

winter 2025

**Assignment**  
literary magazine



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# Assignment Literary Magazine

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Winter 2024: e r o s i o n

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Cover Art by Zahra Zoghi

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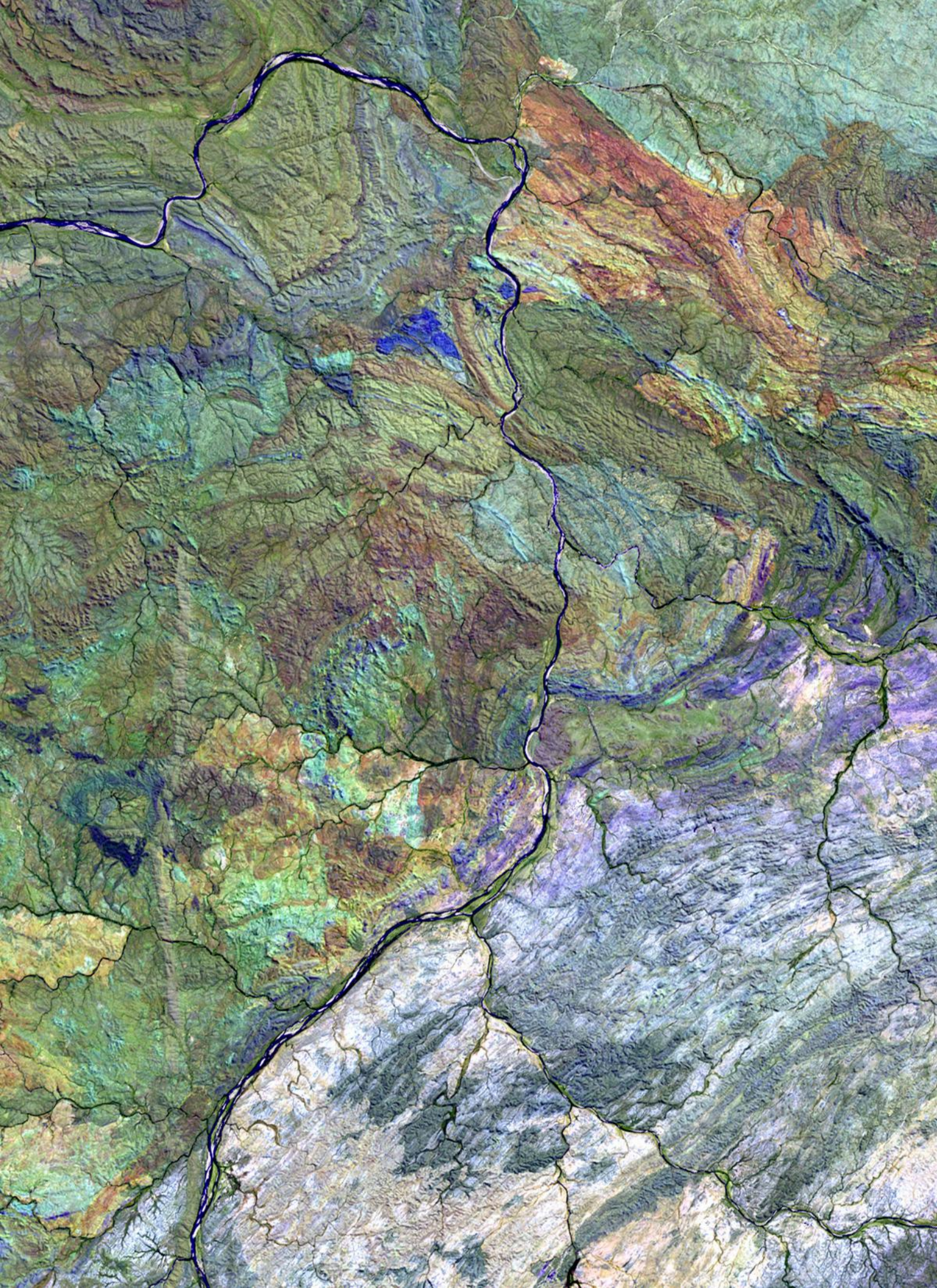
Assignment Literary Magazine is the official literary journal of the Mountainview Low-Residency M.F.A. at Southern New Hampshire University.

**Mission** Here at *Assignment Literary Magazine* we believe in the joy of creating and sharing art. Our editorial team is passionate about curating a platform that both celebrates and elevates literature and the diverse individuals who produce it. We are looking for literature that pushes the boundaries of excellence. We want work that makes you pull over the car because you have to get it out of you so quickly. The art that throbs in your chest and flashes across your vision like a daydream. We want work that hypnotizes us and floats back through our minds while we're folding laundry. Send us something that will change our minds, force our perspectives, or expand our vision. Send us something beautiful. Send us something ugly. Send us something raw. Send us something we can eat. Send us your best.

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## Editor's Note

When brainstorming ideas for our next issue, Savannah and I exclaimed “erosion” in near synchrony. During the curation of our first issue as editors of *Assignment*, we had enormous fun exploring the mine of ideas within the topic “renewal.” We discovered there is a plethora of darkness within rebirth, and so became curious to see if there is also light within decay.

Erosion is a slow wearing away at something. It's relentless, it's continuous. This wearing can feel like a slice, like a wound scraped deeper and deeper. It can feel like entropy, a steadfast deterioration into personal anarchy. But erosion can also be necessary. It can be picking away at an obstacle, peeling away layers of trauma, or cracking open a shell and emerging reborn; for this, “Erosion” and “Renewal” are sister magazines. They follow each other in a loop, becoming more and more alike the closer you look.

Evaluating the submissions for this issue asked us to sniff past definitions and taste rot growing on the words. Savannah and I selected the pieces published here because of how they surprised us. Every single one made our minds twang with a memorable resonance. They challenged us to think more imaginatively and stretch the boundaries of our own ideas, and because of that I declare the authors represented here our teachers.

I sincerely hope that you get as much pleasure from reading this magazine as we did from curating it. I give you “Erosion.”

Sincerely,

Lauren

# Coming or Going

By Serge Lecomte



## **I am Screaming in the Shower to Feel Closer To You**

By Luna Moore Latorre

I am shrieking in the shower to remember that I am still alive,  
cleaning myself, cleansing myself, the warmth of the water soothing my skin.

I think about how you will never take another shower,  
the simplest of pleasures denied to you.

You will never eat pasta, tacos, cheese, or any of your other favorite foods again.  
You will never again captivate an audience at a karaoke bar, your magnetic voice forcing  
everyone

to stop talking, stare at you the way one stares at the sun, we know we shouldn't,  
but you're forever luring us in with your gravitational pull.

I know I love you because never seeing you again destroys me, but you not getting to grow old  
destroys me a whole lot more.

