

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



Summer/Fall 2021

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FRONT COVER ART:

Silk Road Boy on Horse

by
Keith Edwards

BACK COVER ART:

Elephants on the Silk Road II

by
Keith Edwards

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Elephants at 4 Seasons
Keith Edwards

Hoping That With Sleep*

the waters will flow through the gutters with ease
without you having to interfere

hydrodynamics, you've said
and the clicks of the emails coming, will silence themselves

at least for a time, your head so heavy
maybe you can heal, hard as it can be, through the years

and you, lying so still, giving very little
while the rain pours down

so much pressure passing through the leaves and the gunk
through one small channel

or somehow going around all of it
I can't imagine how that would look

we've crossed that line
all of the water's pressure

moving through
it flows, is cleansing

the pounding on the roof
all of the information is gone now

so lost in everything
and I'm hoping

*Hoping That With Sleep was previously published in QU Literary Magazine, Issue 03.

Margaret McGowan

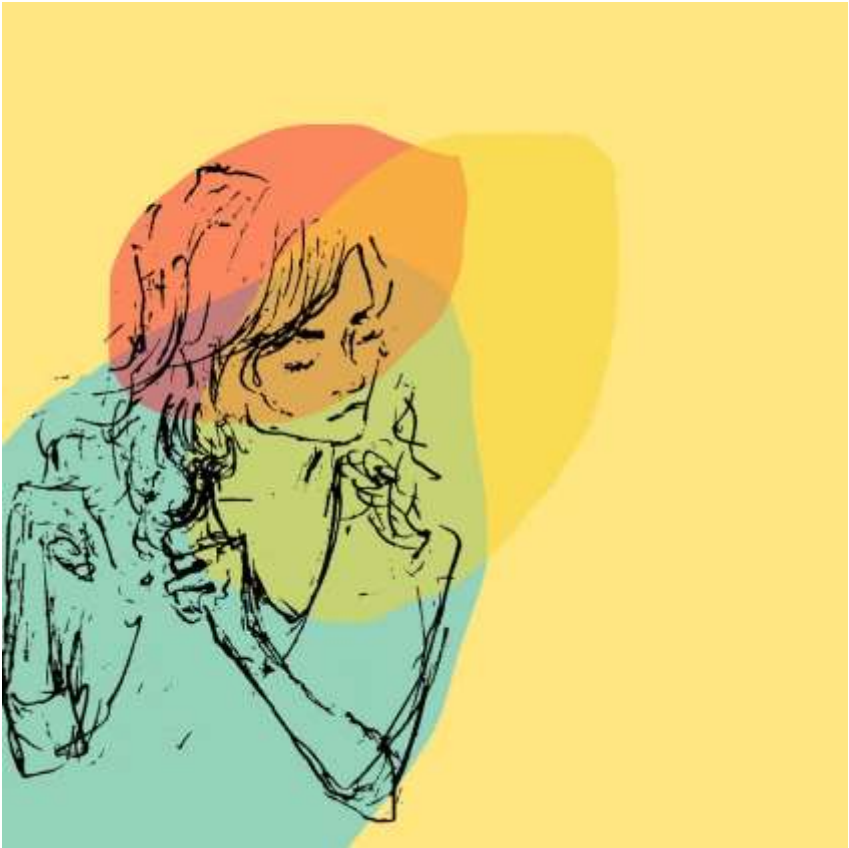


Goldenfield
Nick Miles

Ancestors

Because I think he may have been
my dad I change my name to his
Not officially no paperwork to speak
of no rubber stamps no notary
public I christen myself *Maggie Longo*
after the doctor who delivered me
who saw that my twin sister
and I were breech He turned us around
so we could greet this world head-first
It's just an unlikely intuition that he may
have been my father A wistful wish
A far-reaching guess A thought
that catches fire like dry tinder
and takes over like a coup
That was its genesis Then on a whim
I added *Afar* as my surname So *Maggie*
Longo Afar is now my full name *Afar* being
the name of a magazine on top of a pile
of books on the floor in my living room
My new names sound like *Long Ago*
and *Far Away* Someone who looked
like me Maybe a boy with blonde
locks A Viking named Ragnar
Lothbrok My real life grandmother
an immigrant from Russia which was plundered
and pillaged by Vikings on a regular basis
Or the Neanderthals Or the primordial
soup They are all my ancestors
And I can't forget Lucy
the australopithecus afarensis fossil
who was my greatest great grandmother
who lived 3.2 million years ago
and was also known as *Dinkinesh*
which means *you are marvelous*
in Amharic. People say
I take after her.

Margaret McGowan



Jamie
Nick Miles

Violin

I found a violin
wrapped in a prayer
by the side of the road.
I found a prayer sitting
by the river, a blanket
over its shoulders,
shivering, shards
of Dayenu strewn
across a succulent field.
I found a prayer of light
in a roughed out city. I found
a violin in a cornucopia
of stillness, light flowing over,
like a linen shroud,
like loaves and fishes,
like a mountain of raindrops
turning into tears. I found a prayer
that mimicked a vesper raking
over the sky. I found the limb
of an evergreen torn from a tree,
the wound open and bleeding,
needles and branches long
like fingers, like eternities,
like prayers from the Gita
that melt away from a page
and leave only shadows. I found
a violin wrapped in a tunnel
of wind, I found
a skyscraper under
my pillow. I found you
on a ship of thousands.
I found you wrapped
in a prayer, shivering.

Margaret McGowan



Grass Copperlattice
Nick Miles

FRANCES

I

High over a blind curve on a dead-end country road, a woman and a man lived in their home with eleven children. The children were of diverse ages and races though none was very light or very dark, and all were older than two and younger than ten. One miracle held that the woman was, and had been, sterile; another provided that the man worked two jobs every other twelve hours while she tended their large flock.

She was seen every morning at ten and every afternoon at two walking a number of the children down or up the road for air and exercise. Rumor had it that some of the children went to school, but who knows who went or when: all the children had been seen on one walk or another on school days.

On these walks some of the children limped from a leg too long or a hip malformed: these pushed the wheelchaired ones and watched out for the blind ones. The deaf one led when she was in the group, turning every twelve or so steps and smiling, or sticking out her tongue, at her siblings and mother. The profoundly retarded nine-year-old girl, Carl, tried to run whenever they reached the path off to the river. She loved wading and could never wait for her turn, even in brisk weather.

This woman's name was *Frances*; after she and her husband, whose name I dare not tell you, had adopted Frank, their first boy, an eight-year-old, he had been furious. His foster parents had just given him up to Frances and her husband. He had nearly destroyed his bed in the dormitory bedroom the first week he had lived with them by kicking at it with his small, but heavily-built, boots.

One evening, after Frank had lived with them for two-and-a-half weeks, the three of them were sitting in front of the fireplace, no fire lit, Frances and her husband sitting close, reading, and Frank facing their knees and picking at numerous scabs on his arms and legs. In an easy moment Frances's husband had turned to his wife, who would become in her middle age even more smooth-skinned and beautiful, and said, "Frank, I am losing that fear that you might leave me at anytime." The boy looked up from his bleeding left arm, his small, dark brow jumping up at the man, and then turned, in jaw-dropping amazement, to Frances who had just been called by *his* name. His slender body noticeably released.

II

Frances and her husband made love in slim volumes: episodes were short, but, in the main, honey-suckle sweet. But because there were constant interruptions, often they could not finish what they started --- this paradigm applied, of course, to their entire life at home. Frances's husband, being a man, and having what are called *men's needs*, had the best of this bargain. He could come quickly, and he left on the run every morning of the five at 5:00 a.m. for his leisurely, uninterrupted job of sweeping, hauling, and cleaning at the lumberyard. (In fact, this was both of his jobs, two 5-1/2 hour shifts with an hour in between for lunch.) He arrived each morning at just before 6:00 a.m., swept for two hours, opened, and then hauled till lunch, then closed at 5:00 p.m., and cleaned machines for an hour. Though Frances was a loving and lovely soul, she became frustrated sometimes. She desired a longer, smoother sweep to some things, at least some of the time.

One crisp fall day she decided that in the evening she and her husband would have that leisure in bed. The children were almost always in bed by 7:00 p.m. since they were up before 6:00 a.m. soon after their father had left for work. 'This evening,' Frances

thought, 'will be special for us, but I'm not sure how to push it that way.' Her husband was always tired when he came home from work, as she was after her day at home. Then she hit on it! She would go to sleep with the children, and when her husband came home to a quiet, dark house, he'd sneak into bed with her and they would have time and time after he'd awakened her with full kisses.

Just after dinner she unplugged the phone knowing no one would be calling after 6:30 and poured a long, sour lemonade by the bed. The children were down; she could almost hear their quiet breathing. Tired Frances was asleep in minutes, lemon in her breath. She dreamt:

You are coming to me just as I planned, rolling neatly between the sheets, kissing me awake with deep embraces of arms and legs. I am ready and on top of you quick, slipping you inside me with thick-fingered hands; I am...

Frances, in her waking up, was immediately aware that her husband was not with her; her spirits dropped until she heard a shuffling close by the bed. She called out her husband's name as he slipped between the sheets and reached for her. She climbed right on top of him, and they began to talk to each other in swift baby-talk . . .

III

I cannot call Frances's husband unnameable; in fact, he was her third husband and had the same name as the other two. She buried both of **them** in short order, but they were both quite old when they married her. This third husband was closer to Frances's age. Frances herself told me not say his name: she also said that she tried to avoid using it whenever she could, especially in public. She did use it, of course, when they went shopping and she needed

to get his attention. "Even then," she claimed, "it disturbs. One day at Stepp's Fruits & Vegetables, I called his name, not even loudly, and an entire aisle, five men and a woman looked up from potential purchases they were studying. It's not even a uncommon name. Then their twelve eyes fell rapidly back down."

IV

Frances swept the front path every other day, and when she did, the dogs, all ages, barked at the broom till she was done. The mystery was in their biting: all the dogs seemed to get their excited mouths on the straw, but the brooms she used lasted forever. A younger pup, Kerry, a red retriever, even pawed the handle without ever seeming to scratch it. The dust flew when Frances swept, and no one could see for certain that the broom was whole and unmarked. It is also true that she let the dogs bother her when she swept. But she seemed to enjoy it and said, on more than one occasion, to a nosey neighbor, "My dogs help me sweep: all the barking and biting's for show. They move as much dirt as I do into the brush."

V

It was earlier a long time.

Far too often Frances cut herself when she was paring or chopping. Her fingers were thoroughly marked, and though the bleeding stopped soon and the wounds healed --- albeit more slowly than just five years ago --- the colorful scars stayed put, reminding. Almost warning the children.

This was a side of Frances of which she was not proud: her only little sister, Ortensa, knew it well because Frances had nearly raised her by herself. Father was forever absent, and, for her little six-year-old sister, Mother also was missing, lying in the hospital nearly under-water with bad lungs for a full year.

Frances threatened baby sister with every warning. Frances worried over everything: she dates the flattening of her bite to night-grinding at this time.

Once when she found her sister playing with a kitchen knife, she yelled, grabbed the knife, and cut her sister a shallow, but painful scratch in her left-middle finger. Ortensa cried out, and Frances pushed the bleeding finger into her mouth. The sucking was something anyone could do and want.

Whenever Frances cuts herself and tastes warm blood, she thinks of little sister, who had needlessly killed herself in a car on a tree just a few years ago. Thus, her running tears when Frances cuts herself. Oh, the safer back blade of the knife, a cook's other tool.

VI

But even Frances and her husband had a problem child. *Problematic* would be a more accurate description: she was not particularly destructive or hateful, but she did inspire thoughts and pictures of the most violent sort. What she did was to clam in great angers, without being aware of them, and then to pull on the nearby heartchains of others, mostly her parents, until somehow the rage entered one or the other of them intracerebrally.

Frequently, after a strong moment with her, her parents literally wanted to kill her, or end up killing her after flogging, flaying, and painfully slow-bleeding her. Child abuse? Perhaps. Frances was no

exception though she expressed the rages she felt toward this daughter in exceptional ways.

She could accurately visualize her daughter as a black hole sucking violently at everything around her. Frances would not go into that black hole, but she knew that staying entirely away from it was not acceptable either. Instead, when she found her daughter in this bland, rage-inducing state, Frances might invite her to a tea party. (She also would invite her husband, but he rarely showed, and when he did, he spent the greatest part of the time wiping dust from his eyes.)

At the tea party: many broken, but badly-mended, dishes, and on the dishes any number of plastic and rubber food models. Frances modelled, always sitting at the children's table and biting forcefully at a rubber biscuit (with attached rubber red jelly) or a plastic peach slice, as her daughter silently agreed to join her.

This daughter, first-named Sue, called Optima by Frances and her family, then fooled --- I mean *consistently faked out* --- her mother, and anyone else near to hearing, by reacting to her mother's biting gestures in unexpected ways. For example, one day, unprompted and with eyes creased, she karate-chopped the table between the tightly set dishes, slightly cracking the formica top without upsetting any thing: the bruise on her hand was to turn a blue that could not be forgotten, a blue of a clean sky on the darkest sunset hour in cold winter weather.

VII

The Department called Frances. True, they were returning her call from eleven months earlier, but they were phoning, and that's what counted. Frances was damned mad at them, and told them in certain terms that she no longer had any interest in coming back to

school; they had waited too long to call. Now they were interested, even intrigued. They called back the next day as if they hadn't reached her the day before. Now Frances was really furious: she hissed over the phone line, "Don't you ever phone up me again! You leave me out of it, your stupid department."

Re-cognition. She could do it, why hadn't they? It was simple even when it worked weakly. *Turn over in your mind something, even your blanknesses, until new forms come. Then stop and put them out to paper, bronze, or clay as if you were a laserprinter with so much memory of your own. If tagged **repeat**, you might never be able to quit on your own, but then a warm hand on your shoulder or left neck side might come, might reassure you that dinnertime comes once a day and that you may stop then and there for a meal.*

VIII

Frances had a best companion, Clara, who dressed often as a man. Not as a full man, but with her forehead buffed and her hair bunned back under a cap, she resembled eerily a middle-aged nervous lawyer or accountant, male. She could roller backwards on worn wheels through a parking lot or down a smooth alley missing slow traffic like a pro; she had a pigeon shoulder-trained in the downtown square at noon times; and her overborne kindness was a city legend --- she was her own soup kitchen for the lonelier poor.

Needless to mention, Clara did not dress rich or otherwise showy, and she blended well in with her hungry clients. One afternoon, her pigeon flown off, Clara sat on an underpainted bench in the park of the square and nodded asleep, her head falling forward and back as, lightly sleeping, she tried to balance in mid-shoulder.

A short pretty woman, long, brown, shining hair blowing over her shoulders, approached the bench limping heavily on her right side.

Her left leg was definitely longer than her right, and even the matching shoes could not hide some foot oddity in the right shoe. She sat and began dry-coughing, her smooth, tanned face crinkling from the gagging; Clara looked up from her nap nodding, concerned. "Are you ill?" Clara asked her.

Without recognizing that Clara had spoken the young woman began speaking about her diabetes, her desperate need for a treatment, and the money she needed, just \$40, to pay for it since the clinic would accept no other form of payment but cash money. She spoke in a monotone, but was quite convincing, at least to Clara, who reached into her loose pants pocket and took out a crumpled bill and a handful of coins. She offered them to the woman, who looked sadly at Clara, and began explaining that she needed \$40 for her treatment and that only \$40 would do.

