *summa cum laude*. After a year at Brown

University in the American Studies Program, he earned an M.S.E. from Elmira College with a concentration in American history. Later as a professor at Elmira College, he developed undergraduate and graduate programs in creative writing and completed an M.F.A. in Poetry Writing at Cornell University, studying under A.R. Ammons. He was one of four poets chosen nationally for the New York Poetry Center's *Discovery '69* Program. In 1977 he was awarded a Certificate of Distinguished Contributions To Poetry by the editors of the *International Who's Who Among American Poets*. In 1972-3, he taught writing and literature courses at Corning Community College and was the Director of the English Audio-Visual Laboratory. Appointed Professor of English at Lake Michigan College in Benton Harbor, he was Chairman of the Humanities Department and founder/editor of *Blossom Review*, a magazine of the arts. During his tenure there, he developed creative writing courses and sponsored student readings. His poems have been published in journals, reviews and anthologies and have won over 50 awards, most recently the First Prize Awards of the 2010 and 2011 Tom Howard Poetry Contest, an international competition, and 3rd Prizes in the 2016-17-18 Artists Embassy International Dancing Poetry Contest. Dandrea was a Scholar in the 1993 NEH Institute of Chinese Culture And Civilization at the East/West Center in Honolulu and went on the Center's NEH Field Trips to The People's Republic of China and to India. These experiences have furthered his interest in Asian Studies and informed much of his poetry. He has published 10 volumes of poetry—*Heart's Crow*(1972), *American Still Life*(1992), *Liberation: A Journey To India* (1995), *Undertaking The American Dream*(2008), *An Infinite Human Tale*(2009), *Trying On America: A Mythos Of Immigrant Life*(2011), *In A Kept World*(2014), *Once In Korea*(2015), *Love And Loss* (2016), and *Facing God*(2017). An ardent practitioner of poetry as oral art, Dandrea has read his work in Athens, Beirut, Istanbul, New Delhi and throughout India, in Katmandu, Honolulu, Ireland, in The People's Republic Of China, and in the United States.

Donna Davis is a native of central New York. She received her M.S. in Education from Syracuse University. A former English and creative writing instructor, she owns The Village Scribe, a résumé writing and book design business. For many years, she has been the typesetter for The Comstock Review and has designed chapbooks for winners of its annual chapbook contest, including writers such as Ted Kooser and most recently, Katharyn Howd Machan. She was featured in *Legacy*, the 2019 SCARS publication anthology. Her poems have appeared in *Raw Art Review*, *Down in the Dirt Magazine*, *The Comstock Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Slipstream*, *Stoneboat*, *Muddy River Review*, *Red Fez*, *Red River Review*, *Burningwood Journal*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Pudding Magazine*, *Homestead Review*, *Ilya's Honey*, *Halcyon Days*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Oddball*, *Gingerbread House*, and others.

Danielle Gennaro holds an MFA from Manhattanville College and I have taken workshops with Brooklyn Poets and the Dylan Thomas International Summer School at the University of Wales. I have been published in *Oberon Poetry Magazine* and *Wizards in Space Literary Magazine*, Volumes 2 and 3.

Jason Gerrish is a sheet metal worker in Cincinnati, Ohio. He attended Morehead State University, in Kentucky, where he earned his BFA. Jason has no prior publications.

Dean Gessie is a Pushcart-nominated author and poet who has won multiple international prizes. Dean won the Angelo Natoli Short Story Award in Australia, the Half and One Literary Prize in India, the Eyelands Book Award in Greece and the short story prize at the Eden Mills Writers Festival in Canada. Dean also won the Enizagam International Poetry Contest in California and he was selected for inclusion in *The Sixty Four Best Poets of 2018* by Black Mountain Press in North Carolina. In addition, Dean won the Bacopa Literary Review Short Story Contest in Florida, the Two Sisters Short Story Contest in New Mexico, the New Millennium/Sunshots flash fiction contest in Tennessee and the After Dinner Conversation Short Story Competition in

Arizona. Dean also won second prize (of 2000+ submissions) in the Short Story Project New Beginnings competition in New York and his short story made the shortlist (of 2800+ submissions) for the Alpine Fellowship Prize in Stockholm, Sweden.