You not making it to your 25th birthday destroys me most of all.

The only thing left to do is scrape my skin clean with a blue washcloth and lavender soap,  
cry until I cannot breathe, until I no longer want to breathe,  
only want to hold my breath underwater and live in that blissful breathless place,  
where I can't tell if I'm alive or dead, just another restless spirit in neighborhood pool purgatory.

Because somehow, the more I lose my breath, the closer I get to the afterlife,  
the closer I am to you.

## Piece by Piece

By T.J. Robinson

In the morning, Marcus wakes up missing his left arm. It's gone – ending at the elbow in a flat plane of flesh. Holly lies next to him under the cool cotton sheets, eyes wide, clutching her hand over her mouth. He holds what's left of his limb in the air, staring at the space where the rest of his arm should be. His neck twitches, blue eyes welling up. Holly wraps her body around him, skin sliding against skin. His chest hair tickles her neck as her lips press against the ridge of his clavicle.

He says, 'It's started.'

\*

Both of their families come to their flat for afternoon tea. It's a quiet event. Everyone brings a plate of food, hugs Holly, asks Marcus how he's holding up. So many bodies in such a small space, so close you can hear the moist sound of lips parting to speak. His mother has brought a home-made sponge cake with passionfruit icing. She gives Holly a sickly smile in the cramped kitchenette and says, 'It's his favourite,' like she's apologising for something.

Holly's father sits at their tiny dining table and monologues about the current theories while staring into his cup of tea. Quantum physics, simulation theory, reality fragmentation. Holly thinks, *No one knows anything.*

Marcus' nieces and nephews sit on the floor in front of the turned-off TV, peeking at the space beyond Marcus' left elbow. His brother catches them and shoos them all out through the sliding door to the strip of artificial grass Holly and Marcus call a backyard. Holly's sister cuts the sponge cake and hands out slices on small plates.

'I hear it happens differently for everyone,' finishes Holly's father.

Marcus nods, watching the kids through the glass. Holly takes hold of his right hand, his knuckles bunching up in her fist. She says, 'We're going to do this together.'

\*

Holly scrambles out of twisted bed covers and finds Marcus standing naked in their bathroom. He's leaning with one hand on the sink, staring in the mirror at the smooth skin where his right eye used to be. She wraps her arms around his waist from behind and he says into the mirror, 'This is how it's happening to me.'

Holly presses flat against his back, kisses his shoulder blade, her teeth against his skin. She asks, 'Can you see anything on the other side?'

Marcus closes his left eye. He draws in a quick breath.

'N-no,' he tells her.

\*



They catch a bus to the Research Centre, because all the websites told them they should. What else could they do? The Research Centre is a brutalist concrete block sitting in a pasture an hour outside of the city. Marcus' appointment is on the tenth floor, and the elevator keeps stopping to let on people in white coats and scrubs. The walls of each floor of the building are painted a different colour – a shock of bright orange, a whisper of baby blue, a slice of forest green. Marcus wears a pair of sunglasses to hide where his right eye used to be, his empty left sleeve folded and pinned at the elbow. Holly holds his remaining hand and slowly massages each of his fingers, feeling the bones, the sinews.

On the sixth floor, a woman lopes into the elevator on the palms of her hands, the bottom half of her body missing. Marcus and the woman share a tight look. She balances on one hand, taps the button marked 14, then settles on the floor.

In a lavender room, a scientist measures all the parts of Marcus' body, writes it down on a chart. At no point does the scientist look either Marcus or Holly in the eye.

Holly asks the scientist, 'What can we do?'

The scientist gives them a special journal. He tells them to write down the order of what disappears and when, and to reflect on how it feels, so the Research Centre can add it to their data. On the inside cover is a protocol to follow and a phone number to call.

She squeezes Marcus' hand, pressing into the meat of his thumb.

\*

Holly takes a sabbatical from work to stay home with Marcus. One morning, she cooks him pancakes smothered in maple syrup and butter for breakfast, and they eat them at the small metal table and chairs they keep in the tiny backyard. The sunlight is gold and warm, and a light breeze moves the leaves of the lemon tree that hangs over their fence from their neighbour's yard. Marcus has some trouble cutting the pancakes with one hand, so Holly does it for him while he forces a polite smile.

When they're finished, Holly takes the plates into the kitchen and starts to clean up. Marcus stays outside, sitting there in his dressing gown, soaking in the sun. She watches him through the window over the kitchen sink as she scrubs the dishes. He moves his body, stretching it out, one part at a time. First his legs, then his right arm, then the stub of his left. His head hanging down, a long breath leaving him.

On the kitchen counter is the notebook the Research Centre gave Marcus. She peels off her rubber gloves and opens the notebook, flips through to a random page. On it, Marcus wrote: *Where am I going? In the end, will I be put back together like a jigsaw puzzle? Will all the others be there with me? Or will I just be scattered across an endless void?*

\*

Holly concentrates on Marcus' body. She lies in bed, in the dark, and closes her eyes. She imagines all the details of the body lying next to her – holds him in her mind. The pale skin wrapped around the ligaments in his thigh, the pink bumps on his areola. Chocolate chip moles on the side of his neck, the wrinkled pucker of his knuckles. The wiry hair on his stomach, the smell of soap and saliva. She thinks to herself, *Can I will him to stay? Can I anchor every piece of him here, to me?*

She reaches out and touches his body, confirming what she has built in her imagination. Feels his chest fill with oxygen, the pulse in his throat, the goosebumps tightening the flesh of his forearm. She licks the sweat from his neck and holds the taste in her mouth.

\*

She wakes up, pulls back the bedsheet, and his right leg is missing up to the hip joint.

Holly rents a car and drives Marcus to her brother's beach house on the peninsula. The car pulls into the sandy-gravel driveway of the grey weatherboard house, surrounded by twisted tea trees. Inside, the house smells like old ash from the fireplace and lemon-scented cleaning products. Holly unpacks their clothing into a pine chest of drawers while Marcus sits on the edge of the bed, looking around the room. He finally says, 'This is good. This is where I want it to happen.'

They change into their swimsuits, drive to the very tip of the peninsula and find a strip of beach. Holly struggles Marcus from the car to the water, her shoulder wedged into his armpit, his right arm wrapped around her neck.

They swim out into the cold, dark blue water and float face up, holding hands and staring at the empty sky. The water laps against their bobbing bodies, the orange sun soaking into the broken sandstone hills on the shore. Every breath Holly takes is filled with the fresh salt-smell of the sea, her long hair wafting around her. The water gently moves what's left of Marcus' body, steadying him.

Floating there, he says, 'I wonder if this is what it feels like, on the other side.'

