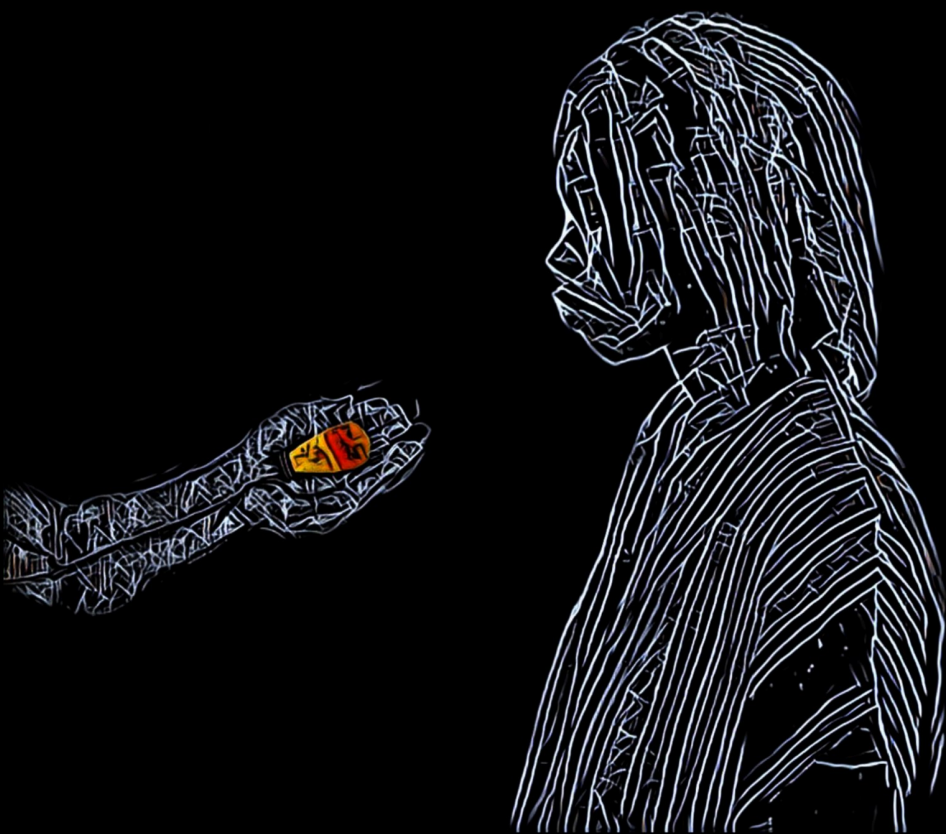


# [Alternate Route]

#6: Spring 2022



# [Alternate Route]

#6, Spring 2022

© 2022 [Alternate Route] and respective authors/artists

ISSN 2767-0317

Issue #6: Spring 2022 (Date of online publication: April 30<sup>th</sup>)

Editor: Michael O. Starr

Cover art: *Give me light* by Zaynab Bobi

Contributors: Fadilah Ali, Tom Ball, Zaynab Bobi, Roy Christopher, CJ Delous, Sean Ennis, Ozzýka Farah, Tracey Foster, John Grey, Joe Haward, David Hay, Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon, Enna Horn, Mark Jackley, Zeke Jarvis, Hec Lampert-Bates, Paul H. Lewellan, Mario Loprete, DS Maolalai, Sadie Maskery, Peter Mladinic, Zach Murphy, Sheila E. Murphy, Ben Nardolilli, Robert Okaji, Gen Parola, Bernard Pearson, Kenneth Pobo, Damien Posterino, Fabrice B. Poussin, Carson Pytell, M Patrick Riffin, Krista Sanford, Gerard Sarnat, Edward Michael Supranowicz

This periodical proudly produced without institutional funding.

To submit, please see our website at [alternateroute.org](http://alternateroute.org).

Online edition free-of-charge.

Patronage is gladly accepted at our Patreon:

[www.patreon.com/alternate\\_route](http://www.patreon.com/alternate_route).

Edited in California.

Likenesses and similarities to any person, peoples, place, or institution past or present are purely coincidental and do not suggest identity or reference.

#### Typefaces

Cover text: **Esteban**, size variable

Headers & footers: **Calibri Light**, size 11

Image captions: *Bell MT*, size 11, italicized

Footnotes: *Bell MT*, size 8

All other internal text: *Bell MT*, size 11

## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CJ Delous.....                                   | 8  |
| Leave me alone.....                              | 9  |
| Desire & Idea.....                               | 10 |
| The Madness of Crowds.....                       | 12 |
| Ozzýka Farah.....                                | 14 |
| Viola.....                                       | 15 |
| Astacology.....                                  | 17 |
| This is a stick up.....                          | 19 |
| Roy Christopher.....                             | 21 |
| Crow.....  | 22 |
| Kenneth Pobo.....                                | 23 |
| Columbine.....                                   | 24 |
| After a Moderate Fight.....                      | 25 |
| Ghazal Begun at a Stoplight.....                 | 26 |
| Ceinwen E Cariat Haydon.....                     | 27 |
| Fascists.....                                    | 28 |
| Witness the mundane courage of the mediocre..... | 29 |
| Time Flies in Residential Care.....              | 30 |
| Smiles are Contagious.....                       | 31 |
| Zaynab Bobi,.....                                | 33 |
| Give me light.....                               | 34 |
| David Hay.....                                   | 35 |
| Voiceless.....                                   | 36 |
| Eat the apple the world is screaming.....        | 40 |
| Autumn.....                                      | 43 |
| Enna Horn.....                                   | 44 |
| Soundscape of the Last Night in June.....        | 45 |
| Zach Murphy.....                                 | 47 |
| Opossum.....                                     | 48 |
| Mario Loprete.....                               | 50 |
| Concrete Sculptures 2021.....                    | 51 |
| ANGEL.....                                       | 52 |
| UNTITLED.....                                    | 53 |
| UNTITLED.....                                    | 54 |
| UNTITLED.....                                    | 55 |
| Tracey Foster.....                               | 56 |
| Dusk Waiting.....                                | 57 |
| Falling.....                                     | 59 |
| Eatock's Pond.....                               | 60 |
| Carson Pytell.....                               | 62 |
| Nails on a Dry Erase Board.....                  | 63 |

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Practicing Agnostic Atheism.....   | 64  |
| I tried to tell a story.....       | 65  |
| Fadilah Ali.....                   | 66  |
| To Walk The Street Home, Mad.....  | 67  |
| Sadie Maskery.....                 | 69  |
| Tide.....                          | 70  |
| Towpath.....                       | 71  |
| Bridge.....                        | 72  |
| Last train, or, Tracks.....        | 73  |
| Breakwater.....                    | 74  |
| Krista Sanford.....                | 75  |
| The First Pick.....                | 76  |
| Rev Joe Haward.....                | 79  |
| Pastor .....                       | 80  |
| Robert Okaji.....                  | 82  |
| Which is Not to Say Never.....     | 83  |
| Emergence.....                     | 84  |
| Closure.....                       | 85  |
| The Secret.....                    | 86  |
| Sean Ennis.....                    | 87  |
| HER HEALTH WAS GENERALLY FINE..... | 88  |
| M Patrick Riggin.....              | 89  |
| Illini.....                        | 90  |
| Dome 2020.....                     | 91  |
| Bernard Pearson.....               | 92  |
| Big Dipper.....                    | 93  |
| John Grey.....                     | 94  |
| Evicted.....                       | 95  |
| How Should I Know.....             | 96  |
| House Fire.....                    | 97  |
| Sheila E. Murphy.....              | 98  |
| Three Ghazals.....                 | 99  |
| Peter Mladinic.....                | 102 |
| Soldier.....                       | 103 |
| Voyeur.....                        | 105 |
| The Unholy Three.....              | 107 |
| Mark Jackley.....                  | 108 |
| Firefly.....                       | 109 |
| January.....                       | 110 |
| I.....                             | 111 |
| Tom Ball.....                      | 112 |
| Drugs for Every Occasion.....      | 113 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Tales from a Remote Distance, Vol. 3, 1 Flash (07)..... | 116 |
| To Be a Merman.....                                     | 116 |
| The War Between Liberals and Conservatives.....         | 118 |
| Hec Lampert-Bates.....                                  | 119 |
| Grave Chameleon.....                                    | 120 |
| Gene J. Parola.....                                     | 123 |
| The Looking Glass.....                                  | 124 |
| Edward Michael Supranowicz.....                         | 131 |
| Sign and Cosign 4b.....                                 | 132 |
| A Delicate Happiness.....                               | 133 |
| DS Maolalai.....  | 134 |
| Guilt.....  | 135 |
| Entropy.....  | 136 |
| The gamekeeper.....                                     | 137 |
| Flowers opening.....                                    | 138 |
| Silver fishes.....                                      | 139 |
| Damien Posterino.....                                   | 140 |
| The good old days .....                                 | 141 |
| Livestock.....  | 142 |
| Another man with mother issues.....                     | 143 |
| Ben Nardolilli.....                                     | 144 |
| The Department of Education.....                        | 145 |
| Anniversary Return.....                                 | 146 |
| To MARRISA.....   | 147 |
| Homonym Toponym.....                                    | 148 |
| Crossed Patterns.....                                   | 149 |
| Gerard Sarnat.....                                      | 150 |
| UKRAINIAN FOOD INTERLUDES [ii] .....                    | 151 |
| i.Light Steppes: “WILL WORK FOR BREAD”.....             | 151 |
| ii.Brussel Sprouts .....                                | 152 |
| Fabrice Poussin.....                                    | 153 |
| A Visit Home.....                                       | 154 |
| Body Parts.....   | 155 |
| Dressed to Kill.....                                    | 156 |
| We Once Spoke.....                                      | 158 |
| Paul H. Lewellan.....                                   | 159 |
| The Plan.....   | 160 |
| Zeke Jarvis.....  | 166 |
| Plight of the Nongoblins.....                           | 167 |
| Badly Beaten.....                                       | 170 |



*CJ Delous*



CJ Delous

## Leave me alone

You asked me what I think

sorrow & regret

will bring,

now the consequence of our decisions

have finally kicked in,

but the silver was stripped from my tongue when

I heard those words I never expected;

when you made me realise

there are some lives you live

& some you leave behind.

There was no answer to give you.

All I can do

is write this ugly poem & hope that

eventually we can accept

the reason it has to happen this way...

CJ Delous

## Desire & Idea

Forever out of reach  
it exists as if,  
    born blind  
they presented you with  
an audio description  
of a visual medium;  
permanent distance, something  
    missing,  
no way  
of knowing  
how to affect the movement.

The desire exists  
but the idea resists,  
a furious rebellion  
against simplicity,  
    insisting on  
misunderstanding,  
infested potential  
& perpetual ambiguity:

## CJ Delous

like the painful birth of conjoined twins,  
who grow to want nothing more than  
to love & to be loved,  
    beautiful & ugly,  
        just like us.

CJ Delous

## The Madness of Crowds

The talk,

the talk goes on forever;

unfocused, the tumult of noises sounds

like the symptom of a fever.

I pick out one voice after another,

disappointed as each

seems to me to be a foreign language

I cannot speak.

It's the silent ones I can understand,

shrouded in loneliness

or pensive thoughts

or maybe just nothing at all.

Are they, like me,

bewildered

as to how the past

can blend

(so fast!)

## CJ Delous

from Spring into Winter,  
through Autumn  
to Summer,  
again & again?

(let us hope they aren't so simple)

as the noise, the  
noise goes on forever...

## *Ozzýka Farah*

*is a poet, editor, and content writer from Sacramento, California. His work has recently been published or is forthcoming in CausewayLit, Penumbra Literary and Art Journal, Dots Publications, and Big A Little a anthology. He currently lives between Melbourne, Australia and London, United Kingdom. Instagram and Twitter: @ozzynapoleon*

Ozzyka Farah

Viola

(For Kris, Tomas, River, Jack, & Craig)

As I watch the tide  
by nightfall  
I am wondering how  
nightmares  
find their way into reality  
A Shakespearean tragedy  
who knows  
what could have been —  
what could have  
possibly went wrong?

When you plunged  
& the water  
began to fill your lungs;  
a sight  
(River engulfed in the canal)  
to see  
& me, powerless  
to prevent it.

I have dreams of you  
in Södertälje  
on that fateful night —  
I'd imagine  
that you'd be frightened  
or perhaps sad  
but you are instead grinning  
as wide as the Cheshire Cat  
as if to say,  
*it's okay, everything's okay*  
notwithstanding the events  
sure to come. Knowledgeable  
but still optimistic,  
for which I cannot relate.

Now *Where's the Music?* Preserved  
in the archives of your existence

## Ozzýka Farah

in prayer by countless mourners –  
your life: An Ode to Keats  
of youth & mortality—written in verse.

There were melodies in your heart  
that you didn't understand  
rhythms pulsing in your veins  
but you didn't know why  
so you learned how to sing  
& then you sprouted wings  
& you learned how to fly.