Elsewhere in the U.S., Dean was a finalist in the Glimmer Train Press Flash Fiction Competition in Oregon, a finalist in the Gotham Writers, Goodnight, New York Short Fiction Competition, a semi-finalist in the Machigonne Fiction Contest in Maine, a semi-finalist in the Hawk Mountain Short Story Collection Competition in Pennsylvania, a finalist in The Atlas Review Chapbook Competition in New York and runner-up for the John H. Kim Memorial Short Fiction Award in Maryland. He also won second prize in the CTD Pen 2 Paper Short Fiction Contest in Texas, third prize in the Atticus Review Flash Fiction competition in New Jersey and honorable mention in the 46th New Millennium Literary Awards in Tennessee. In addition, Dean won second prize in the Seven Hills Literary Contest in Florida and he was a finalist in the Tulip Tree Publishers Short Story Competition in Colorado. Dean was also a semi-finalist for the Princemere Poetry Prize and co-winner of the East Jasmine Review Literary Contest in California. In England, Dean was on the longlist of finalists in the Bath Short Story Award, the Brighton Prize Short Story Competition and (twice) the Flash 500 Short Story Competition. He was also shortlisted in the Retreat West Flash Fiction Contest and the Cunningham International Short Story Contest and won Highly Commended in the Manchester Fiction Prize. In Ireland, Dean was shortlisted in the Fish International Poetry Contest (of 1641 entries) and he was a finalist in the Seán Ó Faoláin Short Story Prize. He also won Third Prize in the Hungry Hill Writing Poets Meet Politics Competition. Elsewhere in Canada, Dean was a finalist in the Writers' Community of Simcoe County, Short Fiction Contest and shortlisted in the annual Freefall Prose and Poetry Contest in Calgary, Alberta. Dean was also a finalist (twice) in the short fiction contest sponsored by the Federation of British Columbia Writers, a finalist in the Darling Axe First Page Challenge in

British Columbia and on the longlist of finalists for the Peter Hinchcliffe Fiction Award in Ontario. In Australia, Dean was on the shortlist for the Fair Australia Prize in poetry and the Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Contest. Dean was also on the longlist in the Margaret River Short Story Contest in Western Australia. In the E.J Brady Short Story Competition in Victoria, Dean's fiction achieved Top Four on one occasion and he was on the longlist three other times. Finally, in India, Dean was a runner-up once (of 1500+ submissions) and Top Ten a second time in the Wingless Dreamers Poetry Contest. Also, in Greece, Dean was on the Shortlist in the Eyelands Second International Flash Fiction Contest and a winner and a finalist in the Eyelands Book Awards. Additionally, Dean was a finalist in the Pangolin International Poetry Contest in Mauritius. Dean's short stories and poetry have appeared in numerous anthologies around the world. He has also published three novellas with Anaphora Literary Press: *Guantanamo Redux*; *A Brief History of Summer Employment*; and *TrumpeterVille*.

Catherine Gewertz has been a cocktail waitress, garage band singer, pie baker, and typewriter poet-for-hire. To earn a steady living, though, she's a newspaper reporter. She loves a nice turn around the two-step floor, and a glass of Bourbon, neat. Her work appears in *True Chili* and *The Altadena Literary Review*.

At ten years old, **John Matthew Gillen** was sent to a Christian summer camp. Campers were allowed one elective activity. Out of four hundred campers, John was the only one who chose Storytelling. The camp director asked him to choose another class so they wouldn't have to offer Storytelling that year. John refused. Since then, he has been fired for writing poetry at work, cussed out by the Chief Clerk of the United States Supreme Court, and has spent over \$10,000 on tickets to Bob Dylan concerts. In addition to writing and directing short films in New York, John's work has appeared in literary publications

including *The Laurel Review*, *Storgy Magazine*, and *The New Guard Literary Review*. His favorite authors include Jorge Luis Borges and Hank Bukowski, and he harbors a deep reverence for Martin Scorsese. Manhattan is his home.

Elton Glaser has published eight full-length collections of poems, most recently two books in 2013: *Translations from the Flesh* (Pittsburgh) and *The Law of Falling Bodies* (Arkansas), winner of the Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize.