\*

The process speeds up; three fingers on his right hand, the rest of his left arm up to the shoulder, his left leg up to his knee – all gone. After three nights at the beach house, Marcus is a head attached to a pair of shoulders, one half of a ribcage, and a right arm that ends in only a thumb. The rest of him is a soft nub of glossy flesh. Holly cradles him in her lap, sitting cross-legged in the bed, talking to him. She strokes his hair and tells him about the first time they met, the day they moved in together, the moment she realised she was in love with him.

On the fourth morning, Holly finds Marcus' ear sitting on his pillow. She goes to the kitchen and finds a tea towel in the bottom drawer, one that's soft and clean, and gently wraps his ear up.

She packs their things and drives back to their apartment. She unwraps the tea towel on their kitchen table, runs the tip of her finger along the ridges of cartilage, the skin as soft as velvet. She takes his ear to their bed, takes off her clothes, slips under the covers and puts it on the pillow next to her.

Her lips so close to the opening of his ear, almost touching, she whispers, 'Can you hear me? Wherever you are, I'm with you.'

\*

In the morning, Holly wakes up and the bed is empty. She reaches for his ear and can't find it. Her body is seized by panic; she pulls the covers back, stripping the bed, searching. She balls up the bedding and stuffs it into the kitchen bin.

Holly stands naked in their tiny living room. She trembles as she shakes out her hands, cracks her knuckles, counts her fingers. Her chest starts to constrict. She runs her hands over her body, tugging on her ears, pulling her nose, gripping her lower lip. Her throat is closing. She searches every part of herself, her shoulder blades, her elbows, her forearms. Her breasts, ribs and hips. The flesh of her thighs, the bumps of her knees, each nail on each of her toes. She's pacing around their small flat, gasping for breath.

Then she's running out the front door, into their neighbourhood. Her bare feet slapping against asphalt and concrete, the gumtree branches hanging low over the footpath whipping at her body, the blare of a car horn sliding past.

She runs, her body pumping blood, sucking hot air, tendons tight. Sweat pushing out of her pores, fists screwed up, her skin slick and her hair in her mouth, sticking to her tongue. She runs until her body screams.

## Take a Shiny Penny

By Sean Whalen

put it in a water glass  
nothing happens  
except reflection  
if placed in the sun

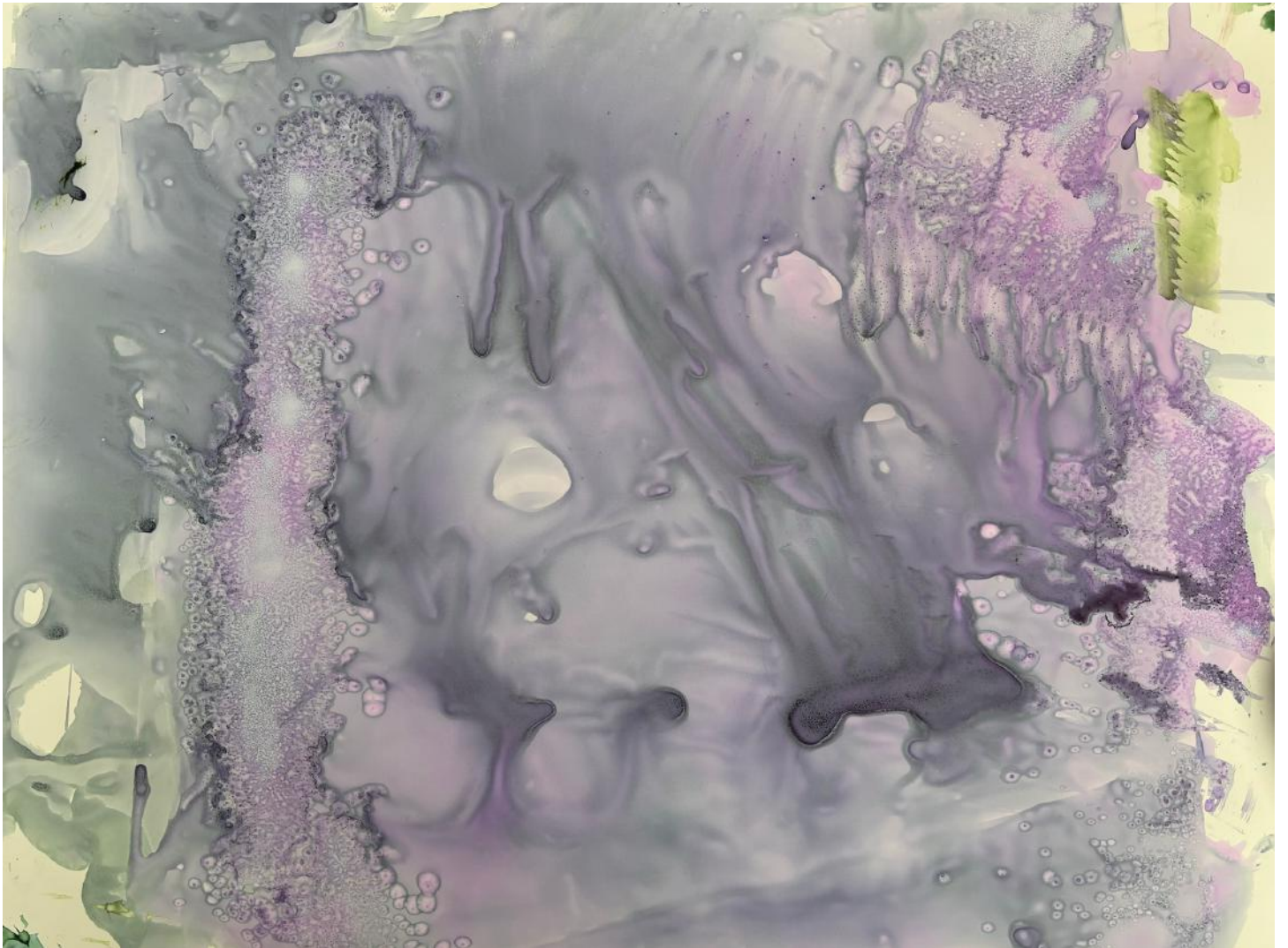
now drop it in acid  
the green moss forms  
Abe's head fades  
in the bubbles over time

add bicarb until neutral  
drink the salty mix  
don't worry  
there are insufficient

ions to harm  
just enough  
to increase worth  
slightly

# Bosc

By Cynthia Yatchman



# The Way You Look Tonight

By GJ Gillespie



## Deep Valleys

By Lorraine Jeffery

*Tell me, I say to her ninety years.  
Her smile fades as she remembers  
her volcanic mother, and Della,  
her stable oldest sister.*

*When things boiled up,  
Muma threatened to drive  
off Rocky Point  
and kill herself.*

*I couldn't stay overnight—  
ever.  
She might be gone  
when I got back home.*

*I don't know why,  
she erupted at Della.  
Muma was sewing and she  
grabbed the scissors,  
held them up like a knife,  
over her chest,  
said she was going to kill herself.*

*Della yelled something,  
and Muma hesitated.  
Hot tears ran down my face,  
I couldn't move.*

*Then Della tackled her,  
they went down yelling,  
and Della grabbed the scissors.  
When it was over,  
I couldn't talk—  
for three days.*

She shrugs and smiles again.  
*It was so long ago,*  
but silent tears run down  
the deep valleys  
of her cheeks.