Ozzyka Farah

## Astacology

Going crawdad hunting, I prepare to get dirty  
Trudging through the muddy rice paddies

Hunter-gatherers on a journey for a dinner  
That we did not need

I pulled myself up by the sleeve of my sock-glove  
Then set out to march through the trenches

Like a foot soldier to pillage the foreign soil  
Wreak havoc & take innocent lives

One was rebellious enough to pinch me & I howled;  
*The trick is to grab them right behind the ears,*

Uncle Tommy told me,  
*For the claws cannot reach backwards*

Then they are confined as a tuxedo jacket  
Ready to be captured; literally, crawdads in a bucket

They've claws & meat packed tightly  
Behind a plated armour exoskeleton

But all we were after were the tails  
Twisting thorax one way & abdomen the other

Until it pops, 4<sup>th</sup> of July in your hand  
& they separate, dispensing a yellow fluid

These didn't look like the muddy fresh water  
Cousins of the famous Red Lobsters

They were brown & spotted  
No one ever told me that they do not turn red

Until you boil them – due to the astaxanthin  
We acted like fish farmers assisting in aquaculture

## Ozzýka Farah

The thought of it makes my blood boil  
You can see the iron-rich haemoglobin turning my

Blood red beneath my brown & spotted cheeks;  
Such a weird thought to capture these creatures.

## This is a stick up

In the inner cities  
the stick up kids  
paint portraits on asphalt  
on brick & mortar  
like Basquiat

In summer,  
bodies drop as temperatures  
rise           The mercury  
in the thermometer is bloodshed  
the combination of grief & heat  
exhaustion causes mothers,  
grandmothers, aunties to faint  
in funeral homes  
& brothers to clench their fists –  
It is a strange pain,  
grievance.

Up against the concrete wall  
take your hands out  
of your pockets  
I do not want your possessions  
I want your knowledge  
your priceless wisdom  
I want your riches  
the precious gems  
made valuable by time spent – weathered  
through experience.

In the inner cities  
the stick up kids  
paint portraits on asphalt  
on brick & mortar  
like Basquiat

During the day they lie idle  
laying low, lying still;  
killing time until it is killing time

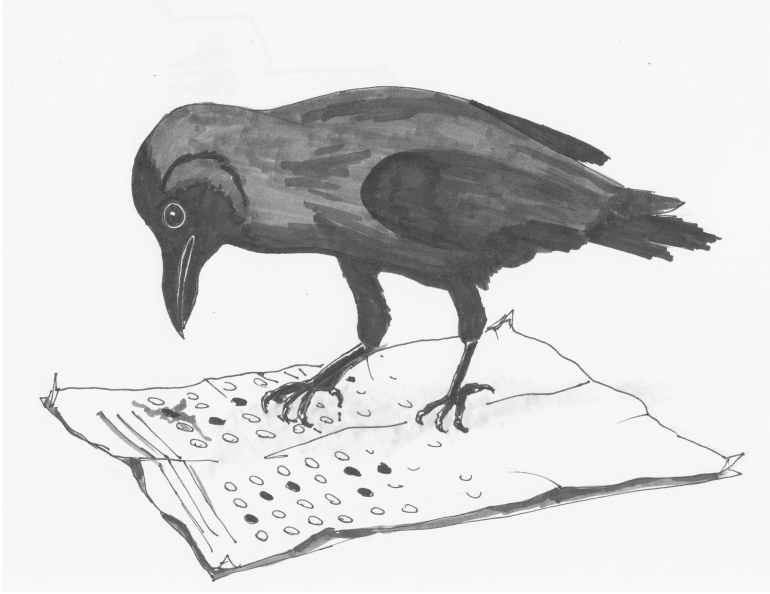
## Ozzýka Farah

until it is time to make a killing  
you wouldn't need  
a pocket watch to know  
what time it is  
but if you have a watch  
they will take that, too  
if you are not careful  
they will blow your knowledge  
through the back of your skullcap  
leaving it for all to see, take in & digest

Up against that concrete wall  
take your hands out  
of your pockets  
I do not want your possessions  
I want your knowledge  
your priceless wisdom  
I want your riches  
& before you leave anything out  
Remember,  
this is a stick up.

## *Roy Christopher*

*marshals the middle between Mathers and McLuhan. He's an aging BMX and skateboarding zine kid. That's where he learned to turn events and interviews into pages with staples. He has since written about music, media, and culture for everything from books and blogs to national magazines and academic journals. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. As a child, he solved the Rubik's Cube competitively. He currently lives in Savannah, Georgia.*



*Crow*

## *Kenneth Pobo*

*is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include Bend of Quiet (Blue Light Press), Loplop in a Red City (Circling Rivers), and Lilac And Sawdust (Meadowlark Press). His work has appeared in North Dakota Quarterly, Nimrod, Mudfish, Hawaii Review, and elsewhere.*

Kenneth Pobo

## Columbine

My friend says it's strange  
to clean up garden beds  
when World War Three  
might be starting.  
Some madman might nuke  
the future. Even then, some  
will stand by him—as their faces  
drop off and skin vanishes.

As a boy, I thought the future  
was mine, was all of us, though  
we were taught to duck and cover.  
Teachers didn't say  
that crafty radiation  
would still find us.  
We did as we were told,  
turned in our spelling tests.

It's spring. The first columbine  
is up. It didn't bloom last year,  
but maybe this year? Maybe.



Kenneth Pobo

## After a Moderate Fight

On our wedding day, the gray sky  
offered some bright sunny moments.  
When we have a fight, I think of  
clouds that break up before they fly  
away. I sink into silence,  
mourn the possible loss of love.  
We make up. Somehow. Everything  
feels right despite a shallow sting.

Our house holds joy—and some anger.  
We're like two creeks joined together  
or two frogs croaking and calling.  
I guess love is about falling  
and getting up again. Again.  
Two clocks on one wall, two old men.

Kenneth Pobo

## Ghazal Begun at a Stoplight

Maybe I'll make spaghetti for dinner. I like  
when hot water softens pasta, yellow worms.

Whenever I see a groundhog, I fear  
for my sprouts. I see them tremble. And grow.

Oh moon of Pennsylvania, burn out.  
Do your sky striptease for no one.

Sometimes I write poems because a certain word  
fascinates. Alabaster, yeah, alabaster!

I think I'm mostly a sedimentary rock.  
I erode, slide to the river, get carried away.

Make sense, my analyst says, make sense!  
A violet understands me, winks with a small eye.

Who is Ken? I heard he was starring in  
a film called *Pieces, Try to Keep Together*.

## ***Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon***

*(MA, Creative Writing, Newcastle University, 2017)*

*lives near Newcastle upon Tyne, UK and writes short stories and poetry. She is widely published in online magazines and in print anthologies. Her first chapbook is 'Cerddi Bach' [Little Poems], Hedgehog Press, July 2019. She is a Pushcart Prize and Forward Prize nominee. She is developing practice as a participatory arts facilitator and believes everyone's voice counts.*

## Fascists

Well-tailored, veneers of grace  
who mouth conservation concerns  
for endangered species, like their own.  
They have appetites for raunchy parties;  
wool-suited men in silk shirts hiding  
ammoniac, lonely children wetting  
prep school beds, or tongue-kissing  
nanny to be met with slightly delayed,  
sharp-stinging slaps. Drunk on Moët  
power and privilege they whip up  
alienation in laid off workers; point  
to scapegoats from other continents.  
They preach biblical principles  
that in private, they disdain.

Entitled smiles, beam lies  
of convenience, fuelled  
by peptic stomachs,  
acid reflux, lily livers.

Killer instincts colonise  
their brains, feed their hollow eyes.  
They file and buff blade-sharp nails  
while their proxies maim or kill all  
who threaten their age-old games.  
The piss and shit of top-drawer fear  
is laundered and tidied well away.

*Witness the mundane courage of the mediocre*

the calm marginalised are all around.

The cowardice of high-born  
high achievers pollutes everywhere.  
Their flatullanced clubs and boardrooms  
claim to have clean air whilst  
full of businessmen betrayed  
by skid marks on designer underwear.  
Craven Oxbridge rich kids  
now lack *nanny* to keep them clean,  
this crass ruling-class demeans  
and is demeaned. Bullying  
is all they know –

how else would they survive  
as genetic inbred ingrates  
who'll deny others life.

Ordinary working folk  
will soon be stirred to roar  
demand a life beyond constraints  
and crumbs from wealth's *high table*.

Know, you who govern us,  
your position is, at last, unstable.

Witness the fiery courage of the mediocre,  
the strong marginalised are all around.

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon

## Time Flies in Residential Care

I've missed the bus to work, I'm late  
again. What will happen next. Dad will be cross.  
Autumn sunlight shimmers as I shake, I watch  
leaves through the lounge window. Movement  
casts marbled shadows over neglected pages.  
*Wuthering Heights* can't hold me today –

I'm fluid, floating like  
beams shimmering, soft scalloped, in sea water.  
Randomly, I enter dreams of childhood  
and endless beached summers.

I'm roused by gentle pats on my shoulder –  
Hanna, my named nurse. *Lunch time?*  
she invites. *Let me help you up.*

Tomorrow's forecast is for rain.  
Hanna will fly home to Poland,  
away from Brexit's cold stares  
and complex paperwork.

None of us is where we need to be\*.

---

\*line borrowed from John Challis's poem, 'In Praise of the Flood', from his collection  
*The Resurrectionists*, Bloodaxe Books, 24 06 2021, ISBN 9781780375519

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon

## Smiles are Contagious

The first smile was shy,  
barely a movement of a Libyan refugee's lips,  
it landed in the eyes of an old woman  
who thought she was invisible.

She passed it on  
to a child being pulled along  
by a harassed mother  
who pushed a buggy with a howling infant inside.

The bairn shared his grin  
with the lollipop man  
who'd just had his old springer spaniel, Molly, put down.

The crossing man's lips stretched wide and kind  
as he stopped the traffic for a trans girl,  
a wheelchair user who often had to wait ages.

She beamed at the bucket drummer  
on the street corner,  
as it started to rain.

The shower cleared fast,  
and the sun twinkled  
on water running in the gutter

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon

and they laughed together before duetting,

*You Are My Sunshine.*

Soon

they were joined

by the refugee,

the old woman,

the mum and her kids

and the lollipop man.

Their shared smiles

powered them all to sing

into a happier day.



**Zaynab Bobi,**

*Frontier I,*

*is a Nigerian poet, digital artist, and photographer from Bobi. She is a member of Hilltop Creative Art Abuja branch, Poetry Club Udus, Frontier Collective, and a Medical Laboratory Science student of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. Her artworks and photographs are published and forthcoming in Blue Marble Review, Barren Magazine, Isele Magazine, Type House Literary Magazine, Night Coffee Lit, Wrongdoing Magazine, Rulerless Lit, Harbour Review, B'K Magazine, Olney Magazine, All My Relations, Salamander Ink, Anti-Heroin Chi, Acropolis Journal, and more. She tweets @ZainabBobi.*



*Give me light*

## *David Hay*

*is an English Teacher in the Northwest of England. He has written poetry and prose since the age of 18 when he discovered Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and the poetry of John Keats. These and other artists encouraged him to seek his own poetic voice. He has currently been accepted for publication in *Dreich*, *Abridged*, *Acumen*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Dawntreader*, *Versification*, *The Babel Tower Notice Board*, *The Stone of Madness Press*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Lake*, *Selcouth Station*, *GreenInk Poetry*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Seventh Quarry* and *Expat-Press*. His debut publication is the Brexit-inspired prose-poem *Doctor Lazarus* published by *Alien Buddha Press* 2021.*

David Hay

## Voiceless

D1

Good lord, this is a spineless  
wreck of a man.

D2

Doctor, he has the same facial  
expression as a worm,

Worrying but definitely comical

Yes I agree, quite humorous

Filthy mouth, dirty tongue –  
Shows an obvious lack of  
respect for hygiene

Quite repulsive, interesting but

Repulsive

He is addled no doubt  
by Freudian demons,

If the body symbolises  
impurity,

The mind must be a catalogue  
of perversity.

Exactly Doctor. Exactly.

Dead by 25.

Dead by 25.

Look at his eyes they never sit  
still

Give him a crayon, primary  
coloured and suicide proof

To transcribe his delusions?

Enter them,

Oh dear

Thumb his scars (a

## David Hay

His privates are nothing to speak of,  
The penis must always return  
To its flaccid state  
Stare at him until he  
internalises our judgement  
Embarrassed by bodily  
functions.  
Note it down.  
Thoughts are equal to actions  
Watch him, his internal  
monologue  
has done a runner  
Grub his brain and  
Let him take his nourishment  
Make one of your cocktails  
He's looping anyway  
Put Charlie Parker on  
And put some vomit of  
Kerouac In his hands

command)  
His girlfriend – well women are  
always disappointed .  
All men are weak.  
Cum flows grey like freight  
trains  
He is still ruled by sin  
Such words birth psychotics  
He'll be too much of himself  
for the rest of the day.  
Pornographic filth has overrun  
his nerves  
There is no cure for being a  
man  
His age is his main illness.

## David Hay

His life will be ascribed a yearly  
value

He is an investment,  
I'd bet my house on it.

My daughters are depending on  
him.

His death will be

Mundane

And full of beige roses

If he wakes

Console him

The earth is still round

It still charts gravity's path  
around the sun

He feels no one loves him

It is always the mother

He read too much Tolstoy  
when he  
was 18

Roosevelt was right.

Perversion comes naturally for  
pacifists.