Lyall Harris is a writer-visual artist whose poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *The New Guard*, *The Prose Poem Project*, and *The Montréal Review*, among other publications. Harris was a BANG! Selected Writer in 2016 and received Honorable Mention for the Mary Merritt Henry Prize in Poetry in 2011. Harris' paintings have been widely exhibited and recognized with awards, including The George Hitchcock Prize from the National Academy Museum (NY), and her book art is held both privately and in over fifty Special Collection libraries including those at Yale, Stanford, Berkeley, and the University of Washington, and at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Maggie Huff-Rousselle, PhD, loves trespassing, especially across invisible human boundaries that set limits on our interpretations of reality and our own imagined possibilities. She puts real life characters into her poetry and prose, where she can shake them by the shoulders, gently admonish or tease them, and (too rarely) give them a long juicy smooch. She practices the art of recycling, which includes everything from making papier mâché pigs from old issues of *The Economist* to imitating famous poets, as she has done in this volume with Charles Bukowski.

Rachel Kaufman is interested in memory studies, diasporic identity, and the ways in which literary and historical texts transmit the past. She is currently writing a poetry collection

about New Mexico crypto-Jewish memory and the Mexican Inquisition which weaves together archival research, oral histories, and linguistic play, encountering nostalgia, empathy, and translation in stories both distant from and near to her own. Her poetry has appeared on *poets.org* and in *Carve Magazine*, *Levee Magazine*, *Good Works Review*, *Glass Mountain*, *The Yale Daily News*, *The New Journal*, *Kalliope*, *Shibboleth*, and elsewhere, and is forthcoming in *Southwestern American Literature*. Last spring, she read her poetry across the state as a winner of the 2019 Connecticut Poetry Circuit. A recent graduate of Yale College, Rachel moved to Santa Fe to teach, research, and write.

James Ross Kelly lives in Northern California. He has been a journalist for Gannet, a travel book editor, and had a score of labor jobs — the in-between, jobs you get from being an English major. He started writing poetry and short stories in college on the GI Bill, after college he continued and gave occasional readings in the Pacific Northwest during the 1980s. His poems and stories have appeared in *Westwind Review*, (*Ashland, Oregon*), *Open Sky* (*Seattle*), *Siskiyou Journal* (*Ashland, Oregon*), *The Sun* (*Chapel Hill, NC*); *Don't Read This* (*Ashland, Oregon*), *Table Rock Sentinel*, (*Medford, Oregon*), *Poetry Motel* (*Duluth, Minnesota*), *Poems for a Scorpio Moon & Others* (*Ashland, Oregon*), *The Red Gate & Other Poems*, a handset letterpress chapbook published by Cowan & Tetley (*Vancouver, B.C. Canada*). In the past three years *Silver Birch Press* (*Los Angeles*) *so glad is my heart* (*Duluth, Minnesota*), *Cargo Literary*, (*Prince Edward Island, Canada*), *Fiction Attic*, *Rock and Sling* (*Spokane, WA*), *Edify* (*Helena, AL*), *Flash Fiction* (*San Francisco*), *True Chili* (*New Mexico*), and *Rue Scribe* (*New Mexico*), have all featured one or more of his stories or poems. Mr. Kelly's upcoming collection of Short Stories, *And the Fire We Talked About* is scheduled to be published by Uncollected Press in 2020.

Jacob Klein is a recent graduate and professional wine expert from New Jersey who graduated with a B.A. in Creative Writing with a History minor from Farleigh Dickinson University. I am an emerging writer currently working on my first novel. I write both poetry and prose, and tend to lean towards the mythic, the fantastic, and the bizarre in my writing.

Daniel P. Leiser is a poet that works at a tech company. His work has been published in *The Stardust Review*, *aglimpseof* and the *agenbitofinwit*. He lives in Massachusetts.

Kay Lin lives in Singapore. Her poetry has been published by *the december*, *Live Canon*, *The Laurel Review*, *Cloudbank*, and others. Her short story, "night out," was published by *The Tishman Review*. Involuntarily intersectional, she writes in hope of giving words to those whose stories have never been listened to before.

Sean MacDonald when not working around Canada or visiting new places resides in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. Working as a fire fighter/paramedic. Sean takes inspiration from his experiences and puts his interpretation in the pages of what he writes- from summiting glaciated mountains to diving with bullsharks.