## **Not quite the right mind**

By Arno Bohlmeijer

Erosion of the soul,  
until the mind blows,  
but surely not three times?

### **Meant to be on air LIVE**

After trouble (or trauma?) during a national-TV performance and more, there's a kind and admiring request: would I read my work on local Radio?

My shyness cries NO! And rightly so: I could suffer or choke.

The brain, though, in a low yet long voice, "Don't be a loser and spoilsport. It's a fine test, a proper challenge and opportunity for all sorts: a sense of community, time for a mental breakthrough... It's a friendly event, and no cameras! You'll celebrate after and feel a hero!"

But my stage fright, failure fear, microphone phobia...

"Oh, you whimp, just focus and prevail. Rise to the occasion and festive success and fulfilment!"

OK, some courage or adrenaline sound tempting. All details are noted; there's no way back – and no need for that?

On the day, there's a heat wave, that eats energy and concentration. But staying calm and positive, I practise all day, read the poems out loud, slowly, even though that makes me feel nervous and awkward. As a good preparation? I'd say, there's nothing to be ignored or suppressed anymore.

Would a kind of praying be stupidly egotistic? Yeah, ridiculous histrionics! The other day I did a recording and it was awesome, despite nausea.

After a shower and map studies, I arrive an hour early, 7 pm, and find a good parking spot – on the safe side in the right place, the closed door in sight. Quite composed, I hope, I can wait in some shade. Let's just double check and ask a passer-by, "Is this the library, that has a little studio?"

Sure, and there's a sign too, with the right number, beside the locked door. But the street here is very quiet indeed, and it remains mighty still even by 7.45. Certainly that's confirming the casual mood of the show. Any minute the door will be opened with a smile, although it is weird that no one arrives here. Have they been inside all this time?

If I go walking around – to try and find what? – we're bound to miss one another. Better stay put and let them find me.

Full of purpose and confidence and practical wisdom, I've left my phone at home. It would not ring during the live show! So there's a total void and impotence, when finally it's no longer deniable: something is entirely wrong. It's a sickening mystery,



defying belief and real life.

Twenty useless minutes after emission time, grown numb, I can't but leave and return home, where I *don't* phone a soul, as if the inevitable could be postponed. I'll send a defeatist email, a "safe way" to face major shame and claim innocence, describing my best behavior of the long day.

Still there's no clue of any cause. How badly can the mind be clamped – the way a migraine tightens the blood veins?

*After* an improvised live show with a benign replacement, their email message is crossing mine. "Where were you – we couldn't wait any longer."

When the polite producer calls (hanging between anger and fear?), we discover that I sat at the backdoor, nearly out of use now, of that large building, where I did double check, and *nobody* thought of that ludicrous risk for one second of any stage, because it's too silly for words. It could never happen to anyone in a right mind. It's time for a new life.

### **Don't shoot the messenger or limitless optimist**

This must be my ninth life or so; if Google shows a pile of mud, it was a long time ago – I hope.

Is everybody dating on the stale Net except me? Nah, I've done it all, the light or heavy conversing, a nature hike, a museum... "Never again!" I've growled and grinded repeatedly.

OK then, just this one more adventure, for exceptional reasons: he lives close by and his profile is truly striking. Besides, I've learned to be alert, read signals, protect myself from expectations and frustration. Here's a perfect balance of excitement and reserve!

On dating sites everybody lies about age and looks or sizes, except me (as trouble prevention?), but after pleasant emails and phone calls, I can be resolute, careful, trusting, all at the same time. Let's meet and take a stroll along the riverside.

The forelands are idyllic indeed, but presently I can tell: there's no trace of attraction or affinity that could lead to any little sparkle that might grow into more.

Usually my instincts are quick, strong, and correct. And on the way back, his banal question, "What do you think?" requires frankness already. "Sorry..." I stammer my honest explanation of rejection.

Still, he says goodbye with a smile. "See you next time."

Surprised, I stay politely vague and good-natured, planning to move on smoothly.

Soon after, he's on the phone. "I'd love to see you again; tomorrow?"

"Sorry, no," and once more I need to be forthright, not even flattered.

Over two days, his calls and emails grow agitated, confused, accusative, and almost vicious.

From a safe distance I can keep calm and wise, intending to neutralize his

sickly anger. For my own sake too, I should continue being saintly and soothing for as long as it takes, but in a final email I become firmly clear and fair. There: in writing.

When the phone rings more times, I don't answer. This foolish phase is over for good, states my brain. I'm drained and take a nap, to be woken by a bang that can't be defined at all, until I've walked downstairs in a hazy mind and see the shattered window pane. Sharp and cragged pieces of glass form a crooked, giant spider web.

Fortunately the guilty brick lies helpless outside, in my sweet little garden, where splinters of glass can be removed one by one, all thousand of them, among the lovely and surviving flowers, before I'll write something light again, about the fine recovery of time...

The skin is wrinkling,

I'm Wilde nor Dorian Gray,

pretty ashamed of my silly Profundis.

If Amazon shows a ton of junk, it was ages ago.

I've begun over and over; next could be my tenth life or so.

### **Catching or missing a train**

When sharpness was needed on peak days, like travelling around Europe, I could be lost in thought or life.

I'd go from Holland to Italy on the grand Night-Line train, booked with a comfy berth in a fine sleeper compartment, after the German border. I couldn't wait to reach and roam the Alps! But first, crossing the Dutch lowlands, I had to change trains twice, and I'd mis-planned a connection: the next intercity was due to arrive at the very same minute as the international Night Line's departure.

In a daze of shock I ran around and accosted various Rail people, plainly showing my shameful desperation. They all asked, "Are you in a group?"

Would that make some crazy or radical measure possible?

My honesty revealed the solitary nature of this predicament. Unbelievably they took me seriously, and it was the easy age: a station manager actually made phone calls on my behalf. It seemed that the huge and magnificent Night-Line train, over an hour away, might implausibly be stalled a minute for my sake.

In fact, I would have sworn that the train I then boarded in a state of sedated terror, was jumping red lights and racing along the summer evening. Was the driver involved as well? What did the manager tell him, "There's a film star on board – or a nutcase emergency – to be humored"?