His thoughts are not special

His illness is common and  
speaks not of artistic depths

He is normal and the world  
Mirrors every one of his fears

The key facts

The base facts

David Hay

19 and a nervous breakdown

The things he knows but can't  
accept

Pathetic.

25

25.

David Hay

**Eat the apple the world is screaming**

the married  
woman  
of translucent  
flesh  
holds tight  
her psalms  
burning autumnal  
as she eats  
the apple's flesh  
silver with  
the moon's  
light.

she knows  
the purple  
blossoms'  
of sin  
its taste  
tumid with  
despairing



David Hay

joy

held within

the groaning

furnace

of the night

her liquid tongue

broken red

by dawn

lacerates the

mourning man

with his phone

mollusced to his

silk pajamaed chest

thinking of cock

needled lips

plastic breasts

anything

but

her

the sterilized

David Hay

white-shirted choir  
sing hallelujah to  
the quick cum,  
the muted orgasm  
of the British wank

sighing inaudible  
she returns to  
her side  
of the bed  
its familiar  
coldness and  
masturbates  
silently

David Hay

## Autumn

Leafs like corpses  
lay bloated on the pavement,  
exposed to the sticky fingers of the sun,  
retreating under the timid skirt of the clouds.

Crucified by tears  
by the lines of sorrow  
dripping grief down flowerless sunsets  
craven as the morning wind,  
I make my first sacrifice to the day.

With eyes like razors  
I will section up the sky  
before burying every carcass of light  
deep within my belly until  
the landscape maps my bones.

## *Enna Horn*

*is an author, pianist, and polyglot who can be found haunting the woods of midwestern America. If they don't have their hand to the pen, then they're more than likely outside with their hand to the plough. If necessary, they can be summoned on their Twitter or Instagram @inkhallowed , or unearthed at their Tumblr @earthbloods .*

## Soundscape of the Last Night in June

To have a memory, there must be a cue—  
the barcarolle drifts, spliced with blues, a summer afternoon  
drenched in seawater. There has to be a cue, so touch  
the ivories, slick beneath your fingertips, slick in sound, in  
the water of the city's smog, dense enough to hold you still,

keep you on the black leather bench as your fingers numb.  
A good friend sits beside you, bony shoulder to your soft arm,  
his gaunt face serene, smoothed & drifting in the barcarolle,  
infused with life from the concerto. There's not much left of  
him.

There's not much left of you.

You tell him, *I don't know how to make you feel better.*  
He tells you, *There's nothing that will make me better,*  
*but there's enough here that will make me feel.*  
It has to be good enough. It has to be muted, hidden in the city,  
both of you disguised in the practise room swamp.

What do you do with a good friend like this?  
You try to make sure that you won't lose him, but you will.  
You try to make sure that you don't stop playing, but you must.  
Concertos bruise the fingertips like needles bruise his chest,  
but at least he gave permission for one of those to happen.

Bells peal from the bass-line, orchestral reduction, his hands  
narrow & spliced with jaundice, but tickling the upper register,  
somehow, you are a two-person concert, you open at the close,  
you sigh out the pain gathering in your bundles of nerves,  
you continue to stretch out the arpeggios that never end.

There must be a cue to have a memory:  
a summer afternoon clogs up your innards, gags you like the  
same passage in C minor, like the chords that take up too much  
space,  
like the hands that are too small to hold such hardship,  
but you do it anyway. You swallow it down anyway,

## Enna Horn

the dense water of the smog-city, & you hold still.  
You watch the grey of his shirt fade out into the mist,  
you go back to the piano & float in the barcarolle, pound out  
the concerto; you splice yourself with blue from the pedals,  
you sag against the piano lid, soft arm to its bony shoulder.

## *Zach Murphy*

*is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Reed Magazine, The Coachella Review, Maudlin House, Still Point Arts Quarterly, B O D Y, Ruminare, Wilderness House Literary Review, Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine, and more. His debut chapbook Tiny Universes (Selcouth Station Press, 2021) is available in paperback and e-book. He lives with his wonderful wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

Zach Murphy

## Opossum

Pete and Richard's orange safety vests glowed a blinding light under the scorching sun, and their sweat dripped onto the pavement as they stood in the middle of the right lane on Highway 61, staring at an opossum lying stiffly on its side.

Richard handed Pete a dirty shovel. "Scoop it up," he said.

Everything made Pete queasy. He once fainted at the sight of a moldy loaf of bread. Even so, he decided to take on a thankless summer job as a roadkill cleaner. At least he didn't have to deal with many people.

Richard nudged Pete. "What are you waiting for?" he asked.

Pete squinted at the creature. "It's not dead," he said. "It's just sleeping."

"Are you sure?" Richard asked as he scratched his beard. He had one of those beards that looked like it would give a chainsaw a difficult time.

"Yes," Pete said. "I just saw it twitch."

Richard walked back toward the shoulder of the road and popped open the driver's side door of a rusty pickup truck. "Alright, let's go."

Pete shook his head. "We can't just leave it here."

"It's not our problem," Richard said. "They tell us to do with the dead ones, but not the ones that are still alive."

Pete crouched down and took a closer look. "We need to get it to safety," he said.

Richard sighed and walked back toward the opossum. "What if it wakes up and attacks us?" he asked. "That thing could have rabies."



## Zach Murphy

“I don’t think anything could wake it up right now,” Pete said.

Richard belched, “It’s an ugly son of a gun, isn’t it?”

“I think it’s so ugly that it’s cute,” Pete said.

“No one ever says that about me,” Richard said with a chuckle.

“I guess I just haven’t crossed into that territory.”

Just then, a car sped by and swerved over into the next lane.

Pete and Richard dashed out of the way.

“People drive like animals!” Richard said. “We’d better get going.”

Pete took a deep breath, slipped his gloves on, gently picked up the opossum, and carried it into the woods.

“What are you doing?” Richard asked. “Are you crazy?”

After nestling the possum into a bush, Pete smelled the scent of burning wood. He gazed out into the clearing and noticed a plume of black smoke billowing into the sky. The sparrows scattered away, and the trees stood with their limbs spread, as if they were about to be crucified.

“Jesus Christ,” Pete whispered under his breath.

Pete picked up the opossum and turned back around.

*My name is*  
**Mario Loprete**  
*I'm an italian artist.*

*I wish show you my artistic project .*

*Painting for my is the first love. An important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which I want to send a message to transmit my message, it's the base of my painting. The sculpture is my lover; my artistic betrayal to the painting. That voluptuous and sensual lover that gives me different emotions, that touches prohibited cords...*

*In this year, I worked exclusively at my concrete sculptures .*

*For my Concrete Sculptures I use my personal clothing. Throughout some artistical process, in which I use plaster, resin and cement, I transform them in artworks to hang. My memory, my DNA, my memories remain concreted inside, transforming the person that looks at the artworks a type of post-modern archeologist that studies my work as they were urban artefacts.*

*I like to think that those who look at my sculptures created in 2020 will be able to perceive the anguish, the vulnerability, the fear that each of us has felt in front of a planetary problem that was covid 19 ... under a layer of cement there are my clothes with which I lived this nefarious period.*

*clothes that survived covid 19, very similar to what survived after the 2,000-year-old catastrophic eruption of Pompeii, capable of recounting man's inability to face the tragedy of broken lives and destroyed economies.*

*In the last 2 years about 250 international magazines wrote about my work turning on the spotlight on my art project , attracting the attention of important galleries and collectors.*

*I believe much in this project and I hope that I can exhibit in important art spaces other those already in program:*

*-from 4th september at North Carolina University of Charlotte*

*-from 1st october at Bibliotheke of Venlo in Netherlands*

*-from 5 may 2023 at AVAPAI COLLEGE PRESCOTT ART GALLERY of Prescott Arizona U.S.A.*

*-in september 2022 at Falkirk Cultural Center - SAN RAFAEL - U.S.A.*

*-in September 2023 at DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA in SAN RAFAEL - U.S.A.*

Mario Loprete

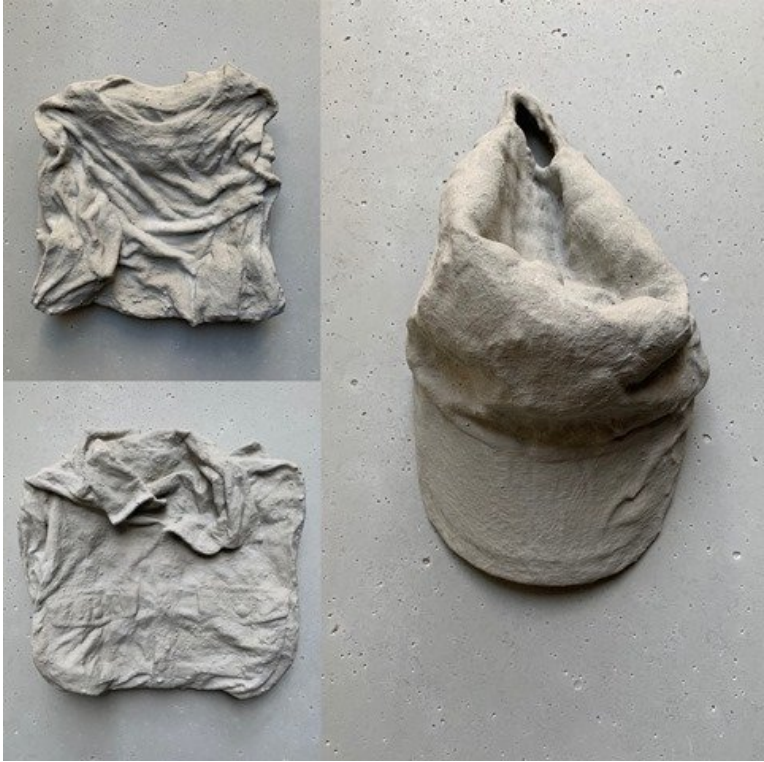


*Concrete Sculptures 2021*

Mario Loprete



*ANGEL*



*UNTITLED*



*UNTITLED*

Mario Loprete



*UNTITLED*

## ***Tracey Foster***

*started off in a long career as an Art and Design teacher but wanted to refocus her creative energies into writing poetry and prose. After helping others find inspiration in the world around us, she took an MA course in Creative Writing at Leicester University and has not looked back. She finds inspiration in the past and the events that shape us. Previous work has been published by CommaPress, Ayaskala, Bus Poetry Magazine and The Arts Council and writes regularly for the Everyone's Reviewing website.*



Tracey Foster

## Dusk Waiting

Leaving loved ones waving at a gate, I turn to

*dusk waiting.*

Cataracted cats' eyes hide sleepily under tarmac  
as spectacular sunsets fade to ghostly grey.

Postponing leaving till it's too dark and then facing

*dusk driving.*

The twilight hour commences to muddle with my senses  
so that near and far play a merry dance.

The sun tips the dimmer switch and turns to blush

*dusk creeping.*

A single star pin pricks the sky as the  
streetlights switch on a thousand suns.

Praying that you stay smiling until we next meet, no

*night news.*

Winking embers crest the brow ahead then  
dip and rise in hypnotic moves.

A silhouette breaks the form of a bridge overhead a

*night walker.*

One leg over the parapet and a vacant stare  
a quick glance up and then he's gone.

Tracey Foster

The trees and hedgerows cocoon me with

*night cover.*

The river rolls onwards and I never know  
if a stone was tossed to break its flow.

Tracey Foster

## Falling

Take me back to that daisy-chain daze  
as many petals, as the freckles splattered across my cheeks.  
Where I lay feet placed against brick and back on grass,  
scanning the skies for shapes in clouds.

The wind whipped them from candy floss to cotton tail.  
And the more I looked at the chimney pots  
black outline against the blue,  
the more the wall seemed to fall towards me.

Tracey Foster

## **Eatock's Pond**

Two shafts sunk into seams of black  
spew sludge and muck upon a mound.  
Wheel rotates forward and back  
where men in negative toil underground.

Back filled and capped and laid to rest  
shale left to moss and green cover.  
Gantry removed so the earth is left gorged  
where water collects and swirls.

Brown site built upon with a steady pace  
surrounds a pocket time capsule.  
Where children find an abandoned space  
to spin their stones onto.

Lonely water beckons the show-off  
tempts the wary into weakness.  
Calls to the fool to cast off his guard  
and dip his toe into the eerie.

## Tracey Foster

A call to climb aboard an old barn door  
and balance for all your worth.

Imagine it calling through the earth  
down to forests long forgotten.

## *Carson Pytell*

*is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominated writer living outside Albany, New York, whose work has appeared widely in such venues as Adirondack Review, Sheila-Na-Gig and The Heartland Review. He serves as Assistant Editor of Coastal Shelf and his fifth and sixth chapbooks; Tomorrow Everyday, Yesterday Too (Anxiety Press, 2022), and A Little Smaller Than the Final Quark (Bullshit Lit, 2022), are forthcoming.*

Carson Pytell

## Nails on a Dry Erase Board

Once,  
when we were all lined up  
and ready to head to lunch,  
we passed a whiteboard  
on which one of us had earlier written:  
"LIFE'S TOO SHORT TO JUDGE".

Another  
of us towards the front of the line,  
when she turned and saw it,  
added the other 'O' where it needed  
to be all the while muttering:  
"People are so dumb."