Clara sighed: "Don't you see I have no money either? If you are going to try to hustle . . ." The young woman interrupted, "I need the \$40 . . ." This final bit of dither triggered Clara's first petit mal in years.

IX

Fury, too, is a sector of kindness, an eighth-wedge of the pie, but a live one with its sharp eyes. Saints can love a rich man, but no one can love what a rich man does. These were thoughts that fumbled through Frances as she walked to grocery shop; she had with her: red Kerry on a short leash and two of the children, Frank and Optima.

Both children had been moving more quickly than Frances so she had pulled Kerry's half-filled fur-brush from her coat pocket and instructed them to take turns brushing and holding Kerry as they walked along: this slowed the two just enough to make the passage

a walk instead of a random gallop, and although the brushing was rough-or-miss, Kerry loved the petting and the attention.

Frank and Optima fought over who would brush the longest, but instead of arguing words, each tried to pull the brush from the other's grasp whenever, to the grabber, the brusher's time seemed up. Frank and Optima were equal in strength, but Optima had more endurance in her spindly limbs and more inherent stubbornness. At one point Frank, his eager, sharp chin jutting, kicked Optima's shin in frustration, but Optima just shrugged it off and kept on brushing, pushing deeper and deeper toward Kerry's bone white skin: Kerry became ecstatic, and her whole hind frame dropped down and twitched under the scratching brush.

Short, fat, never-quite-shaven Cassetti had shut their water down to a trickle that morning explaining that his spring, which fed the area, was drier than last year and that they'd all have to economize. He had then gone into one of his long stories about the old country, this one about hot summers in Palermo when the authorities shut off water to whole sections of the city when the supply fell low. "We just filled our bathtubs and stepped out for picnics in the afternoon," sang Cassetti, as if anyone would trade anything to have his history and background. Frances was angered by the memory of Cassetti grinning up on the toes of his very soft, cream-colored shoes (probably imported from Italy). She spat with the wind into the poison oak along the side of the road.

Frances had never before tried to thread the needle as she walked, but today she was up to a challenge and she put the red thread to her lightly damped lips and then held the needle up to the greening hill and began to search out the eye. She had to stop: there in her sight was a Guernsey, looking, because of some speck on the inside of the eye, like a two-humped camel. She laughed aloud and began to hum her shopping list to the squabbling children: *figs and garlic, flour and cheeses, tomatoes fresh and tomatoes crushed, noodles to cook in boiling water, potatoes and onions to be hashed.*

X

When Frances taught in town, she once had had a student, a follower really, who had written her a devotion:

**I love Frances, I worship her. We all do. She is purer
of heart, and in kindness she is sure. I have no fear
of Frances until just now, and that will pass.
Though she is not perfectly clean, I search
for Frances, and so do you. If you find
her, bring her close and befriend her
to me too. Please be quick like a
kid because I miss her just as
if she were already gone off.
If there is a God, god is of
many parts and Frances
has numbers of them.**

As form has often followed a thing previously formed, the devotionist had cut this begging prayer in crushed styrofoam with an ink pen, round-nibbed but sharp enough to dig down. Much care had been taken with the placement of the words; in fact, only an *idiot savant* with some certain mathematical brilliance could have scribed it the first time around. How the text was discovered, I will leave for another time.

XI

Oh, the dividing is not that neat, but it must occur just the same because the human is not singular. Even the monomaniac attacks out, at others; and sleepers for thirty years have impressed in slow time the outside, and can remember; only the catatonics seem to feed on nothing, alone, not that they are misanthropic, but rather

that they have lost a taste for things and for other folk. And, yet, some electricity awakens in them new hungers. Even the brain-dead, who are not with us, are not dead yet and seem human to touch and to embrace, their breath, even through machines, comes to our ears, if not to our skin touched, with something that can only be called, *lived*.

XII

Not Jewish, this Frances, that's a fact, but I will follow her wounded feet everywhere they've walked, over hills always tired to the next township. As if this world were a moving sea and the cities rocked over it to some happy purpose.

San Francesco d'Assisi *Frances assisted us*

Precious the small hands of Frances as they hold, left in right and right in left, a child's smaller, even more fragile hand, the little nails already bitten down beneath the quick. The sorry child is ever slow in watching others play near her and, from little tears and rips, chews herself red.

XIII *Frances in Hell*

Once every year for the past fifteen, Frances spends down the refrigerator in the week before the anniversary of her parents' deaths. She is careful to have foods available for all meals in the approach, but she never quite plans it perfectly. Some child is always too sick to eat a breakfast, or another is on a growth spurt and needs extra sandwiches at lunch. Frequent shopping can take into account the changeable nature of appetite; but Frances does not shop this week and only resumes on the day following the

memorial day, a wounded-day she fasts and inevitably spends at least a four-hour period in her room alone, come whatever chaos in the rest of the house.

Her husband pictures her in a meditative mourning state in these hours, and she does weep a part of each hour. But the grief is also a general despair that she can fight off the rest of the year, but not at all during these hours.

And the mourning is of a particular kind: her mother and father were in the same car when they were hit head-on by a large Peterbilt whose drugged driver had closed his eyes a second too long; and they were both killed instantly, the truck driver and her father. Her mother had gone deep immediately into a vegetative state out of which she had died five years later.

Frances had loved her mother, but had always felt bullied by her: the endless visitations her mother's odd body had requested after the accident had eventually made Frances even more resentful of her. So she remembered her father strongly and fondly and her mother with a rich mixture of relief for her final going and a subtle nostalgia for a mother whom she had not actually ever had and whose especial absence in these last years had worn a hole in Frances from the inside in.

Frances often performs privacies in her mourning hours. They are untellable acts accomplished in the seclusion of her room, long eating of unhealthful foods, painful discharge of some of these foods, and stimulations of her sex amidst these eating and excreting spells. She finds that she must complete these near-rituals, or she may continue to feel in fragments for many weeks or even months after her mourning. She is in a constant blush and trance during feeding and excreting, so says her low round mirror whenever she sneaks a look.

"Borders," Frances said to herself aloud, "keep, your boundaries intact." She pounced forward when the mugger reached out to pull her hair. Feigning surprise, he grabbed each of her shoulders with a big mitted hand; she let him, and as he pulled her toward his armored torso, she stepped forward, lifting her bony left knee violently into his padded-over crotch and yelling from her diaphragm a "No!" every hit woman and child watching recognized in the hair on the backs of their necks. When he doubled over as he had to, she grabbed his masked and helmeted head and, stepping again, held it as she drove her other knee into the front of his face. As if punted, he snapped back against the wall and slid down sinking to the mat, rolling over on his back and bringing his mitted fists over his covered eyes. *Surrender.*

"Perfect form!" yelled the small instructress as she rushed to Frances's side and began to whisper thoughts into her ear:

"Check him; are you certain he is knocked out?"

Good.

Do you need to say anything to this other one in the silent corner?

He is the one who could not, would not protect you."

At the word "protect" Frances, who had looked to the corner as if she might head over there, fell to her knees, and, as if in prayer, began first quietly, and then with larger and larger sobs to weep. Her words were stirred up together and inhaled or exhaled as she cried to breathe: every half dozen or so sounds one was comprehensible to those within twenty-five feet:

".....Auntie...

..me.....washed.....

..touched....no..

...helped.....lonely....

.pleasure.....how...

....oh Uncle.....leave...
left.....'n'..ever...."

The instructress, whose name in the class was *Prensa*, hovered over Frances like a cape mouthing soothing syllables to her backside and periodically touching her neck with a soft hand. As Frances finished sobbing, she fell over onto her back and began a series of short shrieks as if the scene in her mind had come to life and she were in immense physical pain.

And, of course, she was in pain since we know the mind to rule the body when it wills and the body the mind as it moves.

XV

The story of Stephen's spot had hit Frances viscerally: when she had first heard it, she had gasped for air as if she had been hit in the solar plexus and had had all air knocked out of her. The oddest thing about the story, and her reaction to it, was that she could not, for the life of her, remember who had told it to her.

She did remember that she had first heard the story under the maple near the corner of Long and Alice Streets, only a mile from her present home, and that it had been Autumn: leaves of gold, red, and orange had lay scattered at her feet and at her sides as she had listened and talked, seated on the rusted bench. Many of the leaves had still held a little green in their centers as if heavy wind had blown them off a pinch prematurely. She also remembered that sitting on the bench had reminded her that years before, she and her present husband had first petted on it and that she had nearly wet her pants from the cold and the holding as they had touched each other under their heavy coats. She flushed now, as she had on that Fall dusk, when she had been recollecting how she had lifted

her head for him to move on her neck, a private place she almost never left open to men or even air.

As Frances recalled, this is the story of Stephen's Spot:

Stephen worked in an office on Taylor Street, just blocks from downtown; he typed letters for the boss at a computer terminal most of the day, with short breaks for bad coffee and eye-rest. He was more than a secretary because he actually edited the letters for this man, who knew little about how to compose an elegant letter. Stephen, whose second language was English, knew the formal and casual letters in English like second skins.

The boss valued Stephen as if he were noble metal, and Stephen rarely worried about his job. He did worry about hemorrhoids a little and always sat on a donut cushion over a desk chair made of heavy aluminum. Every morning, as he sat down in his chair, Stephen blinked back the first time he had seen the vacant lot where his place in the office now sat. He had been climbing the wire fence around the building project and had just pulled his waist to the top with his strong, flabby arms, when his little sister had hollered loudly from their house next door, "Stee-fun, Stee-fun! Din-ner! Din-ner!" Stephen leaned forward on the top of the fence, was startled into falling and rolling directly onto the spot where now he was sitting. When he recalled this story and action, as he did, at least in part, each morning before he began his day, he was content. This wasn't the end of that scene, but he rarely re-registered the details of his broken arm and the hours in the emergency room with his angry mother. What he re-played with warm satisfaction was the falling onto the spot where he always

landed, the spot where now, again, he began his day. These memories were to be altered irrevocably one still Fall afternoon as he sat re-writing and typing a particularly badly composed letter for his boss. EARTHQUAKE! Rolling under his desk, Stephen re-gleaned the intense pain of his broken arm and the real, though rare, anger his mother showered on him in his misery.

XVI

Then San Francesco said: "I have not done any harm to Brother Wolf that he should dare to devour our Brother Donkey. Good-by, my sons. And fear God."

Frances knew her own Wolf of Fear by heart. Every snarl of teeth lodged in her head like a bad photograph. Her wolf was as tall at the shoulders as a tall man, taller than any woman she knew, and so strong in the jaw that one bite down killed the lamb. Frances was scared enough that she saw the lamb as a wolf dressed-up, but never the wolf as anyone but a wolf. She recalled her Dad repeating FDR's *nothing to fear but fear itself* as an endless, beadless rosary. As a grown-up she feared fear itself, exactly, and could not get beyond the fear. She felt it was not death she feared, but something worse, an endless decaying life on earth, perhaps, or, even worse, an eternal life in some unprescribable circumstances. 'Perhaps all this thought is merely about death,' Frances thought to herself at least twice a day, once when she awoke and a second time, usually, before she went to sleep.

At the grand age of forty, Frances had searched out a mesmerist to try to unravel the fear's meaning. During her seventh session, the therapist helped her to rebuild a memory

(. . . *and* a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them .
..)

(Jer. 5.6)

that as a child, she had fed a donkey for some neighbors whenever they went away on a trip. She re-sensed the donkey as miserably smelly and covered with stinging flies that flew onto her hands and uncovered neck whenever she got within feeding distance of it. She was, young, a hellion, and one day she decided to ride the ass through the gate she was supposed to keep closed at all times. Riding, bumping along, she had felt her thighs getting colder and wetter through her jeans --- from the mud-wet donkey fur. Shivering, she had raised her look up from the donkey's bony neck and had seen in front of them a huge animal, a dog, but like no other she'd ever seen. The donkey had startled and begun to run, too fast, and she had been nearly thrown off by the hurtling animal when it suddenly slowed to a halt. When Frances looked up again, there in front of them was the animal once more, sitting and panting in their path. The donkey did not panic again.

XVII

HOW FRANCES WAS TO DIE?

HOW FRANCES DIED?

HOW COULD FRANCES DIE?

All her life Frances had been preparing to die, not in any macabre way, but in a practical fashion, always remaining true to her other loves and interests. Frances had read "The Ship of Death" at a very young age: her fourth grade teacher had told the class members to

find a poem about an animal in the school library. Frances, who never followed directions exactly, had gone after school to the public library and had checked out a volume of Lawrence's selected poems because her most recent, but already passed, crush had been on Lawrence Pirro, a boy not in her class, but in the other fourth grade class, which gathered right next door to hers. She had read "The Snake" as many times as there were hours in her sleepnight, waking over and over from a new recurring dream. Actually the dream had not started that night, but several months earlier: in it Lawrence approached her as she sat snuggled comfortably in a large cushiony chair dressed only in a silky slip, but covered by the soft wool blanket she had named Blankey when her parents had given it to her as a toddler.

In each dream Lawrence came toward her from a different room always dressed up, usually as a girl or woman replete with a purse and sometimes even wearing stockings. In the dreams Lawrence never reached her in the chair, but her skin had always tingled with energy in both of her legs, each time he began to approach. Lawrence had died that year in great pain from childhood leukemia, but before the disease had been discovered, Frances had stopped having this recurring dream and had begun to fall in love with four-square and tetherball.

In any case the evening after she had read "The Snake" over and over, she was again reading in the volume and had found near the end of the volume "The Ship of Death." No poem she had read before or since had had such an effect.

XVIII

Frances had a singular fetish, a secret she shared with no one but her husband and her talking doctor. Frances loved elbows. How

they knobbed and then smoothed as arms bent and straightened out again in daily work and living.

XIX

At 48, Frances found herself, remarkably, pregnant; her age was not the most amazing factor. Rumors still flew that she had always been sterile and that all her children were adopted; nor was this the most astonishing part. What was, in fact, nearly impossible to believe --- though no one but Frances and her husband knew of it --- was the reality that Frances and her husband had not had reproductive sex in over one year. They had kissed and hugged as often as one can count fingers, but he had not entered her. Had it dripped on the outskirts, the little drivers rushing in to find an expectant egg? Or had she had secret relations with someone else? Neither of these scenarios seemed likely although a man's penis will drip out beyond any intentional control and to say that Frances was still attractive was no mere understatement.

Frances was gorgeous in her middle years; curves that had once brought a wandering man's eyes to tears of need, now made most everyone, who walked behind or toward her, sigh in either jealousy or warm fever. Children still hung on to her smooth arms and rounded thighs as if to their dear lives. Friends of her husband, who believed themselves to be impotent or tired of sex with their mates, had only to conjure Frances in an uncompromising, though slightly stripped down, position, in order to bring themselves determinedly to life. And, as they could now not even keep themselves (if they desired) from running gently with their mates, breathing loudly as they came back home, so were their mates, even upon hearing the name of Frances called out by their now-steady partners, unable to bar a broad smile or block the crying out with wide-open vowels and large, consonantal tongue-urgings. These happy pairs, too, held to each other's softer parts as the children held onto Frances.

Frances's husband was a well-meaning sort, and loving Frances as much as he did would lead anyone to believe that he wanted her as much or more than any other friend. Was it his drinking? Certainly he needed to diminish quantities of alcohol in his system, but, in fact, no, booze did not prevent him from staying hard. Perhaps it was his own odd self-conception at work now that retirement was no longer a hazy fancy, but an upcoming reality. Do I mean that he wasn't happy at work any longer? Perhaps. But he was, after all, almost ten years older than Frances.