After an hour's eternity it was 9.30 pm; we arrived on the dot, and my world train was right there, more than ready at the lively platform across. It should be leaving or have left that very instant. The whole station was a bustling crowd in the twilight, amply and joyfully on time for wonderful trips.

I walked in a blur and followed the informed officials, clutching my passport and clumsy baggage. Quickly all was checked and approved by Customs. They escorted

me in and we left immediately.

Let's breathe, to find my booked berth. On which cloud was that now? In a chariot of air?

If I thought I had wings for a moment, my feet and each body fiber crashed into a quagmire: where was my bag with delicious food, badly needed juice, my book, the map, the ticket to Italy and onward?

It was left behind on the previous train, if not as a thank-you gift, although that would have been deserved.

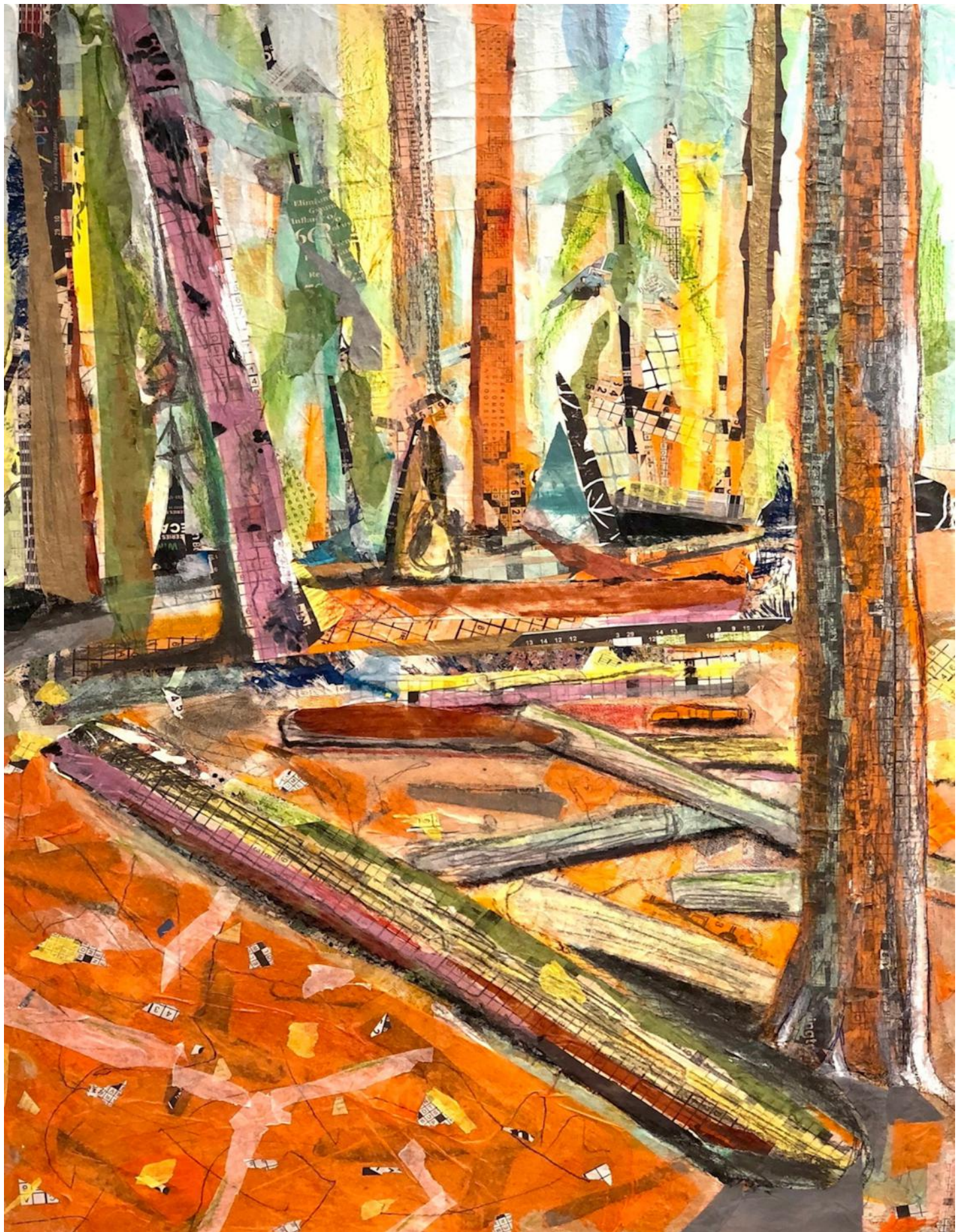
When the steward, called 'guard' here, came and asked for tickets, he could see the depth and trueness of my stupid gloom. He would help me get through a country or two, until his shift was over and he started his happy day of rest. But how to explain it all to the Italian officer, after a sleepless night, when he'd speak no German or English?

With hands and feet, bashful bluff and sadness.

After that I'd be sensible and confident, sending a special request to kind people in Holland, who were going to trace my beloved bag, find the precious ticket, and send it safely to where I'd be – waiting patiently, gratefully humble, full of resolutions for the rest of my wise and organized life.

# Woods of Honalee

By GJ Gillespie





## **The Statue**

By Joseph Cooper

I sat on a park bench overlooking the lake at sunset. Shortly thereafter, a family stopped in front of me and the mother scrutinized me up close. “Do you see his legs?” she said pointing them out to her children. “The way one is crossed over the other? That means he was wounded in battle.” After a while a pair of girls, noticeably intoxicated, walked by and one stretched languidly across my lap and flashing the peace sign said, “Take my picture.” While I admired the sunset, a young man walked by with his dog, who stopped, sniffed my legs, and urinated on my feet. “Good dog,” said the young man into his phone. At dusk a boy in a black hoodie skulked up to me and spray painted, *Heaven*, across my chest. In the afterglow a wayfarer wandered into the park and sat down beside me. “Turtles,” he whispered wiping a tear from his eye and resting his head in my lap. “Turtles all the way down.”

## **Dislike of Cycles**


By Frederick Pollack

Hitting the window, the hawk dropped the squirrel it had been carrying, killed apparently by one beak-stab to the gut (pale-pink intestines trailing), front limbs already gone.

The hawk lay panting on our cement patio. Big; hard to judge size. The look of its visible eye was, I thought, its one expression whether it had the advantage or, as here, not. All hunger is rage;

It panted. I waited a minute for it to die, then turned inside to call someone, and at that moment it flew to a low bough, stood observing. I don't in fact wonder if it's the elegant hovering form we see most days. Paper towel for the squirrel, whom I carried, dropped beside

a bush. (Imagined his last inadequate scan of the sky.) Something about returning to earth, but mostly what I thought of was bones, including ours and the dinosaurs', as eventual witness. Evil is whatever wants to eat you, which means that evil is everywhere and is both very big and very small.