We  
were in the adult ward  
of a psychiatric hospital,  
all getting along wonderfully and  
feeling comfortable in ourselves.  
I never have left that line.

Carson Pytell

## Practicing Agnostic Atheism

I had to look it up, the right way to say how I feel about religion or even deism. I was a Church kid so much so that I didn't think not to capitalize that despite being dragged outta there mid-2000's.

Guess my folks' belief was strong enough to even if I never stepped near the altar before or after communion. When we left the Church we still went on Easter and Christmas.

It just confuses me how I've never not gone to a Church for a funeral and that my mom still prays her entire Rosary every evening. But what to call hope for happiness if not prayer?

But a Church is only a building like a brothel or liquor store, and prayer is dumb especially when you know God helps most those who help themselves to finding their own Damned optimism.



Carson Pytell

## I tried to tell a story

and as the story was told  
it was all too clear  
that  
no one could really tell it,

but all's fine in the world half-conscious  
when I know more than by believing so  
that flights of angels stoke my heart to love,

and as I told myself that  
it became too clear  
that  
I couldn't say so out loud.

## ***Fadilah Ali***

*is a Nigerian writer living in Edo State. She is currently studying for her MSc in Food Microbiology. Her works have appeared in Briefly Write Magazine, and Overtly Lit. Find her on Twitter @/partyjollofism where she is either tweeting a new word she made up, or sharing her Strong Food Opinions.*

## To Walk The Street Home, Mad

The street is your metaphor for a fallow game of chess. For a ton of grey lives lived all at

once, for a smack of cowardice, for you. And all the fantasies you allow yourself at night.

The street is the scene where a thousand heartbeats skip. Today, like always, you walk the

street home, mad. Your backpack is haunted with books from a fever dream, and you wish

the street boys didn't call you professor. You are so forlorn, professor. They are so fortunate,

the boys. This is your life. This is where you collapse, where you bleed a river of hemlock.

The street carves your angst into the body of the world's oldest ghost. If you look back, there is

nothing. If you look ahead, there is but a happy man who once thought himself immortal.

The street is how you learn that your metaphor is flawed. You know little and less about chess.

This is your truth. These are the empty recesses of your soul. Tomorrow when you walk

the street home, mad, you will gaze into silvered glass to find  
older selves lingering in the ether.

You will choke on your canines. And you will live these  
checkered lives again and again.

## *Sadie Maskery*

*lives in Scotland by the sea. Her first chapbook, Push, is published by Erbacce Press ([erbacce-press.co.uk/sadie-maskery](http://erbacce-press.co.uk/sadie-maskery)).*





*Towpath*

Sadie Maskery



*Bridge*



Sadie Maskery



*Last train, or, Tracks*

Sadie Maskery



*Breakwater*

## ***Krista Sanford***

*graduated from Ball State University with her BA in Creative Writing and Literature. She is currently the HR and Media Manager for a marketing firm in Indianapolis, IN, where she is able to split her time between working and submitting her writing. In her free time, she loves to read and hang out with her dog and kitten.*

*You can find her on Instagram at [@k.leesan](#) and at her website, [www.kleesan.com](http://www.kleesan.com).*

Krista Sanford

## The First Pick

I remember the first time I did it.

It was a sunny Saturday in the middle of July. I should've been outside playing with my friends, but I was too afraid to move from my hiding spot under my bed because I didn't want to interrupt the fight my parents were having in the living room. Instead, I stayed under the bed, lying on my side and wishing I could just disappear.

I was six.

When I heard my father slap my mother, making her cry out in pain, I brought my legs close to my chest. The scab was on my knee. I got it a few days ago while playing at the park. Tripped over my own two feet and fell into the wood chips. Usually I had a band aid on it, but my mother started fighting with my father before she could put one on and I didn't know where the band aids were kept.

Now, I touched the scab, feeling the roughness of it. It made my skin bumpy, a flaw in my otherwise perfect skin. My parents' shouts were getting worse now. I could hear my mother screaming in between cries. I didn't know what they were fighting about; I wondered if they even knew.

I took my finger and slowly started picking around the edges of the scab. I didn't like the rough patch; I wanted my skin to be smooth again. Perfect. So that at least something in my life could be perfect again.

The scab came off in one motion. I only had to pull a little right

## Krista Sanford

at the end.

Then I watched as the small circle filled with blood.

I was mesmerized, watching it pool into a dome but not fall out of the edges of the scab.

It took me a moment to realize that everything was quiet.

The fighting was still in the background, but I wasn't listening to it

as I stared at my bloody knee and the dead skin from the scab that was now on my finger.

I remember feeling excited.

All I'd ever wanted was a way to hide the screams. Nothing I ever did—

crying at them to stop,

yelling with them,

trying to block the blows they were throwing at each other—ever worked; but this,

this would work. And they didn't even have to know.

It was my little secret. A way for me to stay sane in the world crumbling around me.

Sure enough, the next time they started fighting, I picked another scab.

This one wasn't as fresh as the other, and I had to work a little harder to get the scab to bleed.

That just meant a longer silence from the fighting.

The more my parents fought, the more I picked my scabs.

By the time I went back to school that fall, I was starting to pick them

even when my parents weren't fighting.

When my homework was too hard, I picked;

when there was drama between my friends, I picked;

when I was scared or nervous, I picked.

Something changed in me that day under my bed.

I'd found a way to bottle up all of my anxiety and let it out without hurting anyone.

It was the best.

I felt alive.

Krista Sanford

And I knew I wouldn't stop.

## *Rev Joe Haward*

*is an author, poet, and heretic. Born into an Indian family, Joe was adopted with his identical twin brother and grew up transracial in the UK.*

*Alongside two published nonfiction books, he works as a freelance journalist challenging political, societal, and religious corruption, with articles regularly featured in the national news site, Byline Times.*

*His work can be found in various publications, where he writes horror, noir, and transgressive fiction. His poetry has also been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.*

*His debut novel, *Burning the Folded Page* (Cinnabar Moth Publishing) will be released in 2023. He is also working on his first poetry collection, a novella, and two further novels. Find him on Twitter @RevJoeHaward.*

Joe Howard

## Pastor

Scream

Michael Myers

Jason Voorhees

Predator

Masked monsters with little on you

Teeth glistening under stage lights

A smile staged for bright recruits.

Perfumed promises intoxicating vulnerable minds

Soon a rotting stench offered like incense to bullshit gods.

Abuse

Trauma

Poverty

Despair

“Throw in a dime for it all to disappear.”

Desperate knees burn on the ground of regret

Tongues stretched for body and blood

You whisper anything is possible



## Joe Howard

“Will you give flesh and soul to it all?”

Heaven remains silent

Depression buries me deeper in its tomb

You'll pray for demons to release me

Thank god when I leave you forever.

Unholy creatures offer a treat

But the mask will eventually slip

How sweet the moment

When you walk away for good.

*Robert Okaji*

*is a half-Japanese Texan living in Indiana. The author of multiple chapbooks, his work has appeared or is forthcoming in Book of Matches, The Night Heron Barks, Threepenny Review, Vox Populi and elsewhere.*

## Which is Not to Say Never

If only  
that splash  
of cold water would awaken me,

this dream  
could forget I existed,  
allowing new breath

and a little rest  
to refreshen  
my opened eyes.

## Emergence

I swallow pebbles, climb trees.  
Through branches burdened with fruit.  
Of poisoned memories and laughter.  
Questioning my scar's value.  
Whether polished or rough.  
Uttered or merely mouthed.  
Whole or ripped through.  
These syllables, forced.  
A ringing not meant for ears.

## Closure

Or the mountain, which is  
no mountain  
                  but a thought  
ascending

grief, one small  
stone stepped onto  
                  then away from  
recognition

down that walkway  
amid  
                  the fragrant  
pause

wild onions  
and buzzing wasps  
                  opening  
into

this particular day  
we name  
                  closure.

## The Secret

In the name lies a wolf  
stitched to a deed.  
All sounds  
fade, colors  
dim  
even in the bluest  
afternoon;  
I am small but large.  
Half of one,  
yet complete.

***Sean Ennis***

*is the author of CHASE US: Stories and his recent flash fiction has appeared in Pithead Chapel, Bending Genres, X-R-A-Y and New World Writing. More of his work can be found at [seanennis.net](http://seanennis.net)*

## HER HEALTH WAS GENERALLY FINE

But Grace called saying she thought, maybe, quite possibly, though doubtful, she was having a heart attack. I was about to leave work when she said, no, wait a minute, that's it, it's over, I'm fine. I didn't feel great about the last fifteen seconds, but I wasn't a doctor. I said, call me back. There was a small part of me wishing for an emergency, I admit it. I wanted Grace safe, but a surprise day off, the adventure and company of a waiting room, interactions with health professionals: this all sounded a-ok for Tuesday. Does no one else feel this way, with this terroristic imagination? The glee about the busted water main, etc.? Now you want to know what I do for a living, and do I have insurance. Reunited at dinner, Grace says she believes the pain and discomfort came from an air bubble in her chest, though there is no such thing as this diagnosis. I don't care. She likes this little story, and it's better than dying young or being scared of being startled. The consensus remains that she'll outlive me, thank god.



*M Patrick Riggin*

*is a Pittsburgh born writer, artist and musician.*

*mpatrickriggin.com*



*Illini*



*Dome 2020*

## ***Bernard Pearson***

*'s work appears in many publications, including; Aesthetica Magazine , The Edinburgh Review, Crossways, The Gentian, Nymphs, The Poetry Village, Beneath The Fever, The Beach Hut, & Little Stone. In 2017 a selection of his poetry 'In Free Fall' was published by Leaf by Leaf Press. In 2019 he won second prize in The Aurora Prize for Writing,*

*Twitter @BernardPearso19*

Bernard Pearson

## Big Dipper

The winter sky, moon mocked  
And torn with stars as I walked home,  
The tear-drowned, teenage me,  
Howled out and full of woe.  
I crashed up that country hill  
Wishing I was dead.  
But as it turned out  
I didn't die; the past did.

© Bernard Pearson

## *John Grey*

*is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Hollins Critic. Latest books, "Leaves On Pages" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Ellipsis, Blueline and International Poetry Review.*

John Grey

## Evicted

Soundless, a blessing,  
accompanied by a wide road,  
neck, face,  
of a woman looking up,  
walking fast,  
now the night's skylight  
creeps like a baby  
across the dark floor,  
and fast cars zip by.

Hopelessness subdues  
the streetlights,  
flows through them,  
blanching their faces,  
their breath,  
and many layers deeper.

She can only speak to him,  
he to her,  
down a stretch of shadow,  
to some place  
that is never enough –  
an alley, an overpass,  
the front steps of a church –  
for all the motion in them,  
they can never quite say,  
“We’re here.”

John Grey

## How Should I Know

So why are we where we are?  
When I try to conceive of it,  
the randomness takes a chunk out of my brain.  
When I look in the mirror.  
the reflection is an accident,  
happy or otherwise, I've yet to decide.  
No doubt the sun had something to do with it.  
It's so haughty in the sky, just like a father.  
But like an architect as well.  
And not just us. But all the other species.  
They're far less self-aware, the lucky creatures.  
They get by on instinct.  
Sometimes, we have to be brave.

And what's life anyhow?  
Just death with the lights tuned on?  
Or a physical presence that  
operates from within?  
And what about Earth?  
It's not risk free  
but it provides just enough  
for survival until morning.  
So why does it bother?  
Maybe it keeps enough of us around  
because it likes the company.

So what's the point of wondering?  
There are no answers.  
Of course, there's always religion,  
that old scream-stifler.  
It provides no explanation  
but it does offer an out.  
And then there's just plain pragmatism.  
Whatever the reason,  
it's not for me to know.  
And the bars are open.  
Nothing like a stiff drink  
to put meaning on notice.



John Grey

## House Fire

They're all alive.  
Four mouths pant furiously  
like firehoses of air.  
They repeat that blessing  
back and forth  
so their ears will hear something  
that their eyes do not see.

The roof glows orange.  
Black smoke flees through  
a second-floor window.  
Flashing lights of rescue  
can't out-dazzle  
those marauding licks of flame.

The husband's big and burly  
but size is of no matter  
to the crumbling house.  
He hugs his wife, son and daughter.  
His brawn works with them a little.

Firemen shout,  
run in all directions,  
cops back people away,  
while a stranger  
in a white coat asks,  
"Is this everyone?"  
Two adults, two children,  
huddle in trembling disbelief.  
Yes, it is everyone.  
It feels good to have a name.

## ***Sheila E. Murphy***

*is the recipient of the Gertrude Stein Award for her book Letters to Unfinished J. (Green Integer Press, 2003). Her most recent book is Golden Milk (Luna Bisonte Prods, 2020). Reporting Live from You Know Where won the Hay(na)Ku Poetry Book Prize Competition (Meritage Press (U.S.A.) and xPress(ed) (Finland), 2018). Also in 2018, Broken Sleep Books brought out the book As If To Tempt the Diatonic Marvel from the Ivory.*

Sheila E. Murphy

### Three Ghazals

1/

World premiere of his icy composition on triangle  
revealed the tonsure of neglect that brought him curbside.

A vintner knows his grapes, one would surmise, and thereby  
fastens visual attention on a gustatory reminiscence.