Yes, miracles continued.

And the women grieving.

And the unflappable birds.

by Alan Bern



Couple Looking Away
Nick Miles

Late Winter Sunday Reflection

Three houses down
on a morning with snow
I notice while out walking
a kangaroo in the vacant block
where they tore down the last
of the fishing shacks
to build three huddled units

She stands at full height to query
as I take a phone shot to prove
my presence in her moment

And how I wish to hold her
paw in hand with trust
back down the road to the Reserve
close the gate on this suburb
watch her hop and turn a farewell
float the gravity of leap

Wave a palm so close to mine
We could be family

She knows the truth with humans
the hurling want to be
waits for me to pass
delves deep into the long jump
better to leave that flowing symmetry
of tempting feed and boundary

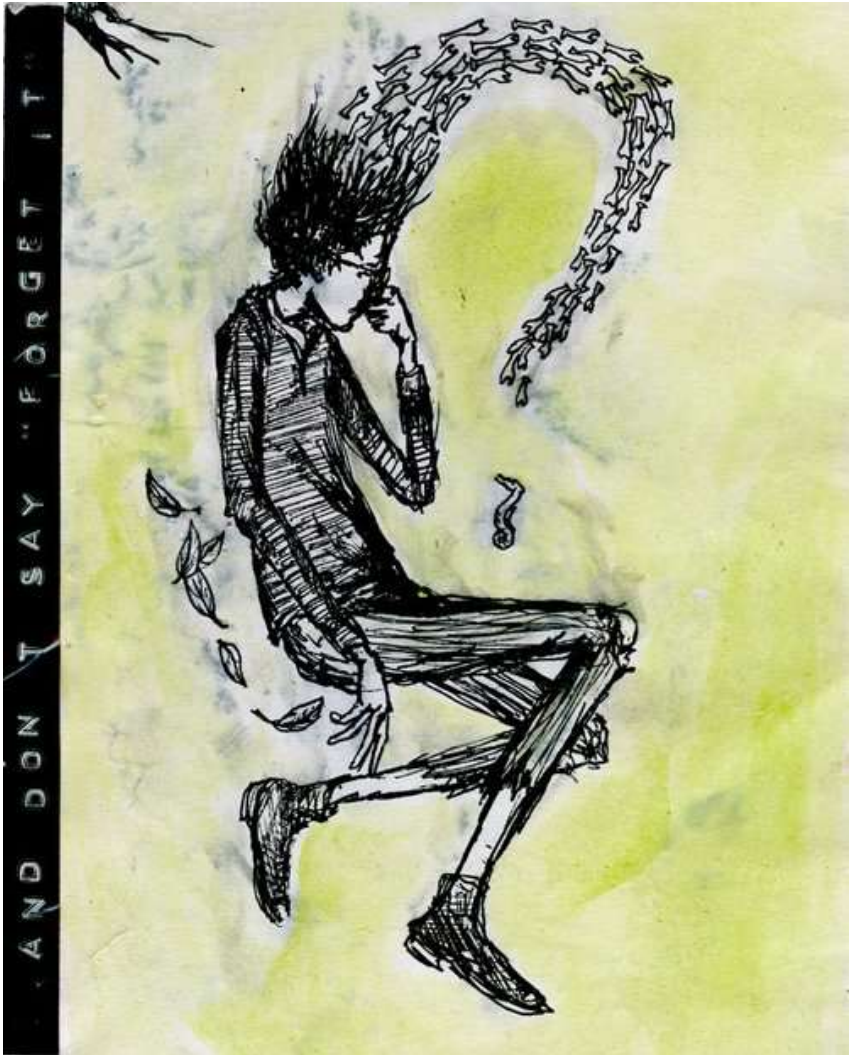
One Easter at another place
marsupial arms reached by the sliding door
hungrily taking hot cross buns
from my children giggling giddy

On entering our lounge I stop to ponder
Can we ever be sure we've not met before?

James Walton



Jesus at MacDonalds with An AK47
Nick Miles



Sinking Holding Nose
Nick Miles

TOCK

Isabel's fingernails are permanently grimy, and no amount of scrubbing can clean them. Nothing thrills Is more than digging bones in Zimbabwe, Brazil and South Africa, chiseling the hardened dirt off the bones of melanorosauruses and other dinosaurs, one speck at a time. For a woman who's spent half her life dusting ancient history to reveal its secrets, when it comes to dusting the furniture, she's allergic to picking up a dust rag. She'd rather study the partially reconstructed skeletons that are displayed in every room in our house, which doubles as a Natural History museum.

Is is my life, my love - unattainable, I assumed, when I first noticed how kind and lovely she looked on her dating site photo: large round eyes, enticing lips, glowing bronze skin, skillfully designed goddess braids. She is also the recipient of several university degrees. Thankfully I was wrong about being in the wrong league. We exchanged resumes and chatted online for three days. Since I'm a Time Management Consultant and she has her PhD. in archaeology, I was certain we'd be a terrible match. The evening we first met for coffee, I was early and she was late by twenty-six minutes, thirteen seconds. I felt like a fraud listening to her regale me with her archaeology adventures. Her plan to strip centuries of soil and sand off some old bones from her next dig didn't sound nearly as much fun as my plan to peel off her skintight jeans.

As it turned out, we *are* a terrible, but loving, match.

Is is consumed by the past, and she became an indifferent mother as soon as our children, Jules and Jason, were old enough to go to high school. She preferred them when they were babies, and complained that they were growing too fast, as if she wanted to freeze them in time like the third century hip of a child that she'd recently discovered in Guatemala.

Sometimes Is disappeared exactly at the time she was supposed to pick the kids up at school. Jules and Jason both

called me, complaining they'd miss their soccer game because their mom never showed up. But I always knew where Is was. She liked walking backwards on the railroad tracks to ponder some puzzling skeleton whose bones didn't quite fit together. She believed she could walk right into the past to find the answer. She would return home after I'd already set four plates of spaghetti and meatballs and a Greek salad on the table.

Is felt no compunction leaving me behind every few months to care for the kids when she went on a dig overseas. I already worked at home, so cleaning the house and going to parent teacher meetings was no big deal.

Is says my time management career has resulted in a serious addiction. If it were up to her, she'd dynamite all the clocks, watches, and cell phones, turn off the sun and moon, stop the tides and darken the stars so I wouldn't be so obsessed with time. It's true. I record everything: how long it takes for her to get out of bed; how many minutes for the kids to put their snowsuits on; how many seconds it takes for her to have an orgasm. Or two.

Although it pays well, I'm frustrated by my career. My mission is to offer solutions to managers who are unfocused, inefficient procrastinators – in short, idiots. Actually I prefer writing my column 'Timely' for the National Post, in spite of the meager pay. In fact, I'm working on an article right now:

Dancing Honey Bees Create Clocks

By dancing in a clock-like circle, a honeybee can alert other bees about which direction to fly in to find food. The honeybee's dance explains to the other bees that 12 o'clock is the 'sun.'

If the honeybee wants to explain to the other bees that they should fly straight towards the sun to find food, it dances on a straight line from 6 to 12 o'clock.

If the bee dances in a straight line from 8 to 2 o'clock, it's indicating to the other bees that they should fly just to the right

of the sun.

If the bee travels the opposite way, from 2 to 8 o'clock, it's telling the other bees to fly away from the sun to find food at that specific angle.

If-

The phone rings. I pick it up. Time stops.

This man who says he's my husband sits down on the bed and tries to clean my fingernails, but his noisy children jump up and down on the bed and argue about who scored the most at the soccer game. The creep asks me questions all day long – What year is it? What month? Where do you live? What do you do? Where do you work? What are your childrens' names? How old are they? He swears that we're married and that I am the mother of his children. There are bones everywhere in his house – children's bones, adult bones, mammal bones, dinosaur bones, crocodile bones, even insect exoskeletons. Chilling. I'm certain this stranger is a murderer and I'm his next victim. To keep me occupied, he encourages me to make sculptures, and gives me crazy-glue to connect the creepy bones. He admires my artwork even when it's a skull with a femur sticking out of it.

I have *got* to escape. He's gone downstairs so I race out the back door in my pyjamas, but I can't run in a straight line so much as in half-circles, and I try to catch up with a floaty that's bouncing up and down in the middle of the road. It's dusk and a car swerves to avoid me but I capture the thing by its string and it makes me feel more anchored.

The man keeping me prisoner likes to tell me stories. Like when he told me this fairy tale of a woman who was taking a break from digging bones in Germany, and visited a famous cathedral in Hamburg. She stopped to view the clock tower. Admiring the gorgeous architecture, she stood right under the clock to take a good picture. The minute hand that weighed forty-four pounds fell from a hundred-and-thirty feet and struck

her in the head. The man telling me this seems to think it's a depressing story, and then blabbers on about 'The Future When We Will be Happy Again.' I ask him how something that hasn't happened yet can even exist? He is stunned by my question. Speechless.

My pyjama bottoms are falling down and I tug them up. A car beeps at me and the driver (he looks like the same man who's keeping me prisoner) drives next to me at walking speed. He rolls the window down and begs me to get into the car. Oh no no no. As if to rescue me, a tree reaches out its piney arms and invites me to enter the park. I sit down on a tire swing hanging from an ancient oak tree. Swinging high higher highest makes me dizzy. I lean all the way back, overwhelmed by the soothing color in the sky, although my mind can't cough up the word that describes *which* color.

The driver in the honking car parks it and hovers behind me, pushing me on the swing like a child. Blue, he says. Cornflower blue.

I jump off the swing, land on my knees and run in half-circles back to the road. A dog is tied up outside a store. It's peering through the window and looking mournful, so I let the sad dog off the leash. The man is back in the car now, following me again. A crowd of people has gathered. They're watching me, and the person in the car, shaking their heads. I want them to be happy so I take off my pyjamas and do a little salsa dance. The man leaps out of the car and throws his jacket over me. He tries to force me to get in the car but the crowd surges towards him. He abandons the car and the three of us - me, him and my playful shadow that darts in front of me left right left right - walk for a long time before approaching some parallel lines behind a flimsy gate. I pop under the gate and follow the straight line on the left, because it keeps me from walking in drunken circles.

The ridiculous man, who doesn't look as half as intimidating outside as he did in the house, is now in front of me.

He looks back and beyond me as if expecting someone else to show up. I notice he's carrying a plastic bag and hope there's food in it so we can have a picnic. I plop down in the middle of the two straight lines. He tries to drag me away but I resist and the bag falls out of his hands and bread and cheese tumble out, making him angry. I pick up the cheese and take a big bite out of it. One of my teeth cracks on a pebble embedded in the cheese, and I spit it out.

It's very dark now. So peaceful. Tears run down the man's face, and I cheer him up by singing the only song I know – *Time Warp*. He asks me if it's from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. I don't understand what he means. The bejeweled sky takes my breath away and I lie on my back so I can count every star. He lies down next to me and I can feel the warmth of him and there's a lovely rumbling sound gently vibrating my body. The earth is purring! The man leaps up, looks to the south, cocks his head and listens. He tries to yank me away from the middle of the straight lines and I fight him off by punching him in the stomach, but he doesn't fight back. I lie down again. The rumbling approaches thunderously, unlike the blinding stars that move closer together silently, and the man's knees crumple and he lies down on top of me and loud warning bells ring and he grips me so tight I can hardly breathe and he whispers 'Is my love, if it hasn't happened yet it doesn't exist.'

I think I've heard those words before but I can't be sure.
Death lies upon me.

Debbie Fox



River Walk 1
Allen Itz

Jackfish Lake 1981

a wounded sunrise struggles through an exhalation of fog
stratified over the quiet waters
you were a ripening promise inside your mother

since then I have doubled my days
and maybe I know now what really marked you as a child

I remember a quick little pier
that seemed so welcoming near the red cabin

you now wear the empty places within
and try to keep them holy even if that sometimes fails

I now dance awkwardly with the physical wreckage that marks the old
yet sometimes I am reborn in the purified memory of that boreal
dwelling
where each season can heal and each season can kill

someday you may arise and go there
and find me sleeping silent as the breath of morning

you must take the breath then
and let it bring you some small measure of peace

Gary Beaumier



River Walk 2
Allen Itz

you who presume to know me

did not know i watched a hermit crab keeping company with a
starfish this morning in a tide pool

or that i peed in a wooded area beyond the salt grass

that i followed the grey silhouette of a freighter northbound and
making heavy weather

that i licked my lips to taste the brine air

that i imagined myself the sole dweller
of a tiny island where i had a stout dory
to row to the coastal village in my yellow slicker
my arthritic hands gripping the oars

you will never know that i talk to the gulls
and they answered me back

or that i nearly wept when i saw a whale breach

or that i watched the rise of the sun that electrified the edges of
clouds

that i picked wood violets to lay next to a fallen tern just beyond
the reach of the surf

will they find me some winter's day
frozen and gone and
all my wanderings ceased
the last of my dreams
dreaming a passage back home to you

Gary Beaumier



Obscure Reveal #2
Christopher Paul Brown

Sunrise Suite for Cello and Piano

The music plays in my head as the bow draws a long note punctuated by the piano keys.

There is little chance of survival now.

The sun emerges indifferently
to preside over the poisoned clouds
rising up like tall buttes.

Unholy rivers of traffic send their
messages into the sky.
You were not shed of man soon enough.

I ask myself "do the birds know:
the egrets, the heron, the gulls that choke the sky
the gulls who will thin out when the silvery fish are gone?"

Does this baby know
held by his father
watching the terrible beauty of this dawn?

And somewhere in all of this
didn't we know it would come,
this slow motion apocalypse?
How can we not have seen all these fires
burning
and do nothing
except to console ourselves
by buying
eco friendly laundry soap
and saying "yes I talk the talk?"

We bequeath you now to the rats and roaches
who may very well be better stewards.

And to whom do i say
I am sorry?

Gary Beaumier



River Walk 3
Allen Itz

Eternity

It was a day with no beginning, no ending. Interminable hours in the lab, an incessant evening crunching data. At 2 AM, Marissa tumbled into insomnia, her brain still juiced. Her beagle, Lucy, snuggled beside her with a delicate whimpering. Stroking Lucy's flank and belly, Marissa repeated her secret word to calm her hyperactive mind. Briefly, she sensed sleep coming, but a violent sneeze from Lucy re-awoke her.

More violent than a lightening flash, an idea disturbed the bleak, black night. A vaccine against death. For nearly two decades, Marissa had been researching the ravages of aging, possible cures for diseases that hobble the mind and send one into an ugly, angry version of second childhood. But, she suddenly realized, she hadn't been audacious enough. Science had advanced to the point where death itself could be conquered.

Details of how such a vaccine could be produced came to her as if in a waking dream, a universal vaccine to heighten the sensitivity of red corpuscles, white blood cells, the heart, kidney, liver, the very brain itself, the delicate, sinuous nervous system. Humans had unlocked the code of life, could play with it, alter it, halt the machinery of degeneration.

Yes, it must be theoretically possible, using the latest genetics, the clean, obscene power of CRISPR technology. A simple shot or two, perhaps an occasional booster, would end humanity's greatest terror.