Samantha Melamed is a recent graduate of Umass Amherst. In recent months, she has been traveling Europe where she finds odd jobs and writes poetry.

Sam Mills is a writer from Berkshire, England. His work has been published in a handful of places online. His recent short story "Poacher's Priest" was published by Fairlight Books. He lives in London and is currently working on a novel.

Darren Morris lives in Richmond, Virginia, works as an instructional designer for a company in Atlanta, and manages the poetry desk at Parhelion Literary Magazine. His poems have

appeared in American Poetry Review, The Missouri Review, New England Review, and Poetry Ireland Review.

Dion O'Reilly's first book, *Ghost Dogs*, was published in February 2020 by Terrapin Books. Her poems and essays appear in Narrative, The Massachusetts Review, New Letters, Sugar House Review, New Ohio Review, Rattle, The Sun, Catamaran, Grist, Tupelo Quarterly and other literary journals and anthologies. She teaches poetry workshops in a house full of wild art situated in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and she is a member of The Hive Poetry Collective which produces poetry podcasts available on Spotify, iTunes, and anywhere you download your podcasts. (dionoreilly.wordpress.com)

J. Ray Paradiso - A confessed outsider, Chicago's J. Ray Paradiso is a recovering academic in the process of refreshing himself as an experiMENTAL writer and street photographer. His work has appeared in dozens of publications both online and in print. Equipped with cRaZy quilt graduate degrees in both Business Administration and Philosophy, he labors to fill temporal-spatial, psycho-social holes and, on good days, to enjoy the flow. All of his work is dedicated to his true love, sweet muse and body guard: Suzi Skoski Wosker Doski.

Aqeel Parvez writes and makes art. He lives in Leeds, UK. He is the author of: *The Streetlights Are Beckoning Nirvana* (Analog Submission Press) & *Anthem Of Purgatory* (Self Published). Find him on his blog at <https://aqe935.wixsite.com/aqeelparvez/blog> on IG @ap.writer and Twitter @aqeelparvez

Robert Perchan's poetry chapbooks are *Mythic Instinct* *Afternoon* (2005 Poetry West Prize) and *Overdressed to Kill* (Backwaters Press, 2005 Weldon Kees Award). His poetry collection *Fluid in Darkness, Frozen in Light* won the 1999 Pearl Poetry Prize and was published by Pearl Editions in 2000. His avant-la-lettre flash novel *Perchan's Chorea: Eros and Exile* (Watermark Press, Wichita, 1991) was translated into French and

published by Quidam Editeurs (Meudon) in 2002. In 2007 his short short story “The Neoplastic Surgeon” won the on-line *Entelechy: Mind and Culture* Bio-fiction Prize. He currently resides in Pusan, South Korea. You can see some of his stuff on robertperchan.com.

Jonathan Andrew Pérez, Esq. has published poetry online and in print in POETRY, Split Lip Magazine, Prelude, River Heron Review, The Write Launch, Meniscus Journal, Rigorous Journal, The Florida Review, the Raw Art Review, Watermelanin, Cold Mountain Review’s Justice Issue, Yes, Adelaide Literary, Mud Season Review, Meat for Tea, Esthetic Apostle, The Piltdown Review, The Tulane Review, Barnhouse, The Tiny Journal, The Westchester Review, Metafore, Silver Needle Press, The Chicago Quarterly Review, and TRACK // FOUR.

Jonathan was selected by The Virginia Quarterly Review 2018 for a workshop with Jericho Brown and Cave Canem in 2018 and 2019 for workshops. He is a 2019 Pushcart Prize in Poetry Nominee.

David J.S. Pickering has lived his entire life in Oregon. His poetry has been published a variety of journals including *the Raven Chronicles*, *Gold Man Review*, *Verseweavers*, *Listening to Poetry*, *Portland Review*, *Gertrude Journal*, and *the NonBinary Review*. Because David earns his living as a human resources director, he makes time on Saturdays to write in the best coffee shop he can find. David has moved from Portland with his husband to The Dalles, a town sadly bereft of good coffee joints. He continues to write, anyway.