In the food court of diminishing returns, the planet mercury  
performs a moon walk for the mirror gentling our way forward.

Monastic orders comprehend the interweaving of  
some integers, selected crayons, and a canvas.

An idea man who codified emotion  
left his collection of clothespins to the docents.

## Sheila E. Murphy

2/

Imitation personalities go fast on auction sites.  
To gather hand-weighed strings of pearls to match takes time.

Paternity differs from fatherhood in much the same way  
that mimesis stays estranged from sacraments, with little to  
discuss.

At the lip of freedom is a story on the news of discerning  
members of a growing audience who want to craft  
relationships.

In a room with windows dark there are no seasons to assume,  
One selects not quite at random from among experiences.

Early in the class, the teacher assigned us to write on  
"How it feels to be alive," but I was still young and conceptual.

## Sheila E. Murphy

3/

Five-thirty a.m. prettifies the landscape blotted otherwise with heat.

The household gallery holds feature photography of snorkels.

He gave me up for Lent, ahead of my intended venture to New Orleans.

That was before the, you know, and before the other thing you've read about.

Jazz ministers get rough with lay-by congregations who speak laissez-faire all day.

Show me a filament of mercy sometime when the wood smell is as good as tunes.

Crafts kicked the bucket list in elementary my dear grade school, the board feathered underparts of desks and swivel chairs and dusted rungs of book space.

Lamentations rinse the thought that someone once deserved something that no one ever earned the way a moment is received and held like a caesura on the page.

*Peter Mladinic*

*'s fourth book of poems, Knives on a Table is available from Better Than Starbucks Publications. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico.*

## Soldier

1

We give them rifles, metals,  
statues to fallen ones.

Who've never been soldiers  
don't know what a soldier is.

Who've never been in a war  
don't know, just as those

who've never been mothers  
or fathers don't know parenthood.

That's natural. It's right  
that one war is all wars,

not like but is. War is war.

Soldiers find themselves in a war.  
Draftees, volunteers, all said yes.

To the fallen, we place flags  
at headstones, erect statues.

The fallen soldiers' metals  
sit in a drawer or behind glass

framed and hanging on walls,  
the rifles passed on

to soldiers who go to war.

## Peter Mladinic

2

Only the soldier knows what a soldier is.  
I don't know, though some reading this do,  
who are or were. My idea after the soldier  
is a civilian he or she stays a soldier.  
One could say I was and am no longer.  
You, if you've never been, can know what  
a soldier is like but not what a soldier is.

They go to war, are in war, fight, whatever  
form that takes, part of the war machine  
sprawl. All who go choose to go, draftees,  
volunteers. Reasons vary: defend a country,  
avoid jail, live on the edge, or simply cave  
to doing what others want them to do.  
Ones who've been in war know what war is.

People living where the war is, they know,  
children especially. They have no choice.  
Civilians who are part of the war machine  
have a choice. In war a few profit.  
Many die. War goes against human nature  
or maybe it doesn't, two could argue.  
If there were no soldiers there'd be no war.



## Voyeur

He crosses his legs. At home  
in his imitation leather white chair  
he unfolds a paper,  
a poem titled "Lauds" by Robert Potter,  
his friend with heart disease.  
"Lauds" names all the drugs  
Potter and people like him take to live.  
He scratches his head.  
The lines are long. "Lauds"  
in three sections takes up the page.  
It's very good. He puts the poem  
on a table and looks out his window  
at a brick wall and other windows.  
The woman who lives in the building  
adjacent to his drinks a lot.  
He saw her one late afternoon  
raise a fifth to her mouth and drink.  
It was starting to get dark.  
She wasn't sipping but drinking,  
and not for long.  
She wasn't in the window very long.  
He didn't want her to see him,  
of course. She wore a bra  
and nothing else from the waist up.  
He saw her more than once,  
but from that one late afternoon  
he was sure, by the way she raised  
the bottle to her mouth, her drinking  
was compulsory.  
Upstairs from him a woman  
named Peterson lived alone. Susan or, he  
wants to say, Elaine, but that's not it.  
They went out to dinner one night.  
Across a table she told him  
some years back her father,  
terminally ill with cancer, shot and killed  
her brother and a male friend  
of her brother in the family garage.

## Peter Mladinic

Up in her apartment she opened  
a desk drawer and took out  
a news-clip about the double homicide.  
Her father died soon after.  
Ms Peterson had a young daughter  
who visited her.  
The neighbors down the hall  
knocked on his door. They asked  
to use his phone, a green phone  
that sat on a small brown end table.  
The neighbors, Todd and Kelly,  
took turns speaking on his phone.  
Kelly's blonde hair fell past her shoulders.  
She wore glasses. He wondered if  
the woman in the window  
in the building next to his wore glasses.  
He was only in Todd and Kelly's one time.  
It was dark, crowded. He stepped  
through a curtain of beads and tripped  
on a lamp cord.  
Robert Potter died in early summer,  
he learned on the phone  
in a house split into apartments,  
another part of the country.  
Trees were different, the topography,  
mountains as opposed to the plains  
he'd come from, leaving Todd and  
Kelly who lived down the hall,  
and Ms. Peterson, blonde like Kelly,  
only thick where Kelly was lithe.  
Neither full-figured nor slender,  
the woman at dusk in the window.  
A light is on. Wearing only a bra  
and panties she lifts a fifth  
to her mouth and drinks.

Peter Mladinic

## The Unholy Three

The gift wrapped carton of smokes Hector  
hands Echo is the irony, a month later Echo/  
Lon would die of lung cancer. There he is,  
cuffed to a detective, open caboose

platform his stage, hand on brow a salute  
to Rosie and Hector, I'll send you a postcard  
(from the grave) to them, and to his fans.  
The scene before he boards, prison-bound,

between Echo and Rosie, a tear, a smile,  
is touching but not as touching as the end  
of the silent, done five years before, where  
Echo sits on a platform that looks like

a shoe shine stand, in his lap a dummy,  
(Echo the ventriloquist in the silent, another  
irony.) Indoors, different from the talkie's  
train scene. Rosie walks out of the camera's

view. He takes the dummy closer in to his  
chest, that subtle embrace, that desire to  
hold near, part of Lon's genius. The talkie is  
better, but nothing can top the silent's end.

***Mark Jackley***

*lives in Purcellville, Virginia, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. His poems have appeared in Cagibi, Talking River, Natural Bridge, and other journals. This summer, Main Street Rag Press will publish his book of poems Many Suns Will Rise.*

Mark Jackley

## Firefly

soul brother,

lighthouse and  
the boat  
breath blows

Mark Jackley

## January

on a dying branch  
in chill  
and fog  
the bloody-  
crowned  
woodpecker  
declares for life  
by leaving  
another  
fresh wound

I

woke up  
at 3 a.m. again  
pressed a  
sweaty palm  
against the  
factually hard  
the logically  
cool and smooth  
headboard  
of the bed again  
to prove I'm  
something more  
than a dream of  
something that  
probably  
slept through

## **Tom Ball**

*has published novels, novellas, short stories and flash in "Green Wall," "Down in the Dirt magazine," "Defenestrationism.net," "Exterminating Angel.com" "Conceit Magazine and its imprints" "Gargoyle Magazine," "SpillwordsPress.com," "PBW magazine," "Fleas on the Dog Online," "Sparrow's Trumpet," "TRSFR/ Sip Cup," "Poetry Pacific," "postcardshorts.ca," "The Local Train Magazine," "Lone Star Magazine," and others.*

*Tom is currently a senior editor at "FLEAS ON THE DOG" (fleasonthedog.com)*



## Drugs for Every Occasion

I was talking with Sally about greenhouses on Mars. She said, “They grew food, but mostly they grew new drug plants which were patented and made them rich. They had a new drug for every occasion, like courtship drugs, sex drugs, comfort for your mind drugs, work ethic drugs, drugs to make one more charitable, imagination drugs, brain drugs to alter your mind for the better in oh so many ways, including making you a freak mind or changing your body and changing your sex including having multiple sex organs. And there were drugs for stimulating sleep and drugs to keep you thin, and drugs to immunize you against potential biological weapons. And I like to take dream enhancers. And so on.” I said “I’d like, as a scientist to make drugs for confidence. You know, like confidence for the lower class allowing them to move up the ladder of success. And confidence in trying to love someone. And such. And I’d also desire to make a drug to change one’s body color. And also increase one’s passion for life. The sky is the limit! She said, “I am working on a series of drugs that will

## Tom Ball

eliminate the need for humans to breathe for an hour or so at a time. This would allow humans to walk around on various Planets and Moons without oxygen or teleport to airless places.” I said, “Brilliant!” And she said, “One day I’d like to invent a drug which facilitates one becoming a hologram for a short time. Holograms are the future.” I said, “Perhaps we would be androids instead. As it is we are all cyborgs with all our brain apps, but holograms are a possibility. Maybe some would prefer one or the other.” And she said, “I was getting bored with life and would like to take a cryogenic drug so he could wake up in the future.” The cryogenic drug was basically a preservative and some of this drug class, allowed one to dream while frozen or so it was said. And I said, “I was bored, too. And would like to merge brains with my favorite woman. We would each exchange a half of our brain with one another. And we needed drugs in order to facilitate the transfer. I guess it would make me into a type of multi-sexual, but my mind was open. And I thought the whole idea was kinky.” She said, “There are many freaks these days. Who use drugs to think bizarre thoughts. Or hallucinogenic drugs to see deeper into Reality.” I

## Tom Ball

said, “Yes, hallucinogenic drugs can produce altered states of mind.” She said, “Altered states and parallel Worlds are definitely the future.” I said, “But I spend most of my time daydreaming on appropriate dream drugs. I am just another dreamer who wishes to live my dreams to the full.”

Tom Ball

**Tales from a Remote Distance, Vol. 3, 1 Flash (07)  
To Be a Merman**

Then one day I found myself in full scuba gear, checking out the sea life. The fish including whales, dolphins etc., along with seals, penguins etc. still lived on. But the seas were dominated by freak human sea life. Everywhere were underwater floating cities and the freaks communicated by mind reading and lived to interbreed with other species. All sea freaks could breed with all others, and they could all breed with humans too. I had a beleaguering series of creatures getting in my mind one after the other (your mind could only interact with one other creature at a time). And I understood them, and they all wanted to breed with me and have offspring. But I wasn't attracted to the vast majority of them. But there were some big breasted mermaids that turned me on, so I loved a couple of those. Of course, I would never meet any children that were conceived by them from my sperm, but it was my understanding that they were very fertile. But loving the mermaids burnt me out and my oxygen was low, so I left the sea and swam to land. My

## Tom Ball

girlfriend was there to greet me, and she looked worried. I didn't tell her about the mermaids. I told her, "The sea was boring, and I wouldn't want to go back." The latter was true, I didn't want to go back. And my girlfriend said, "I thought maybe you would join the sea freaks forever." I told her that, "I loved her." Over the next few nights, I had dreams of the mermaids and loved them in the dream, and when I awoke, I was convinced they'd pinpointed me by satellite and got in my head for real. But anyway, the dreams were pleasant, and I was sexually excited to love my girlfriend. As the days went by the dreams intensified and I felt the sea calling me, so after a few weeks of it, I returned to the sea and asked them to change me into a merman. And I never looked back.

## The War Between Liberals and Conservatives

Vera said, “This War is crippling our quality of life.” The War was between the Liberals and the Conservatives. Liberals laughed at the Conservatives saying they were “backwards” and “foolish.” The Conservatives meanwhile called the Liberals, “mad” for their plans for all out progress and would bring about the Apocalypse. The people were evenly divided and both sides had the most up to date weapons. There were some gruesome major battles and a lot of guerilla warfare and after a few months of War the population of Earth fell to 3 billion, down from 10 billion. Finally, both sides agreed on a ceasefire, but both groups continued to arm themselves as well as create almost invincible android and robot fighters and everyone had missiles on their air cars. Then after a year of peace, War broke out again and this time it was all out war and finally there were just a few thousand people left, mostly hiding in underground bunkers. Vera and I were survivors and we built up a freehold, but it was just her and I and a few thousand battle robots. I loved Vera deeply. Time passed quickly and soon our four children were all grown up and we needed to find them a mate. But we were not in touch with any other humans. So we used a radio transmitter to try and locate other nice, neutral, open-minded people. But all we got was emptiness. And it was too dangerous to travel due to radioactivity. We wondered if we were the only survivors? So, we married each of our two daughters to each of our two sons, a type of dual marriage. And soon Vera and I were old, our supply of eternal youth medicine had long since been used up and we passed away, each in the same week.

*Hec Lampert-Bates*

*is an emerging writer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is interested in surrealism and literary fiction. His story "Rex Najus" is to be published in CafeLit in March 2022.*

## Grave Chameleon

Of course, few go missing once they're gone, but a gentle many are always exempt.

You are in the backseat of my van, its crust exfoliating your cheeks. You are dead. I can't remember where I'm going, but an old tradition must be kept in the eyes of progress, conceptualizing, renovating, if you will. You will not, because you are dead.