Brilliant! She would be immortal in the annals of science! But wait—she would be immortal in actuality, too, once she was inoculated by her own vaccine. Inoculated from death? What a beautiful phrase?

Thoughts seethed through the long night. What would it be like to be immortal? With a shock, she realized, she was now in a position to find out. She, herself, would not die! A whole planet of people never aging, never decaying.

Of course, that would make the issue of childbirth . . . problematic? If the planet's population were to go ever up, what would that mean for the future? How would the world's bounteous, but not unlimited, resources provide for our ever-growing species? Marissa had, in recent years, been worrying ever more about climate change, species extinction, chemicals permeating our air and water. We are a rapacious species. Did we deserve this gift that no other creature possessed, immortality?

There was one being, simple and wonderful, who did deserve eternal life. Lucy, her sweet, lovely Lucy. When her last dog had died, Marissa was so grief-stricken she almost didn't get another, but oh how lonely her nights would be without Lucy. Had she so given herself to her life as a scientist, she wondered, as to sacrifice marriage. Perhaps Lucy could be her companion forever.

Of course, that wouldn't happen. Nobody would endorse precious vaccines for dogs and cats when there were billions of humans waiting desperately for eternal life. Except, perhaps, for the beloved dogs and cats of billionaires. When you have enough money, an exception can always be found. People are such an unfair species, so selfish.

Eternal life. What would one think of over the centuries? The millennia? Would one simply turn over the same thoughts again and again? An earworm, "Whoops, I Did It Again," that she knew was a bit tacky, had been plaguing Marissa for the last several weeks. What would it mean to think of that song for, say, a billion years? Whoops, I did it again and again and again, forever and ever.

Eternity couldn't mean eternity, could it? Surely something would come along, a meteor, perhaps, and end it all? And our own species was capable of destroying itself. Hadn't we invented nuclear bombs? A wonder we hadn't already blown ourselves up, along with much of the life on this planet, including many innocent and wonderful species that deserved to live far more than humanity. And would we really grow wiser as we aged? Marissa had noticed that, instead of becoming wiser, people would harden their positions, grow, in a way, more cynical, repeat the same mistakes over and over. Or, without neural degeneration, would people develop a tempered wisdom, a deeper knowledge of self and ability to guide the young, as the elderly are supposed to? Biology was mysterious, absurdly complex, yet solvable. People were a problem without a solution.

Had Marissa been snoozing when light crept through the blinds? Did she really want to survive another endless day? Perhaps she would call in sick? She was killing herself, killing herself. Her work had seemed so vital, worth the male colleagues who leapfrogged her. Her old lab partner, Ralph Bunchstein, even "borrowed" her idea for a theoretical pathway to reducing Alzheimers, got important publications out of it. The fat, pathetic toad. Perhaps she should sympathize with him, that he talked with a lisp, walked with a limp, but she despised him. He was now at Harvard, while she was stuck as an Associate

Professor at a not quite first-tier school (but still a Research One institution). She was smarter, worked harder, than her colleagues, but where was her reward? People did not deserve immortal life. Marissa would get her revenge, leave our species to grow old, face our end, as we deserved. She would not reveal the road map to a vaccine for death. Its secret would die with her.

Whoops, I Did It Again—would that song never stop plaguing her? Was this what geniuses thought? Whoops, I Did It Again, I created eternal life. Britney Spears, another woman whose talent was stolen and exploited by a man.

Unusually, Lucy had crept away in the night. Did she no longer love Marissa? Was the poor dog ill? Shocked at her aloneness, Marissa sat bolt upright to face a new day.

Marissa would get her revenge. Now was her chance at greatness, proof she was the most brilliant of the brilliant. She would work harder than ever, work herself to death, to eternal life, just to prove she was more brilliant than her male colleagues, exponentially more brilliant than Bunchstein. He would be forgotten. Marissa's name would shimmer in the celestial sphere of the gods alongside Einstein and Newton. Damn the consequences.

She arose to her first day as a God, her first day of eternity.

Ethan Goffman



River Walk 4
Allen Itz

Birdie Hop

“Birdie Hop” was my first
sentence, and at age 26
I still yearn to fly.

I stretch to my fullest wingspan
visualizing while the wind ruffles
my black t-shirt like little feathers.

My eyes are closed so I see black—
wearing black, and seeing black
suddenly I embody a crow.

I cannot go any faster while trying
to escape this. I move my wings,
but my feet are stuck to the pavement.

An endeavor futile.
A naive wish. A wish to fly,
but that cannot stop me from crying.

If I could flap my wings, they’d buckle
under the weight of sorrow, buckle under
the weight of the world, and the weight of the past.

Now the present moment is a Picasso painting:
a distorted person, maybe couldn’t even classify
as a person, perhaps a demon.

Weird shapes bending reality, but I can still
see the humanity—a fractured mosaic of this life,
and a fractured wing.

Sophia Falco



Obscure Reveal #1
Christopher Paul Brown

Claws

Claw marks in the sand towards
the rainbow-colored pond,
timidly the tortoise tries to
dip his feet in the orange,
but that means he must pass
the color red which he despises.

Red reminiscent of blood—that
diagonal scar a reminder of that
twig jutting out from the brambles
cutting the side of his abdomen
though he'd prefer if he was the one
with autonomy who did it himself.

A twisted move it would have
been like the ivy suffocating
the dandelion flower. Yellow like
the sun now fading to gray soon
to turn to dust like the dust
that covered up his claw marks.

He couldn't get past red.
He couldn't get to the blue
where he wanted to wallow
in his sorrows, and submerge in
them only to pop back up
like how his claws pop the little
bubbles the sand makes sometimes.

Somewhere past the rainbow-colored
pond lies the unknown. Over the rainbow.
Not clear-cut. He already feels lost in his mind.
His brain unlike mush. His brain unlike mud.

However, like his brain caught fire,

and how to extinguish those flames
is unknown even when water
engulfs his body.

Mind body separate.

There is no twine to stitch them
back together. Togetherness is as lost
as that fractured leaf that drifted
out of sight. That drifted past his
naked eye into a land far far away.

He is here, but the time is not now—
it's something else. Elsewhere he is.
Not on this island.

In a pond surrounded by land then
surrounded by more water,
and it's starting to rain.

The concept of an umbrella
is inept yet the last traveler
to this island left one behind.

This became his shelter, but soon
the wind swept it away, and turned it
inside out unlike how he wears
his heart on his sleeve.

Sophia Falco



Dancers
Chris McCulloch

My Being

I

It wasn't a straw that broke me,
a tiny straw that the wind could
blow as if a blowing a goodnight kiss.
Fragile. You can only be strong for
so long. Long. It's been too long of
compressed suffering.

II

Fists clenched while trying
to fall asleep, anger bellows
within my being beaconing me.
I'm stuck in bed, and
I'm stuck in the room,
thus trapped as trains pass by
startling me at midnight
yet my eyes are wide open as if
the sunlight is pouring in
through the blinds.

III

Unlike soap bubbles that easily pop,
I tried to keep it together, and
tried, then cried.

IV

Maybe the silent treatment is best.
Silence. This silence does not drift
like the cinnamon scent from
her apple pie, no it reeks of vomit.

V

Silence heavy as stone. I can't skip
that stone because it's just too heavy.

Subsequently I threw that stone
at a tree, and it bled sap. I then
scratched myself, and my back bled.
What's worse—the tree's suffering or mine?

Sophia Falco



River Walk 5
Allen Itz

The Big Gas, 1973

It was a two-storey terrace. A small front square of garden, a struggling rosemary, standard rose, and a bay tree in a pot. Victorian tiles on a rectangle of porch. The biggest room upstairs, once a lounge, faced the street, with windows to step through onto a veranda. An older guy lived in that one, he worked as a waiter in a flash restaurant in the city, and could afford the extra rent. The rest of us were students.

A hundred metres south the Old Colonists home, all quaint English style cottages, spread over prime real estate. A special development for artists, actors, and writers in retirement, it sat out of era, a beautiful parody of a home which never existed. A performance space where theatre met the backdrop of inner suburbs carved in working class days.

We had a concrete floored back courtyard, a lychee tree, a ramshackle gum, a clothesline blown in during a summer northerly. An overgrown herb patch ended at the triangle where the fences met. Walking through the lean-to kitchen the sun seemed to always blaze out there, as if a kite had landed and stuck, bringing down a patch of sky with it.

There were seven fireplaces, none worked. Each of us had an electric heater in our room, but the gas oven was where we mostly gathered. We cooked on the top jets and kept the oven door open, taking turns to place our feet in it. Half of us were purists, our bodies a temple, the others smoked dope, drank cask wine, and sometimes 40 litre bottling tubs, delivered by the train.

Things changed when Lorraine died.

She misjudged a rip down the west coast surfing with Bruce. They shared the first room from the hallway, on the left. Her parents were off the grid somewhere up on the Central Highlands. Lorrie told us how she would be punished with an old blackberry cane, a quick whip over the back. If she didn't work hard enough, or asked questions considered silly. She showed us the scars one day. We filled her bowl up again. Bruce didn't want to go back into that room, and went to another house.

Geoff came about the vacancy. He did amateur ballet, jazz dancing. He was tall, with a thick head of blonde frizzy hair, wore loose-fitting pull-on trousers, had an angular, elegant way of moving. His clothes didn't fit him, but he was like a statue of David, dressed as a clown, in a way that wasn't noticeable until after several viewings. He was a charisma of fairy floss, taken human form.

He chatted with Cherylle and Rose, and they agreed he could move in. We didn't think much of it, we needed the rent money, and he said he could cook. The waiter nodded assent in passing on the stairs, and Arthur and Fay thought he seemed a decent guy. He arrived with a suit case of books, a raffles settee, two helpful well-spoken parents, a bulging Edwardian wardrobe, and a full-length Irish tweed overcoat. He was doing a doctorate in Literature.

After moving in he didn't wear clothes very often. He was mostly naked, believing his skin needed to breathe to realise its potential as he put it, and dress was a modernist convention of capitalism, part of the huge trick that was the lure of the system. Readjusting the body was a key to overcoming the neo liberal constrictions.

He gave us a detailed lesson on cutting the whole loaf from the Yin to the Yang, ensuring the energy flow passed from the grains

to our bodies. He knew a lot about cures, and would consume his own sperm as a treatment for the common cold. He told each of us individually of his bi/non/a/trans sexuality, and how he had felt something move between us.

His surname was Love, and we called him Doctor Lurve.

I met Melanie in the kitchen at three in the afternoon when I returned from my Law lectures. Geoff was having a cup of tea, suppressing a shake of goose bumps. She had a London accent, flowing hair as rich as a Persian carpet, and finger and toe nails painted different colours, every one of them. They met at the tram stop in Queen's Parade, and had been in Geoff's room for the two days since.

Unusually, Melanie was taking a ship back to England, later that night. Melbourne's winter was too cold for her, and she had to get back to her girlfriend in Oxford before the Summer ended there. While I was getting toast and spreading the butter the incorrect way, Geoff explained that he was trying to remedy Melanie of her lesbianism, which Melanie found hilarious. I couldn't tell if Geoff was joking or not, given sex and gender were irrelevant to him. There was an unease about him, and he was wearing socks.

I left them to it and went to sit on the bench seat in the street in the late afternoon sun. William joined me there, as he sometimes did, on his walk from the old people's village. He was a war correspondent for the ABC and the BBC, had seen the liberation of the death camps, and later covered Korea, the Berlin Wall, and the early years in Vietnam. We used our proper names, we hated

the short versions, especially when there was a ‘y’ tacked on the end.

“Your new housemate is an interesting soul, I found him shivering here the other day, let him sit on my jacket.” I had the feeling William was still investigating, watching for specimens to examine in a world-weary way, not judging, observing. “I hope you put it down the right way, not in a way that would conflict with the current between him and nature.” He was on the move, “I’ve seen it all before, we’re all just electricity, an occasional static interruption.”

I ran to the milk bar around the corner to ring for an ambulance.

Geoff was cold, very cold. I put a blanket on him before they arrived. I didn’t know about pulse, CPR, any of those things. I rubbed his arms as hard and as furiously fast as I could. Turned the gas off, relit the oven, tried to place him more comfortably, but he was a big guy and the best I could do was sort of flop him in the front of it. I opened the door to clear the air.

“There isn’t a window,” I kept saying to the paramedics as they rolled him down and over. They asked me about drugs, alcohol, anything else that might have affected him. I didn’t know, I knew he smoked, but that was all I knew. The very loud contradiction in that was clanging on my forehead. And, “Melanie went back to England.”

His parents came to collect his things. It was one of those August days when Winter won’t let go, the clouds all clotted and bolstered up, a sky conceived by a shammy, wiped in every direction. “He’s doing OK,” his father thanked me as I dawdled patiently speechless. “He thought you might like his coat; we

can't thank you enough." They were both as tall as basketballers, moved the same way as their son.

I sat in herringbone with William. "You could get a cap to go with it, although you'd look a bit like a matchstick, the last one left in the box." The road was slick with passing drizzle, the bus went past leaving the pushpushpush of its opening and closing on the air. You could see the sun mopping the Dandenongs.

I finally asked him.

"I was too young, although I lied. At the start you had to be six feet and two inches to be accepted. By 1916 or so, they dropped the height to five feet and four inches, then took away the limit altogether. War's a great leveller. I was born before Federation, a real colonial. Rode a horse to school. There was a lot of stained glass when I was growing up."

He worked as a cadet in a big Melbourne newspaper, and left for London in 1919.

"Yeah, I wanted to be a writer, who didn't? I sent back reports from Istanbul on the breakup of the Ottomans by the winners. Saw the first war grave memorials being established, wanted to believe there was a better world around the corner. I wrote it that way too, I was stupid. Made my way across Europe filing stories, it was a good living, very exotic for the all the folks at home, reminiscences for the returnees, a good dozen years' worth. Of course, I was an oddity, a bit of an uncaged marvel, a true wild descendant of the convict transportees. They loved me, they mocked me, I played their game, I was an international at the heart of the Empire.

I fell in love with a woman who had amethyst eyes out of blue ice, that colour on the side of emperor gums which cannot be described. She'd escaped the Armenian Genocide and was working in Paris. She looked straight at me serving me coffee, and that was that."

The rain got heavier, buses and cars passed, joggers waved at us, pedestrians stalled and got going again. The day seemed to stutter.

In October I opened the door to a woman in a broad scarf, enough to go over her head, around her shoulders, and fall down over a hat box she carried. She paused long enough to say, in a precise tone "William wanted you to have this". She did not come in from the porch, and I did not need to be told. 'Galleries Lafayette 1925' and a faded maker's name ran around the circular lid, and inside were envelopes of varying sizes and ages. The copper plate headings on each changed from pencil to ink to biro and to thin texta. They were arranged chronologically and laid out a life story in chapters of years and events in a narration of despatches, photographs, and notes. William had told me much of this, but the envelope which drew me bore the word 'Lusine'.

I was spread out over two small rooms at the top of the last staircase. From the window, in the bedroom, the lanes took crazy angles bending around back entrances, tracking between workers' houses. Beyond them the city's skyline wavered in late Spring warmth. Jacarandas broke open managneseblueviolet, a full moon hung radiant teasing the falling shades. From the kitchen below, talk of Blue Poles, Patrick White, and the Sydney Opera House opening floated, a translucence of smoke rings of turtles rising...