## Decompose

By Nina Robins

Every day for four days I pass  
by the decomposing raccoon  
on my walk to work.

The first day he was whole,  
on his back, paws up  
still positioned  
from begging the car to stop.

The second he was melting  
but I could still see in his face,  
desperation.

The third day the flies  
had burrowed into his skin  
and he was flattened  
against the pavement.

Today he is odorous  
a home for feasting bugs,  
missing head, flesh removed  
the maggots and beetles  
tear through him.

The cars drive by,  
and no one has called  
the City to remove him.  
His stench of suffering  
is overwhelming,  
but we hold our noses  
and walk past.

So he will continue  
to be removed only by  
those who feast.

## Axis & Allies

By Robert Sumner

Germany had seized three Soviet territories, Japan had amassed a formidable navy and seized Hawaii, Australia, and New Zealand. Beer bottles littered the kitchen counter.

“The mistake most players make is in failing to recognize that the two sides are not equally weighted,” I explained to the two players who always lost against me. “The Allies start out with a bigger overall economy but the Axis initially has more units on the board. The Allies have to play cautiously and not lose too much territory before their economic advantage kicks in; the Axis needs to attack relentlessly.” On this pot smoke-shrouded afternoon I was playing Germany and Japan, but I could win with either side, it didn’t matter. That’s not something that will get you laid, but I’m proud of it nonetheless.

“Thanks for the tutorial,” Chad said as he fiddled with one of his tiny plastic green American infantrymen.

“We’re only a few rounds in and it’s already turning into a stampede.” Normally I’m modest, but not when I play that game. It makes me feel like how I imagine Michael Jordan had felt dunking from the free-throw line. I moved a German battleship and two transports into the sea space between Italy and Libya, then moved a tank and two infantry across to attack the two British infantry defending Libya.

“I knew you were gonna do that,” Dean said.

“It shouldn’t be any great surprise. I’ll take my extra battleship shot.” I rolled a red die. It came up three. I rolled again - five - rolled two red dice - five, one.

Dean removed his two beige infantry pieces from the board and sighed. “I have an awesome idea: Let’s use all that hydroponic stuff to grow some opium poppies. Everyone grows weed. I mean, we should do that, too, but branch out into other products.” He leaned back from the kitchen table and took a hefty swig of beer.

“I’ve come up with a much more awesome idea,” I said, my tone all business. “Let’s recruit a couple hundred good-looking, intelligent people and start a new civilization in outer space.” I rolled three red dice.

“Normally it’s rude to change the topic so abruptly but I admire your audacity,” Chad said.

Dean rolled a white die which came up a two. I removed one infantry piece and tossed it back into my pile of military units waiting to be purchased.

“The surface of the Earth will be mostly uninhabitable after I launch my diabolical scheme,” I said as I adjusted the Industrial Production Unit markers. “I’ll use poisonous gas derived from rare orchids to wipe out humanity, then wait in my space station with my followers until the air becomes breathable again.”

“Like in *Moonraker*,” Chad said and smiled.



“What?” Dean said.

“*Moonraker*. It’s a James Bond movie from the late seventies.”

“Nineteen seventy-nine,” I said.

“I saw that when I was a kid,” Chad said. “What exactly was supposed to be so great about living in outer space? I could see it being fun for a week or two but then you’d get sick of floating around. Those zero G toilets don’t look very comfortable.” He pushed his slipping glasses back up his nose. “How could gas do the job?” His skepticism was a finger poking at the lifelong bruise on my ego. “Maybe in specific spots but over a large area the gas would dissipate.”

“It could work,” I snapped, the beer and pot having somewhat eroded my ability to conceal my irritation. “The orchid has a chemical property that makes it more persistent than other poisonous gases.”

“Wouldn’t prom dates drop dead every year if their orchids were WMDs?” Chad said.

“Some reason you wanna wipe out humanity?” Dean wondered, his bearded face scrunched up in mild revulsion and perplexity.

“I need a specific reason?” My sarcasm flipped and twisted like Nadia Comăneci into a soothing, philanthropical posture. “And no, I’m not going to wipe it out - I’m going to recreate it, make it better.”

“That’s fuckin’ crazy, man,” Chad said. “I’m beginning to wonder about you. Maybe this game has had an effect on your mind.”

“That’s OK, it’s happening to me, too,” Dean said. “But seriously, what about the opium? Has anyone tried this?”

“My survivors would be ethnically diverse, though they’d all need to be fluent in English as well as their native languages.”

“Are you gonna attack again or are you done?”

I shifted a few pieces, then put a few more on the board. “No, I don’t wanna spread myself too thin.” I took an aggressive swig of my India pale ale. “Thirty-eight IPU’s for me.”

“Twenty-four IPU’s for two fighters.” Dean handed me my play money, then tossed some of his own into the pot. He set two British fighter plane pieces by the side of the board.

“*The Spy Who Loved Me* had a very similar plot except the survivors of a nuclear war were gonna live in an underwater colony instead of in space,” I said. “Until James Bond intervened, of course. The problem with both was that neither villain had a rationale for his evil scheme. I would,” I pronounced with an imperial upward jab of my left index finger.

“You’d rather not have to deal with real life?”

“All of the world’s problems could be fixed if we started over and eliminated all ideologies and resource inequalities. Year zero.”

“Just make everyone conform?” Chad stood up, swigged a manly swig, then opened the refrigerator door. “Beer?” He pulled two pilseners from the fridge,

opened them and handed one to Dean. How pathetic it was of them to drink pilsener like peasants when a more sophisticated, bitter beer was available.

“Yeah, why not?” My anger rose. “Conformity is such a dirty word but what if everyone dedicated their lives to the improvement of humanity and never deviated from an agreed plan? There would be no wars, no crime, no hatred.”

“I never realized mass murder could create such a rosy future,” Chad said as he adjusted his baseball cap. “Naturally, you’d provide the grand plan.”

“I haven’t worked out all the details but I will before the first shuttles launch.”

“Are you secretly a billionaire?” Dean asked.

“No offense, but this seems like an inauspicious start,” Chad piled on.

“Ya know, pick any megalomaniacal villain from a Bond flick and ask: How did he put this organization together?” I waved my arms around, sloshing a bit of beer over my fingers. “At some point he had to have a conversation like this one. He had to say, ‘I’m pronouncing myself leader of a militant international cult. Who’s in?’”

“Looking for followers?” Dean asked with ninety percent sarcasm and ten percent neediness.

A cunning smile crept across my jagged teeth. “Yeah. I’ll spring for some pizza if you swear allegiance to me.”

“Deal,” Dean said and saluted me like I stood above him at a mass rally. A feeling of power warmed me. “I’m in one hundred percent. And I can help you set up a website to reel in more followers.”