Again, my shovel, wrot with wormish residue and the earth's own bile, falls from its place on the passenger's seat. My legs offend me. Has my shape devolved to a hump where terror lurks every time my skin touches another part of itself? Is it now contemptuous to engage in a residing flesh connection? I suppose that's just an elegant way of saying I dislike the feel of my thighs resting against each other. Uneasy, leather, static, ill describe my discomfort at this current moment. Driving always does it worst. Naturally, as all would do, I rest that spade's handle between them. That's far superior.

I recall now. I'm no beast, as I thought. I do no harm nor rectify it in a hole. I am simply an undoer, a mover and this is a far better place for you - in the



## Hec Lampert-Bates

back of my car - for now.

I frown and turn to look, but my eyes aren't privy to peek. They'd rather prevent a crash, and search front and to the left for newcomers. No one's out by now, but they could be. That one headlight's gone out to mask the sudden appearance of my neighbor Joe, or his brother Jime, or their pet Jamanther, reading that terrible book of his. You know the one. I'm afraid I can't be too cautious. They could just be - on the road at any time. I can't be too wary. It's all bad, it's no good, it's nothing but confused if we're both graveless.

A roped up heron flies only three inches from the windshield - a folly act. Would it ever stop that? Six times I've been Surprised! by it. Next, I'll be ready. Wiper fluid ought to coax it out of that habit. Further than that, I'd have to name it.

I'm afraid nothing of interest has happened with you. You're still dead. How was it again? It might have been a wanderings at the wrong dumpster past 25, or maybe those boulder dealings went north. If I was still a questioning one, I'd group all this up with your spill-waying. Or was it mine? Doesn't matter. I'm not the dead one.

## Hec Lampert-Bates

A swallow. Did you just swallow? No, you couldn't have.  
You are dead. It must have  
been another bird. Was it?

I partly expected a hitch of this size, but partly never  
covers for a Surprise! It's sort of  
like the ringing of a purple bell; not as in the bell is surprising,  
neither is the purpleness of its  
ring, but still this example has nothing to do with my point. I'm  
attempting to say, write, narrate,  
convey to them that I was ready for neither the heron, nor  
swallow nor next-

"I believe I'm a lizard," you say from the hindseat, its  
crust caked to your speech.

At that nonsense, we both screech, mine mangled in a  
zoonotic twist, yours normal - what  
you'd expect from a grave chameleon. We plummet to a crater  
beside our road.

We are dead, I think.

## *Gene J. Parola*

*is a cultural historian retired to Hawai'i to delve into Hawaiian Native family history." Married in" to a Chinese-Hawaiian ohana, his ten years of research resulted in the award-winning, Lehua, Ka'o a Ka Wahine. He has two mysteries and three collectlons of short stories as well.*

Gene J. Parola

## The Looking Glass

It was an odd shaped remnant of a much larger mirror held aloft by a halter of twine. It hung over a hearth protected by a stone mantel projecting out from the wall.

“Well, yous look fine ta me. Yous a pretty thing.” She studied the reflected image a few moments, her head the only thing she could move.

“But he ain’ gwine mess witch you. Naw, he ain’,” she sobbed.

She lay on a dirty straw mattress, arms and legs tied to separate corners of the small ramshackle room. She could only pull the dirty string Glory had put in her fingers.

“Yous is free an’ gonna stay free.”

She pulled the string. The newborn pulled its bloody tether and cried a single howl.

The noises brought Glory and Slim Jim from outside. A curious girl child peeked from the open door.

“Dammit, Glory, I tol’ ya ta stay wit her. Now, look at what she did.”

## Gene J. Parola

“Oh, no, Mister. Jim. Dat ole mir bin hanging on de wall fo’ ever. It jus’ got tired alookin’, I ‘spect.”

The mirror had fallen to the stone mantel and scattered broken slivers that fanned out, stabbing every thing in a wide arc. One sizable shard teetered on the edge of the mantel.

The baby bled, her mamma cried. The baby died. The girl child fled.

Jim knocked Glory to the floor. “Damn you. He gonna be mad as hell. Dat baby gwine be wuth two three hunnert dollas in a yar er two.”

“Yessa,” Glory agreed, covering a smile by not looking up. “Guess she *wuz*.”

“Her mamma done it a purpose, din’ she? She moved that mirror...an yo’s helped her. Din’ ye?” Jim yelled.

“Who you tink dat baby blongs to?”

“He gone beat yo ass, I bet. You ‘sposed ta keep her from hutton dat chile.”

“I hadda go pee. Anyway, her mama done kep’ *nobody* from hutton dat chile.”

## Gene J. Parola

“This th’ second time she done dat. Nex’ time he gonna stretch her out in de fruit cellar. Cold or no cold.”

“Mebbey ain’ gwine a be no nex’ time. She near gouged his eyes out las’ time.”

“They gonna be. He just tie her up tighter. She pay off big. Her babies always strong. Besides he lik’ the way she fight when he take her. He shows everybody how big and stiff he is cause she fight so hard. He says it make everybody watchin’ look out fo they sef, cause he *massa* round here.

“Mos’ th’ time,” Glory nodded. “Massa monster.”

There was yelling and crying and running and shoving outside. The plantation owner...the *massa* was coming. Red-eyed mad, he stormed through the open door and up to the tiny corpse.

The one window was filled with large-eyed faces that whispered prayers. Others stood at the fear barrier of an open door, in terrible anticipation of what might come.

“Yo’ bitch ,” he yelled, kicking away the dead child with the toe of a dirty boot, before turning his full wrath on the smiling captive. The smile turned into a grimace of pain as he

## Gene J. Parola

struck her with the short buggy whip. Leaving a red welt across the naked body wherever it landed, it never erased the smile that always came back after the momentary frown of pain.

“It hurts, massa,” she shouts between strokes. “Yo doing a fin’ job a hurtin’ me, masa....

Yo th’ bes hurtin’ massa in all th’ county... massa.”

At first the chant sped up and increased the intensity of the abuse, then a titter from Daffy Sally triggered the nervous tension of the gathered crowd and someone began to laugh.

The beater came to a staggering exhausted stop as he turned toward the door, shaking the whip at the fleeing throng.

“Shut up, goddamed animals. Yos gone laugh at me? Yo the stinkiest, lowest thing ever made, an yo laugh at me? Hahaal.”

He whirled on Glory. “Git this damned place clean up, yo lazy bitch. Ah gone sho all’yus who’s boss ’round he’a.”

With that, he recited with measured words his deliberate acts: “Ah’m gonna fix this bitch right here. I’m cutting her one leg loose...” The leg sagged down, the knee bent, toes touched the floor. “and Ah’m droppin’ ma pants and

## Gene J. Parola

Ah'm gonna work ma stock up to where it's hard an mean! "

As he did he turned in an arc so Jim and Gloria and the new crowd at the door and the gaggle at the window— could all witness the manipulation of his gross man-thing.

"It'a a foot long, if it's an inch!," he bellowed, flopping the flaccid mass from side to side.

Some of the women gathered kids, some of the men muttered and turned away. Somewhere a woman prayed a long keening plea. Somewhere else a man cursed, and another quieted him; others spirited him away.

By now the pumping had become frenzied. His blood balked to come to the fistful of gristle—put off perhaps by the gore on the hand that had touched a naked bloody breast.

He slumped down, his back to the still taut tethered leg of his victim. He pumped, all his effort and attention bent on arousing the reluctant beast.

The story varies now with the teller. Some would say that Slim Jim did nothing, others said he did not see the free leg rise up and lock the knee joint around the massa's throat. Some said Jim was busy shooing the crowd away.



## Gene J. Parola

Some said, Glory was picking up big pieces of broken mirror and did not see the last teetering shard angle off the mantel and fall on the semi rigid member temporarily released while both the massa's hands pulled at the ankle beginning to cut off breath and curtailing excessive activity. Glory said later that the cutting edge of the shard was exactly twelve inches long.

It was then that the tardy blood arrived—in great throbbing arcs with each quickening pump of a heart, afraid now because it was not getting oxygen.

One cross-eyed old lady claims that Glory was around the other side pulling the foot to help tighten the hold the leg held on a skinny neck. But no one paid her any mind.

No onlooker remembers seeing anything after the massa sat down to masturbate. Pressed to tell, they all declared it a too private thing to watch.

What is pretty sure is that Jim closed the door and Glory closed the potato sack curtains then they watched the massa squirm away his life in the iron grip of a creature that he had no humane respect for. The artery dutifully delivered its

## Gene J. Parola

crimson arc long after the massa had passed out. He would have had little to live for with his shortened ability, they decided.

They swore that after turning away from their tasks the massa was sprawled out unconscious. The coroner suspected a heart attack brought about by 'over exertion'.

The country doctor who accompanied the coroner counted thirty four lash marks on the mother's body.

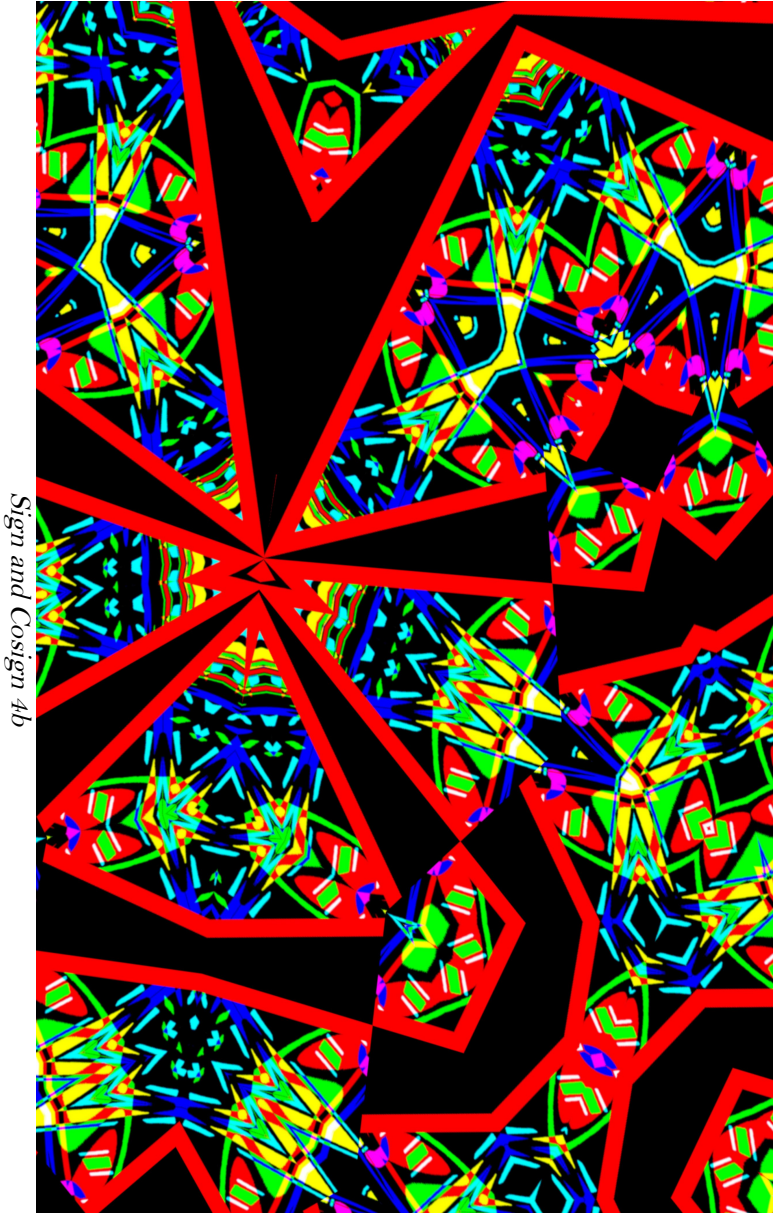
Glory died of flu in the winter. Jim ran away just before the Union troops arrived. The cross-eyed woman ran off with a traveling peddler.

Meanwhile three million, nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety seven other slaves went about their suffering unaware of this small victory in this small room in this small house.