They have cheese, ham, bread, a small amount of wine. Place de Vosges tilts towards the corner houses. "On the second floor, there, see the smaller windows, Hugo wrote most of *Les Misérables*, looking out to here, maybe." She doubts this. "He would have been working and not noticed." In their three rooms in the Marais, lives are compressed within each other's belongings. They were immediately comfortable with the little and the lot of this. Her husband had been killed before the French rescue, and while Apostolic, she did not practise. He believed in horses. "I marvel you had a horse which you did not have to eat."

They did not speak of children. They knew it to be impractical as they moved through Prague, Vienna, and into Berlin. He cabled reports to news services in Britain and in the States. Sitting in Grober Tiergarten, Lusine turned back from watching a group of uniformed youth dally then run. "It's time to leave." William had never been broken. He lacked the shadow sight of those who had experienced flight. At first, he misunderstood but saw the tidal withdrawal of content from her eyes; as events surface to travel in intuition. The BBC took them back to London.

They survived behind blacked out windows, and ration card run downs. She worked at anything required – ambulance, clearing, translating, volunteering tea to neighbourhood wardens. He knew from the beginning that his decade 'advantage' was lost years. After the final all clear, as he wrote of street celebrations and the hope of sugar, Lusine eased beside him, her head and arms across his lap, "Tell them William of this Grand Illusion." Bands were playing, a streaky sun called out streets; what was left of the world found time to sigh.

They spent more time separated but not apart. He sent details back from Nuremberg, different to his press pieces, his study of the world within their world. "Do they really think no one will replace the hanged?" They stayed in London while he covered

Korea, and Checkpoint Charlie. Her business was growing, French, German, Russian, even the occasional Hayeren needed transcription. They laughed over his ‘treasonous’ reports in various outlets about intervention in Vietnam and the ‘progress’ of the war. Suddenly, he was old. The earth no longer folded out.

“Jesus, where have you been?” Laughter, cooking smells, a late western afternoon light, all over the creases of hard sleep written on my face. I take a glass of cask red. We’re celebrating; the voting age is coming down next year, we were already out of the war, conscription had ceased ten months ago, and university fees were being abolished. “There goes your scholarship comrade tosser!” We haven’t been like this since Lorrie and Geoff, and I’m enjoying this merge of house into entity. I’m noticing the end of Spring, the way people come out, like the pollination of being is purposed to scratch out the veneer of Winter, get garden dirty with each other before Summer. Arthur and Fay have reconciled, again, Cherylle and Rose are still fighting over Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and revolutionary nuance in the works of...even mystery guy from the big room is here smiling.

“Are you taking up Brightman’s offer to go to Normandy with his study group, he’s still going on about you pointing out Becket’s time as Papal Legate as part of his resistance to Henry you know,” Fay is reaching over, taking my arm to get my attention. I’m out of focus, the wok is steaming, I’m trying to listen to everyone. ‘No, I’ve never travelled, I’m going home for the hay.’ She gives my shoulder a shove, “Fuck you’re a hard case, what’s the matter with you?”

Early morning, December. The day is warm milk, the air so still it curdles, conversation on the bus spills as it stops and goes.

Trams come down the hill clacking along the Parade heading to the city, the train at the ornate Settler's Station picks up no one and heads off, two hours away my father has waited out the dew, ready to cut the first 20 acres. I sit here in my girlfriend's sister's jumper, a fine wool castaway, cerulean, 'blue and green should never be seen without a colour in between'.

Clouds are washed out, each moment in portrait, japanned at the edges, proves itself. Later I will drive home, knowing the paddocks bleach to white from cutting, then cold lime with the last rain. Before this, as the ocean calls in beneath big hill, we will hurry to cart the bales for next season, over and over, into the sheds, watching our neighbours do the far mountain top fields, in the certainty the southerly will bring in the change.

A page whispers from my room, the way words surge and dart to a resting place.

"My dearest William, it is not that we do not have enough time, it is just that we do not have enough lives, Lusine."

by James Walton

(The Big Gas, 1973 was shortlisted and Commended for the Williamstown Literary Prize Biographical Prose, June 2021.)



Colored Elephants Desert 1
Keith Edwards

The High Rocks

This feels like that:
A sweatiness of palms,
my stomach lurching
legs all aquiver
as brain tells body
“Run and jump!”
It's not a big gap,
only a long drop down
if I miss.
Everyone else says jump.
I watched many others
make it look easy.
So why do the shadows
below us
whisper my name
telling me I will fall?
These high rocks
have splintered bones
carved in them,
a fall from grace
daubed over them
in blood rust.

Linnet Phoenix

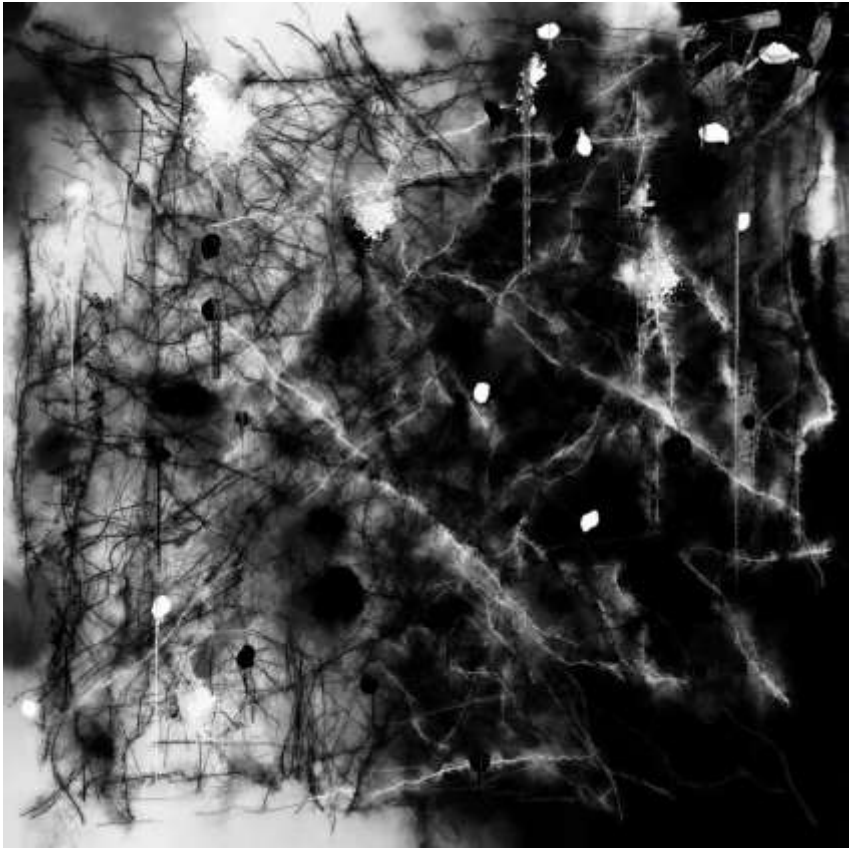


NnoizZthrashHfff7cqkttt8all
by xyckshyt

Sisters

When I saw you
self-set
ablaze,
your clothes
doused
with a petrol
hypocrisy,
that day
you told me
not to play with matches.

Linnet Phoenix



NnoizZthrashHSMKYUSKKMMMNNUUKY
by xyckshyt

Gossip

Now all the glass panes
are broken,
now your jagged edges
reflect
the new morning sun.
Now all the smooth
pebble stones
lie outside on the lawn
of introspection,
and your tender stems
are frost bitten.
Now you feel
the ghost of spring
as your hand
reaches to try and hold,
to control this,
but your fingers
find nothing solid.

Linnet Phoenix



NnoizZthrashHt2o4x72y1
by xyckshyt

In Reply

When my mind
snapped
in an open fracture

With the white
bone
of a panic attack

Where my anxiety
bled out
on our carpet

Which you said
was selfish
because it wasn't yours

Linnet Phoenix



The Marauder
Keith Edwards

Blunderbuss/It's Alright Ma

blunderbuss spinning the platter again, i didn't put it there, you found it at dimple near fifteenth street, the day before mother's day, your first and last, we'd just thrown down chilaquiles at the tower café, javier brought them *picosos* and invited us to his show, he wanted you not me, i didn't care, he was gorgeous and love is rarely fair, you left him for the w row like you were late for a date you'd made five minutes before, you held up jack's pale visage like you'd salvaged the very urn some ancient potter long become dust fashioned for keats to see, something twinkling from the wall arrested me, *kind of blue* fallen into my hands like a prayer answered, mono '59, baby, guaranteed high fidelity, like you never quite were, your girlish cry pierced my heart, as if it had been wrenched from my own, i looked up for affirmation, the price tag couldn't give it, low enough for a thompson twin, a bono solo album or some other botched back room abortion, that's when i noticed jared levitating above the counter, shape shifting in the harlequin air and calm like an angel, angels aren't hovering over your shoulder, they work in record stores, scattering pieces of heaven to lost souls like us, the sun's beatific beam kissing his head through the window, an aureole about him like he'd been cimabue's model for mother mary and the baby he had issued was miles in my arms, i had reached for something else, lord huron or the shouting matches, something you liked, but holy fucking jared mother of jesus and the modal mode, he'd abandoned this miracle for me to discover in that for shit crumbling store long since scraped, built on the ruins of fabled tower records like aztecs layering pyramids over the structures of dead toltec gods. you handed me jack, i cradled miles and a surprise for baby henry in your belly, bob's *bringing it all back home*, mother mary jared had slipped it in unknown to me, glowing so i couldn't miss it, i went back to return it, give it to L-, he whispered, *for henry*, or that's what i heard. the next morning i put his offering in your hands, you came undone crying like an orphan in the sun, i never knew what to say those times your love spoke like god's silence with your ideals of violence and i was just the bruise in your eyes. i mentioned jared's divinity, how angels were watching us ever since the heaven of your womb had reborn me, my head against your belly's button listening for the child's heartbeat rhythmic like mahalia like rosetta like clara like dorothy love singing in him and our singing too, meet me in the morning or if not for you, then your eyes' hard mirrors brought back a shudder strange that had passed through mother jared upon saying your name, a spirt infrared his green eyes were suddenly changed into others, i saw the baby's orbs devour them and drown in their own tears, brown like yours and rimming his out, eyes inside eyes, mirrors stacked against each revealing eternity, empty, dead and born to lose, like you'd taken over jared's body like you sometimes take over mine when i want to hear in a silent way and the needle don't find the groove. i lost track of my drifting, i didn't feel his wing stroking my hand or see him sneaking the second velvets record into my

stack this time or hear him say don't forget to pray for sister ray, or maybe i did hear because i went looking for my mainline, which was you, thinking i'll give her *home* and henry'll know his mom's alright and lick your belly button clean to hear him giggle inside you. happy mother's day, little mama, i put mother mj's gift right into your hands, when it fell at my feet i fell upon yours, praying don't break, an original mono such as the angels quit making, and though i cleaved to your calves like supplicants before deities hidden, you evaded my hold, your foot crushed my hand, though not the record, my broken fingers were grateful to have saved it for henry, from your shelves you pulled another copy, i already have it, you screamed, stereo was the only word i could make out, play blunderbuss, babe, that's my song wherever i am, i knew then your love requires multiple channels, beyond quadrophonic, a mono mic can't catch them all, one's always leaking, i pick them up whenever you disappear, a cacophony of silence amid half-erased tracks of others' cries. i put on jack and laid you down and touched you like i knew the three of us needed, the walls and ceiling of your apartment fell away, the day became the night we were conceiving him on big sur's shore, you a riptide carrying me up to the moon and beyond, another flash of light in the milky white way gazing down and i stirred within creation and you, the light touching me was henry watching himself being born between us, and it wasn't jack i was hearing but a voice that might have been jesus, or perhaps mine from another time, singing it's alright ma, i'm only bleeding, our sweet henry humming to break the california sky, star shards spilling into the shore's perfect white sands like rotten fruit from heaven's orchard shaken, your dirty carpet and the stain we were making, the blood sloshing our loins was the moon's terrible tide, i was begging you to let me stop or hide, you said harder, prick, dont fucking quit, just ride . . . and i did . . . into your fathomless eyes where i met jared dressed like sister ray on armageddon carrying our child back to heaven that godforsaken morn. you know some kinds of love, they can't ever be born.

Parrish



Spring is So Punk Rock
David Beaudouin

ALCHEMY

In ancient lore, when the mummy sleeps,
we dream. We pass black enamel bowls
one hand to another then to lips covered
with blue atmosphere that hugs
the earth's curvature like the outline
of a joyous cheekbone.

Ah, but when the mummy dreams!

When the mummy dreams, shadows suddenly
grow eyelids. The minutes literally breathe
& roll their shoulders to the rhythm
of imagination. We wrap imagination
in a green body cloth & this is how we
create weather, hurricanes, typhoons,
& sensuous breezes.

When a hand reaches through a mirror, notice
the bones of the wrist, how they resemble the hollow bones
of the gull that called to you when no one
else could see you in your dream.

May I suggest that such practice not be underestimated.

Also, beware of anemic claims that life on the other side of the mirror
is superstition embraced primarily by those
whose brows sweat gold droplets in the heat
of their own reflections. Such claims are offered
by those whose lips have never turned blue
from the kisses of flying goats!

The mummy, of course, is not afraid
of a flying goat. The mummy makes a point
of slipping into a café in Blacksburg or San Francisco
& sharing espresso with a mystic during a blinding hailstorm.
Some secrets of the universe shatter a round table darkened
by glistening jazz piano notes.

Now, let me tell you the truth. The one who put the sun into orbit initially was an alchemist. So, if you want to take this matter up with an alchemist, do so at your own risk. But if I were you, I'd watch my step!

Alan Britt



Dancers
Chris McCulloch

POEM ABOUT A SKINK

While some of us haven't given up . . .

That's right, you can spill your lazy lexicon
across the page, but some of us still enjoy
a linguistic tango slathered with papaya
around midnight while the TV ripples
its Venetian blinds across your forehead.

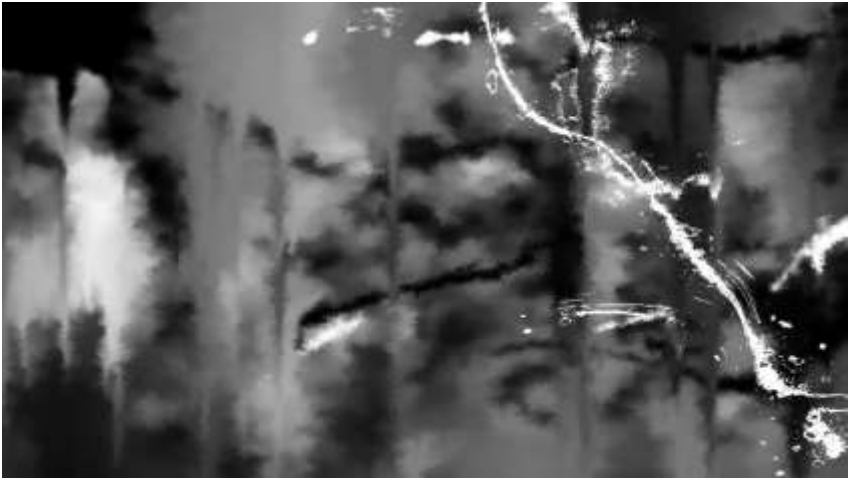
Cave icicles drip
like rottweiler teeth, clean, sparkling,
and sharp as chipped diamonds.

Still, this nonsense about some people
not knowing that they've given up;
as if anyone could know such a thing?