“My friend, the mad man,” Chad said. “Are you actually buying some pizza?” He pulled out his phone. “What do you want?”

“The world and everything in it,” I said, my tone lower. I tossed a twenty dollar bill on the table, picked up a grey bomber piece and turned it in my fingers.

“On the pizza, psycho,” Chad said. “What toppings?”

“If it has pepperoni I’ll be happy,” Dean said.

Chad dialed on his cell phone. “Just to be clear, I’d be the James Bond in this scenario. I would foil your evil scheme.”

I stared at the game board. My eyes glazed over. A few weeks earlier I’d been waiting tables at Winston’s Grille when a guest, a gruff man in his fifties, started really busting my balls, finding fault with everything I did. First I hadn’t greeted the table soon enough. Then I’d had the nerve to correct the man’s hideous wife when she ordered zinfandel. *Do you want the red stuff or the pink stuff?* I had asked. *Zinfandel is pink*, she brayed through yellow chipmunk teeth. *No, zinfandel is red, white zinfandel is pink*. Her condescending smirk turned to hostility. *Zinfandel is pink, honey*, she said. *You need to learn yer job better*. I folded my hands and assumed a lecturing posture. *I know it’s hard to wrap your head around this but white zinfandel was originally a white wine made from excess zinfandel grape juice which a vintner accidentally made into a batch of the pink stuff when the yeast died off before it consumed all of the sugar. He liked*

*it better than the white stuff and so white zinfandel became a pink wine. Zinfandel, on the other hand, is still red and definitely not pink. The husband had glared at me. Just fetch the fucking wine, dipshit.*

Working in the service industry entails tolerating a lot of shitty people. Between the management flagrantly showing favoritism to the most ass-kissy servers, to the servers who form little cliques like they're still in high school, tormenting the nerds like they're the beautiful people working their low status, low pay jobs. I was the only one who resisted the domineering harassment of Dave, a waiter who strutted around wearing a gold star pinned to his collar to show that management had deemed him less of a loser than the rest of us. When too many servers were crowded into the corner where we dumped the dirty plates, he would barge in with his load saying, *Easy, Turbo*, for no apparent reason. He was busting my balls the day my grandmother died and I went ballistic, screaming at him that I was going to rip his balls off. He punished me by stealing a customer's credit card from a plate I left unattended on my tray for a minute. I can't prove it was him, I just know it was. The management later assured us that if we needed a day off for a death in the family, they could always find coverage, but that's hardly the issue.

And the losers in the kitchen resent the snobbishness of the more arrogant wait staff and will punish you even if you don't act like that. One cook sabotaged a salad dressing dispenser so when I tried to pull it out of the refrigerator during my prep duties at the beginning of the lunch shift, the top popped off and splashed homestyle ranch all over my bib. The kitchen staff had a laugh at my expense. I complained to a manager but couldn't prove that it was the black guy who had told a black waitress that she shouldn't have been dating me because I'm white. The only upside to it is the abundance of attractive and lonely young women waiting tables who party with all the other servers at the end of almost every shift makes it easy for a guy who is not all that great at picking up women in other settings.

The world is overrun with idiots, and most of them do not recognize their mental superiors. The only people who seem to understand their position in the natural hierarchy are immigrants. American culture encourages stupid people to assert dominance over smart people. For my entire life I have been oppressed by mongoloids.

I went to the service bar to pick up the asshole's beer and the harpy's white zin, glanced both ways looking for managers and, seeing none, spat in the beer, stirred it around with a straw, and set it on my tray. *Oh, shit, man, is someone getting punished again?* Dean asked with a queasy mixture of admiration and disgust. *Don't worry, they deserve it.* I lifted the glass of white zin and puckered my lips. Chad lunged from behind the bar and grabbed my wrist. *Don't.*

I carefully place the bomber back in Germany's pile. "Do so at your own peril."

"Hey, we'll take a large thin crust..." Chad speaks into the phone, his words fading as I walk down the hallway of the craftsman house, open a door, and descend a rickety stairwell to a dark basement. From a wooden shelf I pluck a plastic watering can, stick it under a faucet, and fill it halfway. One of the criteria met by the twenty acres a few hours north of the city I recently bid on was a plentiful supply of fresh water. The idea of building a space colony is pure fantasy, something I broach semi-jokingly to get a feel for my friends' attitudes about societal rejuvenation. The site is isolated enough that it would effectively serve the same purpose as a space station. Thanks to gentrification and the severely limited construction of new homes far below the rate of population growth, the modest craftsman I inherited more than tripled in value since I poured a hundred twenty milliliters of methanol into the gallon bottle of Stolichnaya my mother kept hidden behind her Weight Watchers supplies. The proceeds from its sale will fund the construction of a bunker complex under a cabin on the rural site after the shabby little hut there is torn down.

While global warming will devastate much of the planet, I read that the coast from Marin up through British Columbia is expected to become an oasis of climate stability. When enough adherents to my belief that Earth is doomed unless the population is radically reduced are assembled and indoctrinated, I will send them out to release the gas in crowded downtowns. The elite will remain with me in the bunker and receive further enlightenment until the population is brought down to a sustainable level, until the now obsolete United States of America collapses in suicidal dysfunction. Then they will emerge in their gas masks, armed with AR-15s and an ironclad determination to assert the sovereignty of the California Republic, or perhaps a new empire.

A quick look over my shoulder and I open a second door. Florescent light pours out. In a room of grow lights and hydroponic equipment I check for expired light bulbs and withered tendrils. I pass the first batch of opium poppies that will fund further expansion of the operation, then stand before the more magnificent crop. If Chad or one of the Chads of the world tries to stop me, the would-be hero will be dealt with. Failure to cooperate with progress forfeits any moral claim to survival. With my left hand I reach out and, with an apprehension of destiny, with world historical greatness flooding from my heart to my capillaries, caress a purple and white orchid frond.

# **Bartlet**

By Cynthia Yatchman



## **Introduction to Music**

By Valerie Smith

Late into fall and deep  
into a warm wet winter,  
the owl and her owl friends  
bellow need into the night wind.

They wait until the stars sink  
into the black, to sing  
across the leafless trees a call  
and response for love.

Between each breath, they hold  
a lonely verse for the widow  
in the window missing her  
husband.

She counts the ups and downs  
with an old German Shepherd  
who stays up all winter listening  
to questions in the dark.

## **Your Father's DUI**

By John Fredericks

he calls at midnight—  
the line crackles you  
awake. he slurs  
directions: get your truck,  
meet at the station,  
go inside. you  
have a test tomorrow—  
cotangents and sines,  
but you don't  
tell him about it when  
he collects himself,  
asks for a Newport, and  
cries in the passenger's  
seat, like this shouldn't  
be happening to such a—  
good guy.