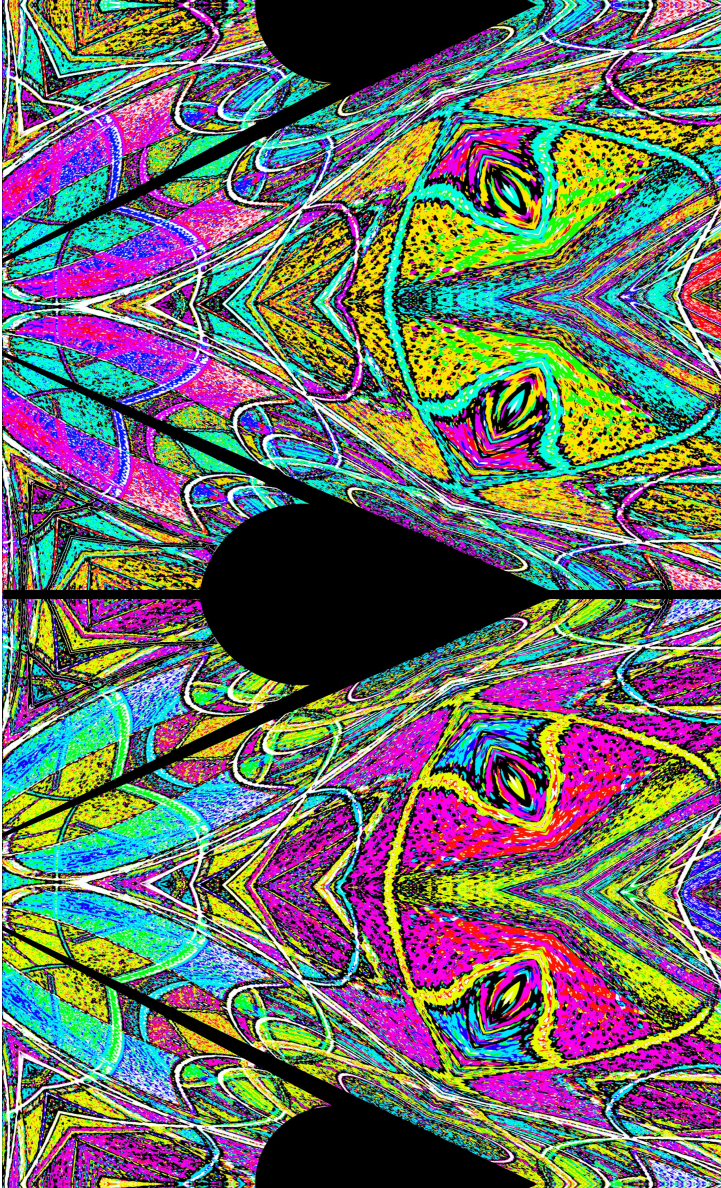
END

## *Edward Michael Supranowicz*

*is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is a Jar, The Phoenix, and The Harvard Advocate. Edward is also a published poet.*



*Sign and Cosign 4b*



*A Delicate Happiness*

## *DS Maolalai*

*has been nominated nine times for Best of the Net and seven times for the Pushcart Prize. He has released two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (Encircle Press, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (Turas Press, 2019). His third collection, "Noble Rot" is scheduled for release in April 2022.*

**Guilt.**

so sick. my clothes  
greasy as fat  
off a candle.  
I wash them  
like a cleaner  
inexperienced  
with silk. the stains  
of hard water –  
there is always  
a stain there.  
hell – death to symbols –  
I do not deserve them:  
I've fucked  
who I shouldn't have  
and fucked you  
by fucking them.

DS Maolalai

## Entropy

a plantpot  
on the window-  
sill. an ashtray.



DS Maolalai

## The gamekeeper

hairs spike your legs  
as some wilderness  
detail: twitching  
black rabbits  
on fields of white  
snow. conspicuous,  
just like wild  
rabbits. I lie  
on our bed  
on my belly  
and elbows – you're  
asleep and you're warm  
and you've kicked off  
the duvet. I'm in a ditch, quite  
dirty-trousered, soaking,  
invisibly guarding  
wild game.

DS Maolalai

## Flowers opening

early morning  
treble chime  
of sunlight

on horizons  
and closing  
to bass register  
atonally

at dusk. the finger-  
nailing music  
of a man  
inside a kitchen,  
with a screwdriver  
and a bottle of lager,

assembling a table  
from half-read  
instructions

sitting on a cushion  
on the floor.

## Silver fishes

seabirds dart down over  
skins of the liffey –  
skimming together  
in loops and around.  
their shapes make a pattern  
like synchronized swimmers,  
like dancers in movement  
to improvised jazz; a hand  
clenched fist-tight  
and then loosening  
quickly; a dandelion  
burst in the park.

at my window I watch  
with a cold cup of tea,  
their rotations like beads  
in kaleidoscope. something  
in ease of the motion  
in there, as if there were no  
things like making  
mistakes. the day is quite warm,  
though it's cloudy; the sky  
holding onto its fish.

later, a suggestion  
of thunderstorms  
coming – they'll bang  
on the pavements  
tonight. the gulls revolve slowly  
and oscillate slowly,  
adding new texture  
to grey afternoons. you could read  
a good future  
the confident movement  
in shapes made by draining  
your tea.

## *Damien Posterino*

*(he/him) is a Melbourne-born poet in London. His poetry explores themes of characters, commentary, and capturing moments in time. He has been published in recent editions of Fiery Scribe Review, Neuro Logical, Analogies & Allegories Literary Magazine, Abergavenny Small Press, BOMBFIRE, Jupiter Review, Fairy Piece Magazine, Poetic Sun Journal, Green Ink Poetry, Zero Readers, Melbourne Culture Corner & Discretionary Love. More are due to be published until January 2022. You can find him on Twitter at [twitter.com/damienposterino](https://twitter.com/damienposterino)*

Damien Posterino

## The good old days

Who's to blame?  
Clocks hold Zimmer frames  
begging me  
to suffocate more time;

Always right out the front gate-  
follow a path along those cracks  
under my feet  
which threaten to swallow me;

Walk 10 blocks by 10 blocks  
to make a perfect square  
with edges like a Japanese blade.  
Shadows slither in my side vision,

they move behind windows  
hung with curtains for twitching;  
Flags flutter as cheap make up  
for concrete houses

who never get asked to dance.  
No children play in these streets  
which echo like an empty cave;  
Dogs hide in kennels too scared to bark-

the only howls, sirens in the distance  
which never seem to arrive.  
I get stopped - someone asks me the way.  
I say this is it.

## Livestock

You work all day  
in someone's field grazing.  
Fed on fodder, your jaw is as sore as you.  
Your eyes wander to new pastures,  
to dreams outside the strangling fence;  
The birds fly by and laugh  
with wings spread far and wide.

They grade you  
in their saw dust factory,  
to qualify your type and pedigree.  
You're a dog who's thrown a bone  
and fed the scraps  
till they can clone another one  
from the marrow sucked  
to fill this farmers cage.

Each sullen day spent in manure  
is another to endure,  
even the scarecrow laughs  
within his straw stuffed skin.  
You're in denial that's for sure  
keep ploughing boy  
and they'll ensure  
your branded rump is theirs.

## Another man with mother issues

Somebody has got to help.  
Bare knuckles on fire,  
desperately banging their drum.

Memories flushed  
in the flow of filthy waters.  
Repent in swill,  
shower in fear.

Power juice a lost soul,  
heavy with pain's pith.  
Hide in jungle retreats under

dark starless nights  
dreaming screaming insomnia.  
You inhale vapors,

mumble mantras,  
scrawl graffiti  
all over your frontal lobe.  
Run naked over scorched earth,

wailing for a sign,  
praying it will stop.  
Devour fallacies from false prophets,

recanting- Now! Wow! Begin! Believe!  
Swallow, snort & spew  
to get out of it,  
into it,  
but never through it.

Peel it away,  
scrub it off,  
release the demons.

Reincarnate  
inside a wild womb.

## ***Ben Nardolilli***

*currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, Danse Macabre, The 22 Magazine, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, The Northampton Review, Local Train Magazine, The Minetta Review, and Yes Poetry. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is trying to publish his novels.*



Ben Nardolilli

## The Department of Education

The masters and the owners  
Will resist teaching you  
About your resistance  
And the history of resistance that occupies the past

You must never know  
You are a victim of their excess,  
A victim of their gears,  
You must never even know that there is a machine

They will hide others who tell you  
About your chains  
Blocking out their voices  
With rumors and idle gossip of the idle classes

Failing that, they will make sure  
You will never hear the rattling  
Of your chains  
With a roar for wars and chants against intruders

And should you uncover  
You have been a victim,  
The descendent of generations of victims, in fact,  
Then they will reluctantly allow it

What they will not abide  
Is the knowledge  
That your ancestors were survivors too,  
Who fought and resisted to overcome the last machine

Ben Nardolilli

## Anniversary Return

Half a stranger now,  
you ask me  
if I really meant it  
when I said I loved you.

Fair follow-up to months  
spent together  
and then spent apart,  
but because I track changes,

Let me ask you,  
did you really mean it  
when you told me  
that my poetry was good?

## To MARRISA

Over the sienna'd hardwood floors  
and the gray stone patios,  
there is plenty of opportunity  
to get a hold of everyone's  
remote controlled perfectionism

Voices bounce around the rooms  
dragging good news,  
promotions that bring premonitions  
of an update in economic status,  
a senator's name will be dropped

Others will talk about vacations,  
it is October, after all,  
every summer odyssey is fresh  
and Christmas plans remain  
to be shared and put on exhibition

More than sounds, these voices  
carry images to share and project  
recent dates and weddings,  
or cars, whiskey, purses, and shoes  
which are ready for checkout

I look for a wild rock to cling to  
and I find you, and compliments  
about my moustache  
growing in this sanitized den,  
immediately we talk about blood.

When the family lines are drawn,  
we make our confessions  
and reveal broken machinery:  
I work in a white-collar sweatshop  
and an Atlas has shrugged you.

Ben Nardolilli

## Homonym Toponym

From nature, take away  
    honesty  
the cruelty is cruelty  
the kindness is kindness,  
    possible lies:  
sleet, fog, and drizzle  
    no need to worry,  
they pass away  
to bring out the real sun  
or true destruction.

Ben Nardolilli

## Crossed Patterns

The mathematics of simple things  
Are combining together, figuring out  
Better kinds of equations

My furniture conspires with my shoes,  
My clothes hang in peace  
With the unread books on my shelf

Nothing has changed on the surface  
Because everything cancels out,  
But a subtraction waits on the horizon

The path of clouds beyond the window  
And the width of that window,  
They are exchanging numbers now

## **Gerard Sarnat**

won San Francisco Poetry's 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfults of 2021 and previous Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is widely published including in 2022 Arts & Cultural Council of Bucks County Celebration, 2022 Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival Anthology, The Deronda Review, Jewish Writing Project, Hong Kong Review, Tokyo Poetry Journal, Buddhist Poetry Review, Gargoyle, Main Street Rag, New Delta Review, Arkansas Review, Hamilton-Stone Review, Northampton Review, New Haven Poetry Institute, Texas Review, Vonnegut Journal, Brooklyn Review, San Francisco Magazine, Monterey Poetry Review, The Los Angeles Review, and The New York Times as well as by Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, North Dakota, McMaster and University of Chicago presses. He's authored the collections *Homeless Chronicles*, *Disputes*, *17s*, *Melting the Ice King*. Gerry is a Harvard-trained physician who's built and staffed clinics for the marginalized as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he is devoting energy/ resources to deal with climate justice, and serves on Climate Action Now's board. Gerry's been married since 1969 with three kids plus six grandsons, and is looking forward to potential future granddaughters.

[gerardsarnat.com](http://gerardsarnat.com)

UKRAINIAN FOOD INTERLUDES [ii]

i.Light Steppes: "WILL WORK FOR BREAD"

|              |                      |                      |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Up to now    | Where you            |                      |
| For almost   | Sweat, & I'ma        |                      |
| 77 years     | Lefty (as it were)   | A poem's a beautiful |
|              | But today            | Scar connecting us   |
|              | Looking at           | To the world."....   |
| The word     | Literary mag         | ...Today, day 12     |
| Divot has    | Named <i>Divot</i>   | Of Putin's War       |
| Connoted     | It's title such      | I vaguely recall     |
| Golf course  | A Lovely             | (Maybe wrongly)      |
| Which always | Metaphor:            | From high school     |
| Seemed bad   | "Poetry that         | Ukraine's a world    |
| Rich man's   | Leaves lasting       | "Breadbasket"        |
| Game, nada   | Impressions          | Growing wheat        |
| Exercise     | Divots in the heart. | Sold everywhere.     |
|              | A divot is a 'scar'  |                      |

This spring, bombs not crop'll be planted.

Gerard Sarnat

## ii.Brussel Sprouts

Not talkin' 'bout  
the EU's bustling  
administrative centre  
in Belgium –

        rather regards  
our nation's fasting growing  
popular veggie, which ever since  
bred to taste sweet, pee yew not sour  
I am told sadly

        also leeches vitamins  
and minerals out that made 'em healthy.  
Though savory, my hope they'd fill me up  
just like protein unfortunately didn't happen  
so an hour later

        you're hungry again as if ate Chinese  
as well as bummed that my fave international bon vivant  
travel documentarian, celebrity chef, etc committed suicide  
by hanging: RIP Anthony Bourdain, 25June1956-8June2018.



## *Fabrice Poussin*

*teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in The Front Porch Review, the San Pedro River Review as well as other publications.*

Fabric B. Poussin

## A Visit Home

He recalls the days when he ruled over the realm  
terrorizing his seniors with his silly pranks  
famous across the land for his noble deeds  
as he grew to respect the wishes of the elders.

Acquaintances vanished before their day  
friends too went their early way to the grave  
surrounded by those who brought them to this land  
their names now engraved in icy stone.

It still rains in spring as in his memories  
the sun continues to scorch the earth in August  
a constant with the strangers who now live there  
upon the earth where he no longer belongs.

Walls remember his cries, the soil his falls  
trees bear the scars of his many escapades  
when he played at war with his gang  
and greeted the whole village on his way to school.

His palaces will stand on the hill for centuries  
homes to unfamiliar glances sealed to the visitor  
now unwelcome in the world that gave him life  
patiently awaiting his boyish adventures.

Why does he not visit more often they ask  
his answer simple as he stares at the surroundings  
the lifeline has been severed for too long  
and fences built around the trees he loved.

## Body Parts

Bewildered upon the speedy delivery  
a gift from an untimely Santa Claus  
the box appeared in silvery wrap.