I don't believe it.

Perhaps together we'll explore an aorta fueling
the building blocks of life, and perhaps wandering
a loblolly pine forest we might even stumble
upon limestone warming the bronze stripes
of a fire skink with black caraway seeds for eyes.

Alan Britt



dRipzZ22ksmkywhtllslin

by xyckshyt

REVOLUTION 2

Grinding our teeth like fists
& speaking our minds every now
& again is pretty much all you
expect from us,
at the moment.

But give us a sec to mull things
over & you might notice a horse
of a different color nudging
your precious treasury box—
your box filled with local jurisdictions,
state, federal, global, & universal
aspirations desecrating the tenants
of democracy before democracy
decided the way things are damn
well going to be once we weed
the garden called human evolution.

Alan Britt



Obscure Reveal #3
Christopher Paul Brown

JELLY BOY

Hard as he tried, he couldn't stay clean, like her.

Clean or not, cancer ate her up, inside out. Billy watched as bulging pink leggings shrunk to loose pantyhose on skeleton thighs.

"Gotta . . . meeting," Vee said hoarsely, trying to get up.

"You won't make it," Billy said.

Wish you could, he thought.

A.A., N.A., she would hit both. That's how serious she was. Years back, she was as bad as Billy. That's how they'd met, in his friend Butch's cellar. The night Butch ODeD.

Damn, Billy thought, she's cute. While the shit cooked, he checked her out. Long hair, dimpled cheeks. Tiny titties he wouldn't mind sucking on. Maybe later, he thought.

After they smoked . . .

But they all smoked too much.

"Shit!" he said, when Butch's heart stopped. Vee tried CPR, but they were too fucked up to save Butch. Hand in hand, they ran upstairs.

Outside, hearts racing, they stopped a few blocks away. Above, the moon looked like a round coke rock. At least, to Billy.

"Poor Butch." Vee grabbed Billy's sweaty hand. "That could've been . . . us!"

They made out like they were scared to stop.

They'd been together since.

When she got clean, they drifted apart.

While she was out at meetings, Billy puffed on the stem, right in the window. When he didn't have stuff, he was a damp, shivering mess.

So he watched from the window.

Over the Chinese deli, their place was sleazy, roach-infested. Sometimes the fuckers crawled on the stem while he smoked, and he flicked them off. Their window faced Broadway. Some assholes ran into the deli for smokes, or Trojans, leaving their motors running.

That was his chance.

Like lightning, he shot downstairs and into the car. Took off, faster each time, hooking left toward the Turnpike. Then changed direction.

The chop shop was in Newark. For parts, Tiny Tim (who was six feet-six) paid in blow.

Fine with Billy.

Even with Vee not working anymore. Behind in rent, power shut off every other month, Billy still took crack over cash.

Sad, Vee's Recovery pals must've told her. Just one drug away . . .

. . . from never being clean. Never, ever.

No food, either. Just three cans of SpaghettiOs in the roachy cabinet. Before the cancer ate up Vee's guts, the fridge was stocked. On top of it was every junk cake going: Ding Dongs, Snowballs. And, occasionally, Vee's favorite: fresh jelly donuts from the deli downstairs.

“Mmmmm . . .” Vee devoured the donuts. Face ghost-white with powdered sugar, jelly oozing like her mouth bled. Since kicking drugs, she craved sugar bad.

Their Chinese deli, Renko’s Bakery, every place that stocked donuts, Vee went, to feed this new addiction.

“Keeps me,” she told Billy, “from picking up. And . . .”

“Yeah, I know. From smoking.” Damn, he was itchy. Soon as she left, he’d cook the last of Tiny Tim’s stuff.

But that was when she *could* leave.

He couldn’t remember the last time she left, even for treatments.

In huge letters on her charity care report, “TERMINAL” was written. Her “free” chemo was cut off, like it was a luxury: a juicy steak instead of Ramen noodles. Or SpaghettiOs, Billy thought, bitterly. The roaches would outlive them both.

“S’okay,” Vee said hoarsely. “Treatments make me sick.”

Her cheeks used to be full, dimpled. Her broken nose had never healed from her scumbag ex, but her gap-toothed smile was beautiful. That night Butch Oded, years back, Billy remembered thinking that.

Now she was all big eyes that couldn’t focus. Cancer had torn through brain, throat, lungs, and more. For Billy’s sake, she wore the wig: feathery blonde waves like a country star from the 70s. Dolly Parton without the titties.

“Can’t eat,” Vee said. “I’ll . . . puke.”

Billy shook out painkillers for her. Maybe too many. If so . . . so what?

If he met her eyes, he’d bawl.

How, he wondered, could I live without her?

Even as a junkie. Deep down, his love was so strong, it terrified him. Made no sense. A shit boyfriend, who lived for crack, but there was nothing he wouldn't give her, nothing he wouldn't do, to save her.

Or, he thought, to prove his love.

Big deal, so he was hooked on crack!

If she could quit, he could, too. At least try.

The last car he stole, he nearly got caught. In the rear-view mirror was a cop who'd stopped for coffee.

"Maybe you should change jobs," Tiny Tim said, later.

Mr. Ng, the deli owner, was acting suspicious. Outside, looking up at the sky, like the car thief might jump from a plane.

Last night, Billy sat up till dawn, still trying not to cry. Watching as Vee mumbled in her sleep.

"But Mom," Vee said, when he got back from peeing. "Bill is clean . . . in his heart."

He sat down, heavily.

Vee's Mom was long dead. Was she joining her, soon?

"Know what I'm dying for?" she said, then. Billy looked around, wildly.

"A jelly donut!"

Fuck it!, he thought.

More than ever, he had to get high. Right now.

He raced into the kitchen, tore through, cabinets, drawers. He laughed. Any stuff he'd had was gone by now.

He would take it, from somebody.

In the dish drain was a knife.

Outside, the sky was pale pink. All had been quiet till now, but the rumble of a vehicle pulling up was music to his ears.

From the window he saw the driver leave his white truck for the deli.

Downstairs, Billy jumped into the truck before realizing the motor was off. No keys were in the ignition.

Something sweet, he smelled. Behind him were rows of cardboard boxes. Pastries, cookies. Donuts.

A bakery truck.

"I'm dying," Vee had said, "for a jelly donut."

Was she dreaming? Billy thought. Or . . . rallying? Right before, weren't dying people suddenly their old selves? Wanting sex? Pizza?

Jelly donuts?

Get out! he told himself. Before he got caught. Without keys, he couldn't drive off.

This time he was fucked.

Still, he crawled into the back of the truck, grabbing box after box of donuts. One of these, he thought, has to be jelly.

"Hey!" the driver yelled from the passenger side.

“Busted!” Billy said.

He jerked open the back door, fell into the street.

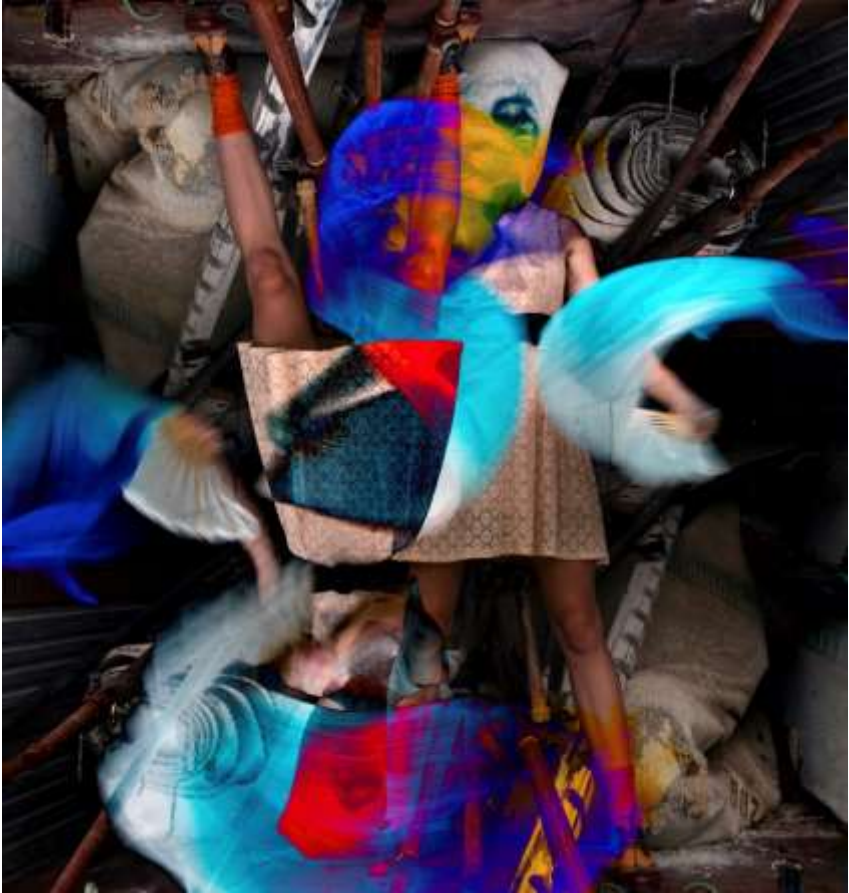
He was killed instantly. The car that struck him was doing eighty. Ran red lights till it hit a bus.

Clumps of Billy struck parked cars, even blocks away. Bits of brain and entrails mixed with crushed cake, so his blood seemed thick as jelly. Only the M.E. could tell the difference.

All over town, lights flashed. Cop cars, ambulances. The ghouls were everywhere. By rush hour, some had gone back to sleep.

Upstairs somewhere, a girl woke up starving.

Cindy Rosmus



Obscure Reveal #4
Christopher Paul Brown

Ann

Come to me, Ann,
put on your old brown shoes
button up your coat
close up the house
and come to me, Ann.

Suns can rise and set
Catullus said;
that same old wonderful line
comes back
one way or another,
time after time;
we know it to
be true and don't care,
don't pay it no mind,
share and share alike
that wretched wisdom.

The weather changes,
the king dies, the tyrant deposed,
revolution, fire, burning,
the comings and goings,
but we don't care,
not for a moment, not nohow,
for now is our only island,
our rock, our well of hope.

Come to me, Ann;
you may as well
leave it all behind,
let it all go and
take your chance;
we can love, can lose,
will lose it all
to the brigand time,
lose it all in the end,

our lives, too,
but for now
take my hand, my heart;
forget the final pitiful loss
of everything and let us
kiss the sacred crown
of flowering May,
make our vows,
and be here now.

Jack Harvey



Evolution
Serge Lecomte

But From That Nest

Was there a kangaroo
hopped and hopped
on the desert
tail down,
brown top-fur
burnt tan
under the sun
with his leg tendons
tensing
like ribs on a fan?
Was there the tiniest yellow
swallow swinging and dipping in
gables and winter far off,
far off to the north?
Did he nest, did he sit on
his own ancient crocket?

Were there men
building and breaking,
creaking and stamping?
Cities spread out
on slick black roads,
streaming metal
over innocent meadows;
concrete flows like manna,
sets up skyscrapers
transcending
desert nights and tunnels
deep as mines.

Hopping, flying,
kangaroo and swallow,
refugees from the pride
in human eyes,
sorrowful grasshoppers

in the barns of Jacob,
try and try
on shaky ground,
in murky skies,
to find the space
in these black days,
the place and time
where no one can get them.

Jack Harvey



No Landing Allowed
Serge Lecomte

Fancy Woman

Naked, the hatcheck girl
brings us
beyond haberdashery
to new coatrooms
of delight.

Against the boom boom
of thunder we
see the catacombs
of ancient sin
brought to perfection.

Theodora, you whore;
even the geese were
overpaid, pecking the
grain off your privates,
while generals watched.

That day the Hippodrome
was quiet:
the pantomime mocked
the glorious noisy chariots,
the noisy birds in cages.

Theodora, rant and rave:
your singing voice
nothing but your
stupid skin
shown off in broad daylight.

But the nightingale
is not much
on daylight;
the darker, the better
he sings.

Jack Harvey



Obscure Reveal #5
Christopher Paul Brown

my lips are blue corn
and honey is jealous

a wild wind rages
behind my ribs

great lovers wait
in the cellar of my stare

galaxies begin
at the tips of my fingers

they refuse
to identify themselves

i looked at her
and said

i love you
they told me

they were sure
there is no meaning

to any of this
i looked at her

and said
i love you

leaning on the back
of the couch

i tipped the world
and every world

in each
dimension knew

i looked
at her once
and said
i love you

Paul Koniecki



dRipzZdgtls1k129ks
by xyckshyt

help - it is coming
(for Haiti)

*"he rocks back and forth in a trance,
eyes rolling in his head"*
-- Barbara Ducharme

a boy stands small
beside a tunnel passersby
whisper in wolof or
french the tunnel's steps

ascend by turns light
ginger or fawn below
some call him a
god some call him

the devil the wall
behind them once read
francois duvalier eats dolly
madison pastries now maybe

doc eats paste the
boy is called mignon
i misunderstand and name
him minnow he appears

inside my brain in
november 2009 i didn't
speak latin then i
still don't wait for

me outside the rubble
and the blood i

will call for you
like a drop of

water in your ear
the first two sentences
i translated were i
cannot control where i

land and sorry about
your phone just then
i dropped it in
the sink minnow possessed

me to write this
poem in january the
last thing we said
together help - it is

coming in my visions
he was harder than
mahogany and softer than
onyx i think water

is time's most perfidious
disguise i think he
was our only god

Paul Koniecki

A confluence of words,

the silence of snow and unread lines,
graupel, city-slush, the way cold air
and water meet to make winter.

Gravity conscripts an object of subordinate mass,

life also lashes us to one,

like rivers in the sky falling to pieces
outstretched tongues, and urban
towers spinning in a fog of exhalation.

Paul Koniecki



Interpretive Dance
David Beaudouin

A Grief That Shatters Oceans

One day, we all woke up in black robes. All across the oceans. Every human. Connected in a way we'd never been visibly before.

We tried to take them off. They wouldn't budge. The robes were so horribly inconvenient for our modern lives—bulky, loose, tripping our feet, trapping us in heavy-weighted wrappings. We could not be free of them.

They made our prior concerns look ridiculous. Even the new arguments, too—each “expert” in invective, hair, and makeup couldn't argue their way out of the robes. They continued to drag themselves into their studios to blast as much blame outward about who brought the robes upon us. Even the top 10 people in the world couldn't pay or talent their way out of them.

Nothing anyone said or did could rid them of a robe. Everyone—finally—trapped. All in it together.

Except wearing a robe didn't keep anyone from dying. Illness still raged. So many of us still died. Everyone shuffled around in our individual robe prisons, which seemed to serve no purpose. People were drowning in the robes.

As the days passed, we talked less. Even when people got the chance, we touched each other less. The robes were between us. Even our skin turned a little grey in the sun, no matter the tone of it before. We faded. We shuttered. Eventually, we went about our days not only not speaking. We walked about with mouths closed. Breathed with mouths closed. We couldn't open our mouths, because if we did, we would scream and scream and never stop. People felt like life was nothing but an exquisite torture. And those were the lucky ones. They were the first to inhabit their robes.

The people who felt at home in their robes were the beginners. The ones who started to do things that seemed strange at first. Moving about gracefully, in the robes—how dare they? People who started talking again, but to say things no one wanted to hear. Things like, “My, this robe is actually quite comfortable,” or “There's really a lot of room in here if you think about it.”