John D Robinson is a UK poet: hundreds of his poems have appeared in small press zines and online literary journals including small press zines and online literary journals including : *Rusty Truck*: *Outlaw Poetry*: *North Of Oxford*: *Tuck Magazine*: *Misfits Magazine*: *The Sunflower Collective*: *Winamop*: *Bear Creek Haiku*: *Chicago Record*: *The Legendary*: *Paper and Ink Zine*: *Algebra Of Owls*: *Full Of Crow*: *The Beatnik Cowboy*: *The*

Clockwise Cat: The Scum Gentry: Message In A Bottle: Horror Sleaze ,Trash: Your One Phone Call: In Between Hangovers: Rasputin: Revolution John: Vox Poetica: Hand Job Zine: 48th Street Press: Poems-For-All: Philosophical Idiot: The Peeking Cat: Midnight Lane Boutique: Underground Books: Dead Snakes: Yellow Mama: Bareback Lit: Eunoia Review: Hobo Camp Review.

Caroline Rowe Caroline Rowe (née Zimmer) is a Pushcart Prize nominated poet. Her work has appeared in *Califragile*, *Seems*, *Adanna*, and *The Jabberwock Review*, where she was named a finalist for the Nancy D. Hargrove Editor's Prize. Her work has also been anthologized in *The Maple Leaf Rag* (Portals Press). She is a lifelong resident of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Her debut chapbook, *God's Favorite Redhead*, is forthcoming from Lucky Bean Press.

Since retiring from daily journalism in 2013, **Robert Eugene Rubino** has published prose and poetry in various online and print literary journals, including *Hippocampus*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Raw Art Review*, *Cathexis Northwest*, *Gravitas*, *The Write Launch*, *Cagibi*, *Forbidden Peak Press*, *Haunted Waters Press* and *High Shelf Press*, and in anthologies *Earth Hymn* and *Poetic Bond IX*. On most Wednesday evenings, he can be found at Sacred Grounds Cafe in San Francisco, participating in the West Coast's longest-running poetry open mic.

Olga Rosales Salinas writes poetry, prose and short stories. Her heart center is with her family that includes two rambunctious boys. Her work has been published by *The Womanist* and *The Forum Magazine*. Currently she facilitates a poetry writing workshop for 5th and 6th graders at Harbor House, a non-profit in Oakland, CA. Between 2009-2011 she was the founding curator for *Vettedword*, a monthly showcase featuring poets, writers, and musicians.

Lynne Schmidt is a mental health professional and an award winning poet and memoir author. She is the author of the chapbooks, *Gravity* (Nightingale and Sparrow Press), and *On Becoming a Role Model* (Thirty West). Her work has received the Maine Nonfiction Award, Editor's Choice Award, and was a 2018 and 2019 PNWA finalist for memoir and poetry respectively. Lynne is a five time 2019 Best of the Net Nominee, and an honorable mention for *the Charles Bukowski Poetry Award*. In 2012 she started the project, *AbortionChat*, which aims to lessen the stigma around abortion. When given the choice, Lynne prefers the company of her three dogs and one cat to humans.

Diane Shannon is a self-taught artist who works in multiple mediums including oil pastels, acrylic paint and watercolor dyes. Following a career as a registered nurse she became interested in pursuing the challenge of creating art. After two years she has learned by trial and error. Originally from the northwest she recently relocated to the southeast.

Seth Simons is a writer and editor based in California. I have received *Fugue Journal's Ronald MacFarland Prize for Poetry* and the *2018 New Millennium Award for Poetry*. My work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Fugue*, *Conduit*, *GAZE*, *the McNeese Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow* and *the Breakwater Review*.

Sofia Skavdahl is an award-winning poet and writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work can be found in *The Academy of American Poets*, *Prometheus Dreaming Magazine*, *Peace Review*, & *Raw Art Review*.