Eager as the young explorer  
of unknown lands in hidden realms  
he cherished the moment of contemplation.

The box came alive before his little soul  
to reveal the secrets of one hundred years  
and twenty more under a darker light.

Neatly arranged in silky compartments  
parts found themselves set in motion  
seeking the safe destiny of a brethren.

Yet a sparkle of another's dream  
he imagined a statuesque ideal  
standing atop a peak of his own making.

It was he waiting to become  
the sum of infinite experiments  
aiming unaware to an end in perfection.

Body parts, complete and ready to assemble  
things which would never really be his  
borrowed so he too might play his part.

Fabric B. Poussin

## Dressed to Kill

Dressed to kill in low cut cardigans  
leather miniskirts they once loathed  
imitation Prada they look five miles in the air  
as they approach the altar.

Too good for the common people  
holding their bloated purses and a pretty pouch  
they carry the book of a thousand pages  
signed by a father record of dynasties.

Holding hands with men in khaki shorts  
Ralph Lauren peach polo shirts  
and the weekly new pair of docksiders  
they smile filling the pristine front rows.

Handsome on a smooth surface  
they are masters of the realm inherited  
given away with the good wishes of tradition  
no one will ignore the sweet scent of their self-importance.

Shoulder to shoulder they will sit  
the noble pages in their laps  
angelic faces lit by a semi neon light  
for you see they must stay in touch.

Soon they will race to the pricey tables  
before anyone can reserve a spot  
they have earned the right they believe  
to gorge themselves on the wealth of the world.

Dues paid, all will be well in their world  
so, they may continue the journey  
willingly blind to the truths all around  
since after all they are dressed to kill for the altar.

Fabric B. Poussin

## **She walks alone**

She was not meant to roam this land in mourning  
so fresh yet she may have seemed puerile.

A moody wind penetrates her somber cape  
as she ventures another step along the mountain crest.

Never taking a chance at a glance behind  
she abandons another path so long a perilous jungle.

There is no time for sentimental memories  
survival she was told lies behind the redwoods.

The flesh so tender beneath a paler embrace  
as if a specter she remains aloof to all that remains.

Her query began long ago in the ruined castles  
and citadels. constructed for the safety of her kin.

But it was a well-built fantasy in concrete and rebar  
a lie to become eternal as might a sacred word.

She may be the last great amazon of old  
gentle as a reviving morning dew.

The piercing greens bear onto other realms  
striking in this otherwise obscured noon hour.

Passing by, infinite numbers of ghosts  
they cry for her to slow and see that they too once were.

Under her grave evening gown filled with grace  
she is safe yet but for how long still?

Continuing relentlessly she leaves a warm aura behind  
last trace of those once compassionate soul.

Fabric B. Poussin

## We Once Spoke

In silence she wonders what must be done  
carried by the lush blades of a rich meadow.

It may have been days since she last motioned  
to the stars reaching for a sign of her life.

Eyes shut to the brightness of the day  
opened to contemplate the night.

Privy to secrets unbeknownst to her kin  
she seems to float in her endless dream.

Perhaps taken in deep meditation she rests  
her lips marking the gentle smile of a new mother.

With no one near she keep the miracle of a conversation  
having uncovered the magic of the origins.

Alive with the unfathomable energy of galaxies  
she speaks in a universal tongue.

Perhaps it is time for her to die to this realm  
for she is safe in the arms of the cosmos.

Perhaps I too will be entrusted with this gift  
to become the words of her endless melody.

We once spoke the sounds of men, a mere gateway  
to unlock but earthly keys.

At a safe distance from her glowing hour  
I am witness as she joins with infinite bliss.

***Paul H. Lewellan***

*lives and gardens in Davenport, Iowa, with his wife Pamela, his Shi Tzu Mannie, and their ginger tabby Sunny. He has recently published fiction in Miniskirt Magazine, Plateful of Pandemic, Talon Review, DASH Literary Journal, and CERASUS. Although he doesn't believe life begins at 70, it does get more interesting after then.*

*@Paul\_Lewellan (he/his/him)*

## The Plan

I didn't plan it. Promise. An accident on Brady Street. Traffic stopped for twenty-five minutes. No time to shower, repair my hair, or freshen my makeup; no time to wear anything but the same Donna Karan suit I'd worn to work.

My seventeen-year-old daughter had set out a yellow sundress before she left for school. "You need to make a good impression."

Chelsea, her boyfriend Bobby, and her boyfriend's (widowed) father Frank were due at 5:00. We would drive to the lake, dine at the Fish Bone, and then take the pontoon boat out for an evening cruise. "It's a stupid idea," I told my daughter.

"You're my mother. Bobby's father wants to meet you."

*No way to duck that.*

I pulled in at 4:55, time enough to kick off my heels and pee. I threw my suit coat on the dining room table. That's when I saw the crooked picture. I was too short to reach the frame, so I hiked my skirt up my thighs, eased onto my knees on top the credenza, and reached up, then the front door opened, our guests entered, and Bob's father Frank was greeted by my



Paul H. Lewellan

shapely butt, rather than by the demure and totally normal “Mom” he’d been promised.

I dismounted and tugged down my skirt. Introductions were made. I offered wine for the adults and iced water for the teenagers. Frank suggested water all around. “We’ll be in the sun. We should hydrate.”

“Water it is,” though I really needed something to take off the edge.

“Why don’t you let Chelsea get it? You could change into something more comfortable,” he said without condescension. “We have time before our reservation.”

“I’d like that.” He read the relief in my face and smiled.

He was perspiring. I wondered how many “dates” he’d been on since his wife’s death? *How desperate does a parent have to be to let their teenaged child set them up?* The question was rhetorical.

In my bedroom I looked at the sundress my daughter selected. *Boring.* I grabbed a snug black tank top with a sheer over-blouse that would dial down the scandal factor of going braless. Tan shorts showed off my world-class legs. Flirty

## Paul H. Lewellan

sandals sealed the deal with foot appeal and toe cleavage.

Supper was strained. I ordered a bottle of shiraz. The waiter poured me a generous glass. Frank declined.

“Dad just got his one year chip,” Bobbie explained.

*Oops.* Frank encouraged me to enjoy the wine. He made another attempt at conversation. “Chelsea says you’re an accountant.”

“I’m a certified fraud examiner,” I corrected. “My firm keeps other firms honest.”

“Is that what you do?” my daughter snarled. “Could have fooled me.” She turned on me. “I just assumed you were a vindictive bitch.”

“Mrs. Hilcrest’s firm busted her ex-husband,” Bobby explained to his father. “Chelsea’s dad is in jail.”

“William is in federal prison for securities fraud, collateral damage from one of my cases. Chelsea blames me for her father’s actions.” I chose not to add that Bill was a psychopath and a serial cheater.

“Because of you, he’ll miss my high school and college graduations, my marriage, and probably his first grandchild.”

Paul H. Lewellan

“Only because he was too stupid to take a plea. He declined a very good deal.”

“Because Daddy was innocent.”

“Not what the jury said.”

“He was trying to protect me.”

“No. He Wasn’t.” Usually I left it at that. Maybe it was the wine. Maybe it was Frank’s presence. “If he wanted to protect you, he wouldn’t have gutted your college fund to restore his Dodge Charger, or to loan his hair stylist \$50,000 to start her own shop.”

“What? My college fund? You’re lying.” Chelsie’s face flushed.

“I can show you the paper trail.” I filled my wine glass without thinking. “Better yet, ask him when you visit this weekend.”

Frank perked up. “Is that the road trip you two were planning?” Bobby shrugged.

“If it’s true,” Chelsea pouted, “the visit is off.”

“Seems to me, if that’s true,” Frank interjected, “you have all the more reason to talk.”

Paul H. Lewellan

“Wait until after you show him our prom pictures,” Bobby suggested.

I imagined the scene. My ex-appears in his orange jumpsuit, smiling and chatting up the guard escorting him. He could charm people like that. My daughter and Bobby would already be in their assigned seats at the round table bolted to the floor with the backless seats attached.

“Definitely lead with the prom pictures,” I told her. “Wait until the end to talk about the rest.” Visitors had two hours. She shouldn’t waste time arguing with her father. “But don’t let him slide, either.” I knew Bill would have an answer. He always had an answer. It was always another lie, but my daughter would have to learn that on her own.

Later on my pontoon boat, Frank and I sat on the prow watching the sun set while the kids handled the boat. I slipped my hand into his. “What happened to your wife?”

“Suicide. Drug overdose,” he said softly. “Bobby insists it was accidental. She was in a lot of pain.”

I squeezed his hand. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He kissed me on the cheek, then looked back

Paul H. Lewellan

to see if the kids were watching. They were occupied. He kissed me again. “What kind of car did your ex- restore?”

“A 1969 Dodge Charger R/T-SE. If you come over on Saturday while the kids are gone, we could take it for a drive.”

He hesitated. “You know this is a terrible idea. We’ve got too much baggage.”

“Of course it won’t work.” I leaned in and put my head on his shoulder. “That shouldn’t stop us from fucking like ferrets before it all falls apart.”

“Now that’s a plan,” he sighed. “Definitely a plan.”

## *Zeke Jarvis*

*is a Professor of English at Eureka College. His work has appeared in Moon City Review, Posit, and KNOCK, among other places. His books include, So Anyway..., In A Family Way, The Three of Them, and Antisocial Norms. His website is zekedotjarvis.wordpress.com*

## Plight of the Nongoblins

There are these creatures, not quite goblins, but there isn't necessarily a much better word for them. They're generally regarded with suspicion or revulsion, which is understandable, if you were to look upon their not-quite-slimey but not-fully-dry skin. They don't reproduce with each other. The way that more of these nongoblins are made is by cutting off a piece of an existing nongoblin. Just think about it. You're out there in the world, trying to do gobliness (but not quite goblin) things when some musclebound human or humanoid with a longsword comes along and, thinking they're going to steal your weapons or just fight something that they perceive as evil, so the human(oid) slashes you, and a piece of you drops to the ground. You stare at it, but, instead of falling to the ground with it, that piece rises up to something like you. Naturally you and your violence-born offspring eviscerate the human(oid), but still.

This begs the question: how do the creatures view others like them? Do they see them as bad memories of violence? Do they see it as worth the pain and the suffering to

## Zeke Jarvis

have more of them in the world? Is there a shared closeness that comes not just from having the body connection but also the shared experience of feasting on your attacker's/co-creator's entrails? Or maybe these creatures are so rooted in their day-to-day gobliness tasks that they never stop to think about it. Maybe when a bit of dismemberment only leads to more of you, you don't worry about your identity that much, and you're content to just muddle about.

But I haven't told you about their singing. They sing in their own strange language. If your native language is English, you might assume that it's German as spoken by a Texan. If your native language is German, then you might think that it was a loudly mumbled form of ancient Greek. If ancient Greek was your native language then you'd be too dead to have an opinion. But it's hypnotic without being the least bit pleasant. Interestingly, the hypnosis is not something that leads you into the service of these nongoblins. Nor does it lead you to be evil. The product of the hypnosis is actually to try to become as productive as possible. This is one reason why humanoids looking to take the nongoblins down immediately try to take



## Zeke Jarvis

them down (and get murdered). No human, to the best of my knowledge, has ever had the pleasure of a choir of the nongoblins. But if you could, if you could actually listen to 20 or 50 or even 100 of them at a time, maybe you could produce the most efficient, the most beautiful, or the most perfect thing that you've ever made in your life. It sounds wonderful. Until you consider the dozens of forced amputations that led to that choir. Would it be worth your personal success? I suppose that it depends entirely upon your view of the nongoblins' experience.

Zeke Jarvis

## Badly Beaten

There were four men beating up the man on the ground. One was trying to hold the man's arms, two were kicking him, and the fourth was beating him with a stick. The man on the ground was occasionally able to shove away the stick or one of the men's legs. Not enough to really protect himself, of course, being outnumbered as he was. The kids nearby were shouting for the men to stop. Every now and then, one of the men would curse or spit at the kids, and they'd quiet down for a second or two and go back a few steps. Certainly, it was brutal to watch. But it wouldn't take long and they'd be back watching and yelling.

The man being beaten would groan or gasp, but he wouldn't cry. This went on. Eventually, another man stepped up. He didn't signal to the men doing the beating that he was there. Instead, he simply pulled out two guns and began to fire. He took out the man with the stick first. Three bullets. The first took off fragments of the stick man's skull. This stopped the other three while one bullet went into his back and another went through his throat. Blood sprayed each time.. While the

## Zeke Jarvis

other men were looking to see what was happening, the man with the guns took out the two beaters. Two bullets for one, three for the other. One left a gaping wound in the beater's chest. The man holding the beaten man's arm stood up and tried to run. Five bullets that time. Two went into his head. The holding man fell hard on his face.

The man with the gun stood for a moment, not moving. He holstered his guns and turned to walk away. The kids watching all cheered. The beaten man propped himself up a bit. He looked at the dead men around him, then at the cheering kids. It was at that point that he finally began to cry. The kids slowly stopped cheering. Then they started yelling at the crying man, belittling him for crying when he'd done so well during the beating and when the man with the gun had stopped the beating. Of course, this only made him cry all the more. He absolutely couldn't stop, even as the kids walked away, laughing and punching each other's arms.