The unlucky ones were the people who shunned the beginners. They were the enders. They continued trying to argue and party and block their way out of any self-reflection or awareness of feelings. It was easier to fight, to blame, to debate, than feel. Than feel how soft

the robes were, or feel how free their legs actually felt in the robes. Than feel who the robes could make them become.

Is there space in a prison beyond the walls?

But these enders were understandable. How could you feel special as a person if you couldn't feel separate? In time, everyone could see them for what they were. They were like that last bit of tail writhing around of an earthworm that's been cut. Going nowhere with the desire to be anywhere but here.

The beginner Beginner went outside and started calling. Other people came to see what was going on. And standing there, in their robes, they felt something plain and old. They looked out across the crowd of people and saw mostly dour robes. Women and children looked at the beginner Beginner and cried. Men joined, howling and wailing.

Across towns, across cities, people came out. They stood and sobbed. And kept lamenting.

Across countries, continents, shrouded people stood outside and wept. The robes felt right. The only place the voice could really rise from to say the only thing left that needed to be said.

Even in parts of the world in darkness, the voices rose. Until even the last Ender was outside. Even if he was trying to raise his voice louder than the others, he couldn't. And it didn't matter even if he could—the total voices finally held power.

We all caterwauded. All people, in robes black as cauldrons. Our bodies vanishing—only solemn faces.

Finally, no room for business.

Just beyond the keening of all the people ringed the sound of animals. Cats, dogs, and birds were the first to join. Dolphins, whales, turtles, sharks, and sea lions poked their heads above the water to squeal and rumble. All creatures, great and small, entered the cacophony. The insect buzz alone started to overtake the voice of the people.

Satellite images of the earth from that time show a strange pattern of darkness on land areas. The robes, visible from space. The images show a rhythm breaking over the oceans. A ripple that first waved over the blue earth, settling into an atmospheric disturbance, a vibration of a hologram ring looping around the world.

Everyone had been moaning and keening for a long time. The ender Ender needed to wail for long enough until he was all wailing in a robe and only wailing in a robe and could remember nothing else.

Mysterious, how no one lost their voice during this time. When our voices converged, it was a boost of energy. We felt better than we had in years. When asked later what this felt like, people said, “spiritual,” “natural,” “connected,” “as one,” “a world,” “total,” and “complete.” A cycle, fulfilled.

The Beginner stopped.

She had been bawling long enough in a robe until she was finally more than bawling in a robe and could remember everything else.

And so it went. People and animals around the whimpering world quieted in waves and went back inside. The oceans stilled. The atmospheric ring disappeared.

The earth was the earth again.

Everyone and everything hibernated. When people awoke, we found a new surprise: the robes were gone, but out of our bodies grew trees. Roots tingled from the feet to the waist. A trunk and branches burst out of our backs. Birches, oaks, pines. Maple. Leaves and needles followed.

The earth slept. She slept long enough until she was all resting and only resting and remembered everyone else.

Heidi Kasa



October Currency
David Beaudouin

Future Beauty: Japanese Fashion at the Art Museum

Form doesn't have to follow function.

Imagine
an anarchy of color, shape, and fabric:

Think of clothing
as a moving canvas, wearable sculpture.

See futuristic couture
fold and warp itself into baffling entities—

Shinjuku street style, Raggedy Ann
meets Elvis, a doll-like innocence
sharpening its edge on punked-out Goth.

Fashion's been decoded, mashed up:

bland androids stare at haughty sci-fi
sirens in shiny metallic armor, while
a tattered rainbow drops from the heavens,
slickly puddling onto a glossy mannequin.

Then look confusedly
at neon-lit silhouettes, as holographic
spiders writhe around the ghostly figures.

Puzzle out the meaning
of an electric cloud of puffy quilts,
or bloody scars stitched up along a torn torso;

while over here,
a retro-avant-garde *soirée*: neo-beatniks
and Warhol automata model garments spikey,
honeycombed, pleated, asymmetric, torquing:

a dizzying discharge of light and shadow.

Alison Jennings



Morosity
Debbie Fox

Party Over, Oops, Out of Time

Let's go crazy,
forget the condition of the heart,
avoid automatic America,

the thieves in the temple
waging
computer blue war
against the Rainbow Children.

Let's go
around the world in a day,
Graffiti Bridge to Alphabet Street.

Strange but true, girls & boys:

we can all climb the ladder,
reach the gold standard:

emancipation
from a colonized mind.

But sometimes
it snows in April,
or there's a tangerine sea
of everything,

even purple rain.

It's a sign 'o' the times,
when doves cry.

So I will shut this down,
Mr. Happy,

and remember when I thought
you would be forever in my life.

I wish you heaven,
the everlasting now, take me with u—

(Note: poem is a collage of Prince song titles)

Alison Jennings



Pink Widow
Debbie Fox

In the Desert of the Heart (The Bop)

On the porch, I watch and ponder, *Are we somehow fated by the games we play?* Eric's choice is chess, Claire's was Scrabble. Usually a winner, he's like a waiting tiger, patient yet relentless. Claire was often disengaged—not minding that she lost—intrigued by oddball words and arbitrary rulings.

What we need is something to astonish us.

Eric survived cancer, Claire did not—so does ease with losing count against you? Is a favored pastime (played for keeps) required, lest we sicken? Seeing *Hamlet* on a summer afternoon, I eagerly accept a reawakening of artistic pleasure, as Shakespeare's gripping, gut-punch effects of mood and plot and character make me give thanks for living and for literature.

What we need is something to astonish us.

All too often, gratitude becomes a list: glory be to *dappled things*, roses, cool water in the desert of the heart. Consider nature's frugal wisdom—Emily, our aging cat. Carefully, she tends her days: outside if sunny, inside near the heater if it's rainy. She savors her few wants, as if they were the world.

(The bop is a poetic form developed by poet Afaa Michael Weaver.)

Alison Jennings



Old Men Watching Native Dancer
Chris McCulloch

Opaque the day, wherein she lay

The city flickers off. Although, of course, some lights are eternal. The canal bends lamp posts catching an invisible current. The sky has a pantomime moon, orange, fallen on the stagey horizon. Cats, foxes, an occasional possum, glow in their own way – eyes out, about, lingering. Jonah fingers the cash in his pocket; the dye has spread to his hand. This is the money for Halo's funeral. Now it is a blue dash of unuse, a fool's hope let loose. A late flight sheds its ticker colour, veering towards the outer suburban airport. The same noise of arrival, and departure. Further along, the overpass is a roof over more bombed out lives. They nod to each other – no speech occurs here. People rattle about, back from the Church food van, settle on coats, look at the town. They are the memories of others.

"I need eight thousand dollars, please". The teller is nervous, places the bundles of bills into the open Gladstone. "No, I don't want all that, just what I asked for, please." The teller takes the extra cash out, shaking, unfamiliar with people at all these days, eyes steady on the object inside Jonah's loose clothing, the angle it takes, the length. "Thank you, sorry, I'm leaving now." He stays there until the stranger has passed by the glass front, calls to the staff inside the office behind the walled in counter, presses the buzzer, sits down, smooths his trousers, and stretches the legs back down over his pull-on boots. The manager tells him to go home now, the police ask for a description. "Polite", he says, thinking of more. "Restrained, but like he had somewhere to be. We don't see many customers."

His fingers are woad. A song calls across from the tram stop. Gulls brawl over spilled chips. The wind throws what it can, chains of melodies from different places. A silly dog skirts trains. There is a mauve wallow to the sky. Sirens trumpet dawn, alarms wake the working, pets prance to be fed, babies cry, again. On Borrow Hill where the Treaty stole everything, a Trustees crew works the tractor bucket, dropping Halo into excavated clay, yellow as a fire cast medallion. Jonah spends a tarnished twenty for a Full Breakfast of consequence. On the bench, overlooking the river, so still the air the

fish smell, and he watches his years count down to a smile and a sister, as two officers approach slowly.
The city flickers on. Although, of course, some lights stay off. Now.

James Walton



Magician with Bird
Chris McCulloch

I Saw the Guns

We hopped off of the bus.
The sun toasted our skin, butter would have been a blessing.
My mouth was like grip tape on a skateboard.

The officers' heat was 22 degrees, pointed at us.
I always heard that you can boil an egg
on rocks in Arizona.
I wondered if my brain was going to be a boiling egg
in the parking lot.

"Hands up! On the fucking ground!" One of many
armed men said.
They pulled up swift like a golf swing, held their metals.
Are their intentions to put us in the sky?
I felt like I was sinking in a sand pit.

Oro Valley doesn't like vagrants.
We befriended the elements while
making enemies with the inhabitants.
Our hands moved like jackhammers. Our lives were judged
by our ragged clothes and dirt-flaked skin.

I saw the guns lower as my head lifted.
A bald cop marched up to me.
Elena sobbed. Dane needed a drink.
Looking at my California license,
Baldy said, "You don't belong here. Oro Valley is
like the Beverly Hills of Arizona."

Are you implying you are a Beverly Hills cop?
No humor in this heat.

I read the officer's lips, but his words were hollow
like the tips of some bullets.
Elena asked if we were being detained.
Dane sat on the floor with his legs in front of him,

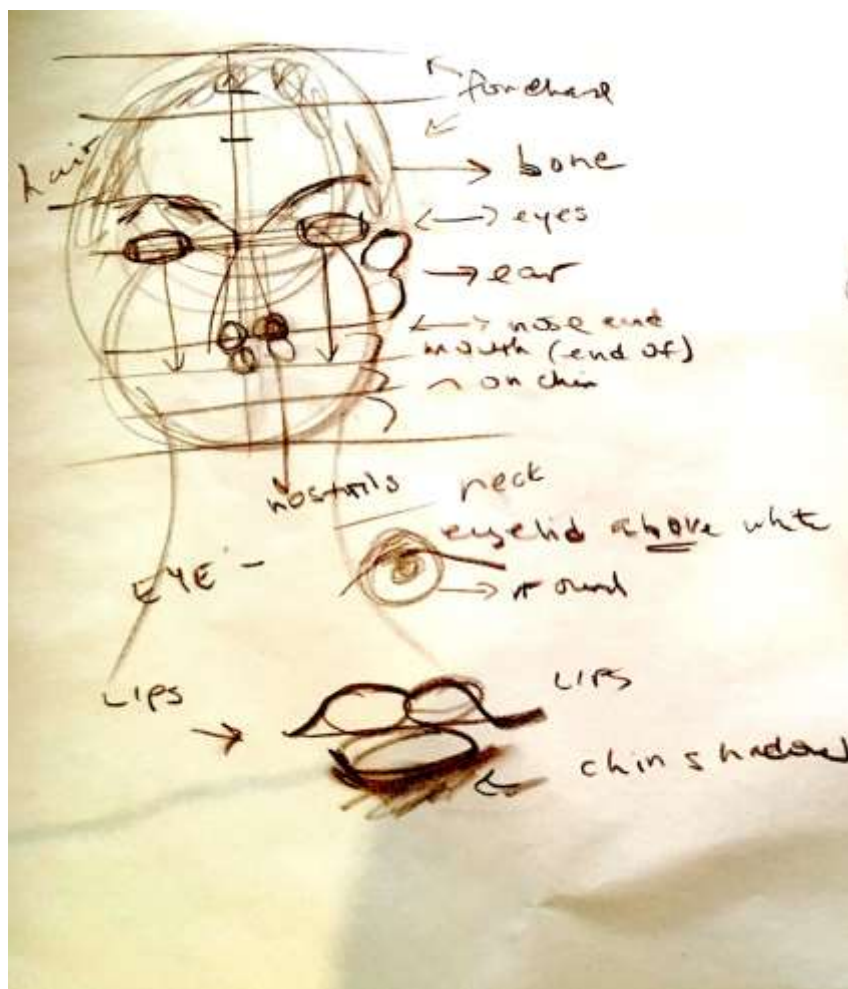
Drawing an imaginary bottle of Jim Beam in the dirt.
I pleaded that we needed a ride.
Dane's friend was on his way.

Before the headlights pulled up,
I felt the bullets pierced my body.
The holes in my skin leaked great red lakes
to feed the dry soil of Oro Valley.

The headlights flashed in my eyes.
I looked at Elena,
and for a moment I couldn't tell if
it was dark outside,
or if I just couldn't see anymore.

I heard the cops laughing and
deciding where to eat.

Clayton Hunt



Sketch Book
Debbie Fox

Familiarity in Someone Who is Becoming Familiar.

Looking through the familiar balcony in Bernal Heights,
watching cars zip by on the freeway,
I couldn't help but wonder if the silver in her hair
would still glisten after time marched us on.
Would her smile still hold the same fresh frame?
I cherished the thought of her hands grasping mine
for a while. I wanted her to hang around.

She was becoming familiar to me.
I watched a scenario in my head where
everything fell apart like the Husker Dü song.
I thought of how the patterns formulated,
and how each relationship of my past
were swept away like dust bunnies.
The fear of the familiarity here was unbearable.

I watched her eyes when she spoke,
loved the way her eyes squinted when she smiled through her
mask,
and received her hand when she reached for it.
Her soft fingers scratched my leg as we sat watching T.V.
In her living room.

What wasn't familiar was her.
Not yet.
There was a healthy distance,
like six feet in 2020.
I wanted to ask about everything,
but the questions scared me
because I was scared of losing her.
So, I sat silent.

Another familiarity.

Clayton Hunt

Raindrops Could be Bullets if They Fell Faster

If the rain dropped faster,
I could feel it slip in my skin,
 like bullets in slow motion.
Each drop screamed red as they bounced
off of my skin and into the Earth,
where many salt droplets like it
carry voices of the past and present.
Voices of spirits who collapsed from
crashes, knives, guns, pillows, disease,
 Agent Orange, atomic bombs, and stingrays.
They all had their lives.
The collapse of mine
is,
 well,
undetermined.

Clayton Hunt



A Walk in The Woods
Chris McCulloch

Aphasia Poem 1

forage for syllables,
mushrooms, gathered from woods'
litter leaf, decomposed sunlight bright.

separate words, peel and
aside cast mirrored twilight from this
pond's past tense surface film.

cut and split, cut and split
phrases and sentences, pile up as
firewood, the against night bewildered.

abandon shelter in
paragraphs, pages, books.
woods in close, every moon obscured, dark.

all at once apart words apart fall,
nothing leaving nothing to recall.

Robert Guzikowski

Aphasia Poem 2

cultivate vigilance.
as single words lose their coherence
wait for the moment born decisive.

slash, chop each, every green
thought, let it all to dry to all dry
kindling, stumps, seasoned words, dormant roots.

ignite slashed, felled, tree-words.
sentient combustion burns hot, leaves
nothing but curtains ash, gardens smoke.

sow morphemes in the moon's
fertile clear æther rain craters where
seed sounds in earth light can germinate.

without words enchanted syllables
elude broken language, broken world.

Robert Guzikowski

Aphasia Poem 3

something say, anything say
jumbled not, halting not, nonsense not,
seeing not concerned, that look facial.

swarmed infarcts, lesions, jarred
wetware bio-lightning bugs, neuron
queen hives, misfire, miscommunicate.

matters crux, sentences
perfectly sensical fine to these,
if any problem thing, other ears.

unexpressed beautiful
marauding lunar thoughts, deceptions,
chase and howl approval.

connections disconnected within,
recognized discognitions without.