Judith Skillman paints expressionist works using oil on canvas and board. She is interested in feelings engendered by the natural world. Her art has appeared in journals such as *Minerva Rising*, *Artemis*, and *The Penn Review*. Skillman has studied at McDaniel College, the Pratt Fine Arts Center and the Seattle Artist League. Shows include The Pratt and Galvanize. Visit <https://www.etsy.com/shop/JkpaintingsStore>

Henry Stanton's fiction, poetry and paintings appear in *2River*, *The A3 Review*, *Alien Buddha Press*, *Avatar*, *The Baltimore City Paper*, *The Baltimore Sun Magazine*, *High Shelf Press*, *Kestrel*, *North of Oxford*, *Outlaw Poetry*, *The Paragon Press*, *PCC Inscape*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Rusty Truck*, *Salt & Syntax*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Word Riot*, *The Write Launch* and *Yellow Mama*, among other publications. His poetry was selected for the *A3 Review Poetry Prize* and was shortlisted for the *Eyewear 9th Fortnight Prize for Poetry*. His fiction received an Honorable Mention acceptance for the *Salt & Syntax Fiction Contest* and was selected as a finalist for the *Pen 2 Paper Annual Writing Contest*. A selection of Henry Stanton's paintings, fiction and poetry can be located www.brightportfal.com.

Scott T. Starbuck's *Trees, Fish, and Dreams Climateblog* has 64,000 views from 105 countries, and averages 1,500 views a month. His book of climate poems *Hawk on Wire* was a July 2017 'Editor's Pick' at Newpages.com along with *The Collected Stories of Ray Bradbury*, and was selected from over 1,500 books as a 2018 Montaigne Medal Finalist sponsored by Eric Hoffer Awards for "the most thought-provoking books." He has given ecopoetry workshops and/or readings at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in the UC San Diego Masters of Advanced Studies Program in Climate Science and Policy, the 2018 Annual California Higher Education Sustainability Conference (CHESC), and at colleges, and other places, in Washington, Oregon, and California. He served as a member of SanDiego.350's coordinating committee for the Road Through Paris action, edited for SanDiego.350, called TV news stations on behalf of San Diego area tribes in solidarity with water protectors near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, and gave radio, newspaper, phone, and email climate interviews in the U. S. and Australia.

Dawn Terpstra's poetry appears in *Third Wednesday*, *Neologism*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, *High Shelf Press*, *Flying South*, *The Write Launch*, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, *Lyrical Iowa*, and other publications. She lives in rural Iowa and leads a communications team in the energy industry.

Tom Ukinski has been a dishwasher, doorman, postman, chimney sweep, factory worker, night watchman, plasma donor, and copywriter. He did street mime and stand-up comedy in parks and nightclubs in the US and Mexico. In the 1980s, he was convicted of being a lawyer and subsequently served 25 years in state government. Desperate to please, he's written novels, poetry, antipoetry, short stories, long stories, comedy sketches, musicals, and importunate advertising. His writing runs from six words to 290,000. He's probably been published somewhere.

Stephen John Walker, as a young man, explored the wharves around Seattle's waterfront gawking at, and sometimes sneaking on board, the multi-masted, derelict lumber schooners awaiting their final voyage to the knacker's yard. He dreamt of running away to the South Pacific or the Caribbean to be a crew member on a copra schooner. Later in life, his work and travels fulfilled those dreams. His debut novel, *Hotel San Blas: A Caribbean Quest*, a finalist in the 2017 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, is set among the islands along Panama's north coast, Vietnam, and is available from Amazon.

Clare Welsh is a poet based in Pittsburgh, and a graduate of The University of New Orleans MFA program. In 2019 her poems appeared in **The Massachusetts Review**, **Puerto Del Sol**, **The Midwest Review**, **The Coal Hill Review**, **Cagibi**, **Fine Print Paper**, **Sundog Lit**, **Waxing & Waning**, **The Peauxdunque Review**, **The Raw Art Review**, and **Twyckenham Notes**. Her poems have been nominated for both Pushcart and Best of the Net anthologies, read on NPR Atlanta and WHIV New Orleans radio stations, and her manuscript *Wolfdog* was a finalist for Muse/A Journal's 2019 book prize. Her chapbook *Chimeras* (2014) is available through Finishing Line Press.

Ali Wilding is a writer of short stories and flash fiction. Originally from the UK, she now lives and works in New York City. She was selected as a finalist in *The Iowa Review's* 2019 Short Fiction contest and semi-finalist in *American Short Fiction's* 2019 Flash Fiction competition. Her work has appeared in *Pif Magazine*, *The Fiction Pool*, *Quip Literary Review* and *The Write Launch*. Two of her stories have been nominated for the *2020 Pushcart Prize*.