Robert Guzikowski



Red Canoe
Dale Shank

Bayboro Harbor, 1999

Small boats cluster about jetties,
Coast Guard sloop stands sentinel.
Nearby on the seawall, a Chevy van
displays homemade wooden doors,
canoe up top patched with duct tape;
then just beyond, two rusting hulks,
the one a cruise ship boarded up,
the other a Russian submarine,
once black plates of its hull iron no longer,
the dull red star on its conning tower
no mariner now, demobbed.

I like this place and have skipped
a session at the U next-door
to wander here looking for you.
Across Tampa Bay tiny smokestacks
puff their breath into low hanging clouds,
and farther still some thought
seeks a southbound gulf.
I've stolen this time to write to you,
not with me, across another ocean,
farther perhaps than the space I need
to reflect I am not a pilotless hulk,
these others mainly background,
texture, because they are there.

But in the middle distance cormorants dive,
gulls swarm and cry, pelicans swoop and swim,
fishing, long snouts like rudders in the water,
all this constrained, contained, like the harbor
interrupting my thought. What do wild
birds require?

I watch them now in cadres, flying

formed up just at the waves' surface,
wings not needing to move,
needing no fish in their baggy throats,
in air like human pilots, jaunty,
reckless, cocksure—what need?
Sometimes their wings splash like joy,
curving up in paeans of flight as they
rise and dive and rise again.

Say what you will of the pull of earth,
or derelict vessels marooned in matter of fact,
my thought now needs the wild bird's
homing, the final heartrending turn—
better now some shrill boatswain's pipe
red star gleaming on shiny black steel
as iron feathers splash like joy,
dark as cormorants, tars doff hats,
and thousand balalaikas whirr
like wings up the wild sweet air.

Julian O. Long



Orca Fun
Serge Lecomte

BIOs

David Beaudouin, native to Baltimore, is a widely published poet and performer. He was the founder of Tropos Press, Inc. (1976-2001), one of the region's earliest and most respected alternative literary presses, as well as THE PEARL (1980-2001), a Baltimore journal of the literary and "spontaneous" arts. He served for more than a decade as a literary panelist for the Mayor's Committee on Arts and Culture and was instrumental in the creation of the Artscape Literary Arts Award, and additionally has created and hosted a number of public reading series in the area, most recently "Blabbermouth." Published works include *Ten Poems* (1973), *Gig* (1976), *Catenae* (1989), *Ode to Stella* (1990), *American Night* (1992), and *Human Nature* (1995). David also has collaborated with visual artists Thea Osato and Julia Kim Smith on multimedia projects, and has co-produced two documentary shorts, *Fluid Movement* and *One Nice Thing*.

During the course of his life, **Gary Beaumier** has worked in a dizzying variety of jobs that include garbage collector, gandydancer, tutor, teacher, bookstore manager, psychiatric aide, and study hall supervisor. A high point of his employment experience — the culmination of his intertwined love of teaching and of poetry — was a recent stint teaching poetry at a women's prison. Now retired, Gary has become something of a Lake Michigan beachcomber. He has always loved wooden sailboats and has cobbled together several. He spends a fair portion of every day at the local marina with his beloved Halman, the boat he considers "just exactly what I always wanted." A runner when young, Gary now walks an impressive 5-7 miles a day and cheerfully admits to "compulsive walking disorder." Of course, Gary also writes poetry. His work has appeared in numerous publications, where it has accumulated a gratifying number of honors. His first book, *From My Family to Yours*, was brought out in 2019 by Finishing Line Press. At present, Gary looks forward with pride and delight to the publication of this new collection, *Dented Brown Fedora*.

Retired children's librarian **Alan Bern** is the author of three poetry books and an exhibited and published photographer. Recent awards include: honorable mention for *Littoral Press Poetry Prize* (2021); flash fiction finalist for *Ekphrastic Sex: The Contest* (2021); first runner-up for Raw Art Review's *Mirabai Prize for Poetry* (2020); medal from SouthWest Writers for a WWII story (2019). Recent/upcoming writing and photo work in *Raw Art Review*, *HAUNTED WATERS PRESS*, *Aletheia Literary Quarterly*, *CERASUS*, *Feral*, *Artemis Journal*, and *Mercurius*. Alan performs with dancer/composer Lucinda Weaver as *PACES: dance & poetry fit to the space* and with musicians from *Composing Together*, <http://composingtogether.org>. *Lines &*

Faces, his illustrated broadside press with artist/printer Robert Woods: linesandfaces.com.

Alan Britt's poems have appeared in *Agni Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Cottonwood*, *English Journal*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Midwest Review*, *Missouri Review*, *New Letters*, *Osiris*, *Raw Art Review*, *Stand* (UK), plus countless others. He has been nominated for the 2021 International Janus Pannonius Prize awarded by the Hungarian Centre of PEN International for excellence in poetry from any part of the world. Previous nominated recipients include Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Charles Bernstein and Yves Bonnefoy. Alan was interviewed at The Library of Congress for *The Poet and the Poem*. He has published 20 books of poetry and served as Art Agent for Andy Warhol Superstar, the late great Ultra Violet, while often reading poetry at her Chelsea, New York studio. A graduate of the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University he currently teaches English/Creative Writing at Towson University.

Christopher Paul Brown is known for his exploration of the unconscious through improvisation and the cultivation of serendipity and synchronicity via alchemy. His first photography sale was to the collection of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana. Over the past three years his photographs were exhibited twice in Rome, Italy and in Belgrade, Serbia. His series of ten photographs, titled *Obscure Reveal*, were exhibited at a Florida museum. He earned a BA in Film from Columbia College Chicago in 1980. Brown was born in Dubuque, Iowa and now resides in North Carolina.

Sophia Falco is the author of her poetry book *Farewell Clay Dove* published by UnCollected Press (2021) and of her award-winning chapbook *The Immortal Sunflower* (UnCollected Press, 2019). She is the winner of the Mirabai Prize for Poetry. Falco takes pride in being a dedicated volunteer blogger for the *International Bipolar Foundation* since April 2020. Furthermore, Falco graduated *magna cum laude* along with the highest honors in the Literature Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She will be starting a Masters of Fine Arts Program with a teaching fellowship in Fall 2022.

Debbie Lynn Fox began her career as a writer working at four ad agencies. She won 33 advertising awards for Coca Cola, The Bank of Bermuda, Hershey's, Manulife, Ginger Ale and many more, including a merit award in Cannes for a TV commercial launching the first Bell cell phone. Debbie was fortunate to be asked to write, direct and produce all aspects of advertising. Working as a freelance writer, director & producer, she was lucky to meet

direct and film Justin Trudeau in a 17-minute film; Tessa Virtue, Olympic ice dancer, twice-gold medalist, in a 15-minute film; writing and producing two TV and several radio commercials with Grace Jones, Andy Warhol's extraordinary muse. She also wrote and recorded radio commercials with Howie Mandel, Andrea Martin, Catherine O'Hara and Eugene Levy. Debbie began writing short stories and poetry, and moved on to writing her first novel, *The Jazz Funeral*. She is currently reworking her second novel, *SOAR*. Debbie's publications include: *SHORT STORIES: Shoes*, *Existere Journal of Arts and Literature*; *Tock*, *The Raw Art Review*. *POETRY: The Damselfly*, *The Raw Art Review*; *Shuffle*, *Azure Journal of Literary Thought*; *Benumbed*, *The Raw Art Review Anthology**; *E Equals*, *The Poeming Pigeon Anthology*; *Period*, *The Raw Art Review Anthology*; *She Fell Hard*, *October Hill Magazine*; *The Damselfly*, *The Raw Art Review Anthology*. Debbie has painted 15 watercolors in the last year.

Ethan Goffman is the author of *Dreamscapes* (UnCollected Press, 2021)--a collection of flash fiction--and the poetry collections *I Garden Weeds* (Cyberwit, 2021) and *Words for Things Left Unsaid* (Kelsay Books, 2020). He is co-founder of It Takes a Community, which brings poetry to Montgomery College students and nearby residents and is founder and producer of the Poetry & Planet podcast. In addition, Ethan writes nonfiction on sustainable transportation for Greater Greater Washington and other publications.

Robert Guzikowski published work in the 1970's and 80's in several magazines and co-edited *The Parlor City Review*. In the 90's he had encephalitis which caused brain damage. Aphasia was one of the sequelae. He has resumed writing poetry and some of his work has been published in *Kissing Dynamite*. Nonfiction writing can be found at atomicgeography.com.

Jack D. Harvey's poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *The Comstock Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Typishly Literary Magazine*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Piedmont Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. The author has been a Pushcart nominee and over the years has been published in a few anthologies. The author has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, New York. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired. His book, *Mark the Dwarf* is available on Kindle. <https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Dwarf-Jack-D-Harvey-ebook/dp/B019KGW0F2>

Clay Hunt is a poet living in San Francisco, California. He is the author of the chapbook "Born Shane" (Two Key Customs) and "Young When the Sun Went Down" (Budget Press.) He has poems published in several journals including "Black Flowers," "Penumbra," and *Song of the San Joaquin*."

Allen Itz, poet, photographer, artist, 78 years old, born in extreme South Texas, on the border, gradually went north as far as San Antonio where currently lives. After a long career in public service and three retirements, he took up poetry, writing a poem a day for 10 to 15 years (after the 2,000th poem, one loses track of dates). He has published 7 books, 5 poetry and 2 short stories. The first book, "Seven Beats a Second" is the only print book and is still available on Amazon as either print on demand or used copies. The remaining 6 books are all eBooks, available wherever eBooks are sold, including Amazon. He was taking photographs throughout this time, showing them once and selling a couple. This is the first publication of his photos. About 6 months ago, at the end of his poem a day marathon, he discovered he had nothing new to say that he hadn't said before, usually better, and turned his artistic urges to painting. His style is abstract and his medium is spray on wood, boards 10 inches across and 4 to 6 feet down. He has his first formal showing of his work at a gallery later this year but doesn't expect to ever sell any of his work because of their unusual

Alison Jennings is a Seattle-based poet who taught in public schools before returning to poetry. She has also worked as editor, journalist, and accountant. Over 60 of her poems have been published internationally in numerous journals, including *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Meat for Tea*, *Mslexia*, *Poetic Sun*, *Society of Classical Poets*, and *The Write Launch*. As well, she has won 3rd Place/Honorable Mention or been a semi-finalist in several contests. Please visit her website at <https://sites.google.com/view/airandfirepoet/home>.

Heidi Kasa writes fiction and poetry. Her chapbook, *Split*, was a finalist for a Black Lawrence Press award in 2019, and is due out from Monday Night Press in June 2022. Kasa's writing has appeared in *The Racket*, *Meat for Tea*, *Monday Night Lit*, *The Cobalt Cafe*, and *Ab Terra*, among others. She works as an editor and lives in Austin.

Paul Koniecki lives in Dallas, Texas. He was once chosen for the John Ashbery Home School Residency. His poems feature in Richard Bailey's movie "One of the Rough" distributed by AVIFF Cannes. Paul proudly sits on the editorial board of Thimble Literary Magazine. His poems have appeared in ENTROPY, Gasconade Review, As It Ought To Be Magazine, Trailer Park Review, and many more.

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He emigrated to Brooklyn in 1960. After graduating high school, he became a medic in the Air Force. He earned a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature, worked as a Green

Beret language instructor and received a B.A. in Spanish Literature from the University of Alaska where he taught from 1978-1997. He built houses, worked as a pipefitter, orderly, landscaper, driller, bartender. He is also a published poet, novelist, playwright and artist.

Julian O. Long's poems and essays have appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Horizon* among others. His chapbook, *High Wire Man*, is number twenty-two in the Trilobite Poetry series published by the University of North Texas Libraries. A collection of his poems, *Reading Evening Prayer in an Empty Church*, appeared from Backroom Window Press in 2018. Recent publications have appeared or are forthcoming at *The Piker Press*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Litbreak Magazine*, *The New Verse News*, *CulturMag*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Pinestraw*, and *O'Henry*. Long has taught school at the University of North Texas, Saint Louis University, and elsewhere. He is now retired and lives in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Margaret McGowan is a poet from Upstate New York. She holds a degree in English Literature from SUNY Albany and is the author of *Ancestors and Other Poems* (2021). Her poetry has also appeared or is forthcoming in *Queens University of Charlotte Literary Magazine* and *New Authors Journal*. Margaret received an honorable mention in The Hudson Valley Writers Guild Poetry Contest 2019. She has worked as a freelance newspaper reporter for the Wallkill Valley Times and as an Adjunct English Professor at Bryant & Stratton College. She has a fraternal twin sister.

Christian McCulloch is a prolific Scottish writer with a background in Fine Art. He's been an International teacher in British West Indies, Singapore (Principal), Japan and Hong Kong, also 10 years in Special Needs in UK. After 30 years in the Far East he returned to UK and now lives and creates in London. His stories have appeared in many modest but worthy magazines. Likewise his art pieces (details if appropriate).

Nicholas Miles is an artist living in Washington DC.

Parrish is a writer and critic living somewhere in California, teaching when UC Davis calls. Parrish's recent fiction has appeared in *Raritan*, *Ploughshares*, *Vestal Review*, *Equinox*, *Blood and Bourbon*, *Sonic Boom* and the fabulous *Raw Art Review*, not to mention other places, so we won't.

Linnet Phoenix is a British poet whose work has previously been published in various journals online and in print. She has had poems nominated for the Best of Net Anthology and the Pushcart Prize in 2021. She has had three books published, a chapbook called *Rusty Stars* from Between Shadows Press, *Urban*

Mustang from Impspired & Post-ed on Your Mirror from Posthuman Poetry & Prose. She also enjoys horse-riding in rainstorms.

Cindy Rosmus is a Jersey girl who looks like a Mob Wife and talks like Anybodys from *West Side Story*. Her noir/horror/bizarro stories have been published in the coolest places, such as *Shotgun Honey*; *Megazine*; *Dark Dossier*; *Horror, Sleaze, Trash*; *The Rye Whiskey Review*, and *Rock and a Hard Place*. She is the editor/art director of *Yellow Mama* and the art director of *Black Petals*. Her seventh collection of short stories, *Backwards: Growing Up Catholic, and Weird, in the 60s* (Hekate Publishing), will be out, soon! Cindy is a Gemini, a Christian, and an animal rights advocate.

Dale Shank's assignment photography includes performance art, wildlife, environmental documentation, and indigenous cultural events. His fiction and poetry have been published in: Sterling Clack Clack, Wingless Dreamer, Exquisite Corpse, The Healing Muse, The Raw Art Review, Akros Review, Before the Sun, Fusion Art, Croton Review, Joint Endeavor, Powder, and University of Portland Review.

James Walton is published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. He has been shortlisted for the ACU National Poetry Prize, the MPU International Poetry Prize, The James Tate Prize, and the Ada Cambridge Prize. Four collections of his poetry have been published. He was nominated for 'The Best of the Net' 2019, and is a Pushcart Prize 2021 nominee. He is a winner of the Raw Art Review Chapbook Prize. He was a librarian, a cattle breeder, and mostly a public sector union official.

xyckshyt is a spatial and audiovisual artist working with highly noisy, scratchy and raw textures and soundscapes to create places that are detached from meanings. Whatever is analogous to terrible, thrashy, ugly or in any sort dark as a source of sublime, becomes the source of the experience. xyckshyt is currently working on spatial interventions, audiovisual performances and generative visuals.

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