## **I Feel Her Slip Through My Fingers**

By Sandrine Jacobson





## The Nature of Sound

By Suzanna de Baca

The gong sounds seven times,  
deep and resonant, ringing low  
in my pelvis, vibrations spreading  
slowly through my body.

There is a pounding in my chest,  
like rain beating down  
from the inside out, drops heavy,  
then faint, then imperceptible.

The gong sounds. The bass tone  
inhabits me, accompanying my heartbeat.  
I float in pure waves.

You used to clap your hands  
together in a room to measure  
the resonance, to count how long  
the sound would stay: one, two, three  
seconds. You would calculate, pointing  
to the walls and windows, doors and ceiling.  
You taught me that sound bounces off  
the surfaces of stone or tile or glass or wood  
at different rates, and then is absorbed  
and dies.

You taught me when sound dissipates  
it's called decay. I believed then  
that to decay was to perish,  
like the disintegration of a piece of fruit,  
sweet and putrid, the withering of a body,  
muscles weak and flesh like paper,  
or the decline of affection,  
one word, one gesture, at a time.  
I can barely remember our love now  
but sometimes in the last moments  
of a gong or a bell or a chime it appears:  
the splitting pain of loss, noise  
careening around me. I slowly let go  
and you are gone again.

The gong sings, leaving  
an echo of silence.

## Decomposition

By Maurice Dorsey

It was my dream to have one gay relationship that would endure as my mother and father's sixty-two years of marriage. I dreamed that my partner and I would work as a team to attain a life better than our beginnings.

I met David during the summer of 1971, one year after I finished college. I was twenty-three. He was visiting my apartment with another friend of mine. He was an acutely quiet man with a gentle spirit. I found department attractive.

Although very quiet, it was he who initiated getting together with me. I agreed. Future conversations revealed he was formerly military, studied engineering at Howard University, Washington, DC, and employed by ATT. The singular glitch in my consideration to date was: he was thirty-five years old, living with his mother and father. That felt odd to me. They resided in a depressed section of southwest Baltimore City. I was from rural Harford County, Maryland.

Shortly, we started dating. During our first intimacy, I discovered he had bad breath and funky smelling feet. He used toothpicks to clean his teeth. He showered but never cleaned between his toes. I didn't want to teach him personal hygiene. He thought my concerns were humorous. He considered his breath and feet a part of his masculinity. Over time, my concerns were agreed upon. Progress was made. Otherwise, I learned to love him.

We dated for three years. He suggested that he wanted an apartment of his own. I happily and willingly helped him to select and set up his new suburban apartment. His mother was clearly distraught with her son moving. In her mind, I was the villain responsible for influencing his action. He had been held by the clutches of his mother. To make the transition easier for her, he visited her after work each day to console her hurt feelings. He would take her to church with us.

He placed his arm around her shoulder, not appear gay in church. His mother never knew that he was gay. I eventually got sick of his hypocrisy. I stopped attending church with them.

After five years we built a four bedroom house together. I operated the entire house. Before we were settled, his mother hinted interest in moving in with us. David had the onset of Parkinson's disease. The last thing I wanted was another responsibility. Tension between his mother and I was escalating since I did not support her. When she discovered we slept in the master bedroom together, she felt hurt. She began to call us every day. If David and I were intimate, he would stop, to take her calls. He felt the need to be available for her.

A few years later, she asked me to drive her to Korvette's Department Store to purchase a gift for David's birthday. I agreed. While we were riding along in my car I asked: "Do you like me at all?" She replied: "I like what you do for my son!"

As my career advanced, I traveled frequently. I returned home from Chicago late one evening. After I parked my car in the garage and entered the house quietly, not to awaken David. I discovered David and his mother sleeping together. She was in my space of our king-sized bed. He had moved her into our house while I was away without any discussion with me.

They did not see or hear me as I packed my clothes and drove away

## **Mourning Ancestors**

By Rafael Wolfe

when thundering clouds roll in  
and hatches are battened,  
that is when I must visit Her.  
She is a lighthouse, standing  
firm on the cliffs.  
sea spray mists my face  
stings my eyes and salts my tongue.  
I stretch my hand out from the bow  
to reach Her  
but the tide pulls me away.  
in the night She shines a light  
across the water like a city on a hill  
guiding me home.  
but every night  
She is just as far as the last.  
and when I finally think I've arrived  
She is stone,  
set in the ground,  
plain  
strong  
silent.  
I lay the marigolds at Her feet  
the orange petals a beacon  
to help Her see me.  
I don't know if She does,  
but I sit with Her anyway.  
We share this night  
in early November  
though the crisp breeze chills  
my bones and the  
tears from the sky threaten  
to snuff out Her candle

I stay.

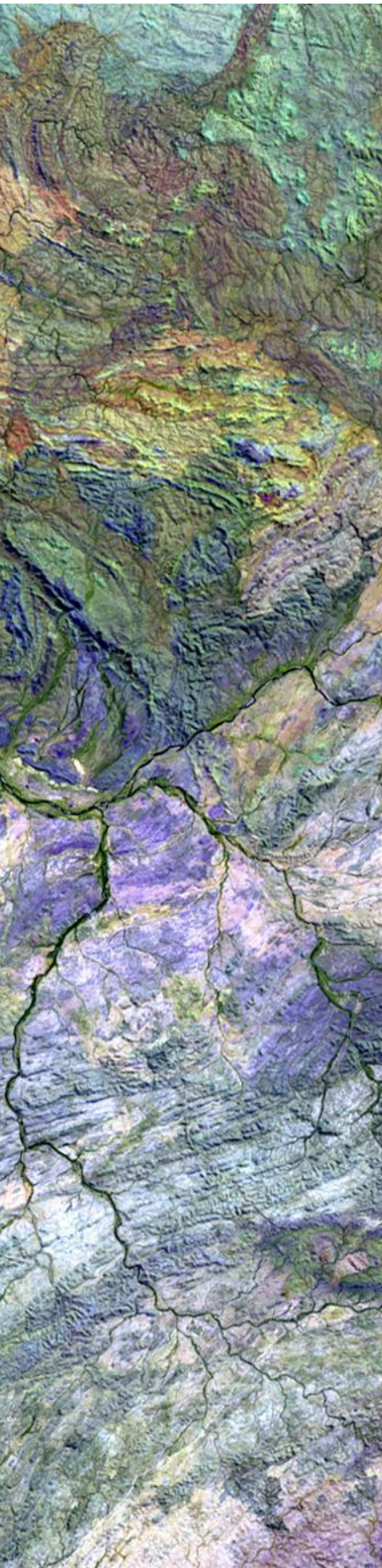
We sit  
in the same silence  
We have always known.

We are strangers,  
but I cry just the same.

# Peonies

By Rachel Coyne





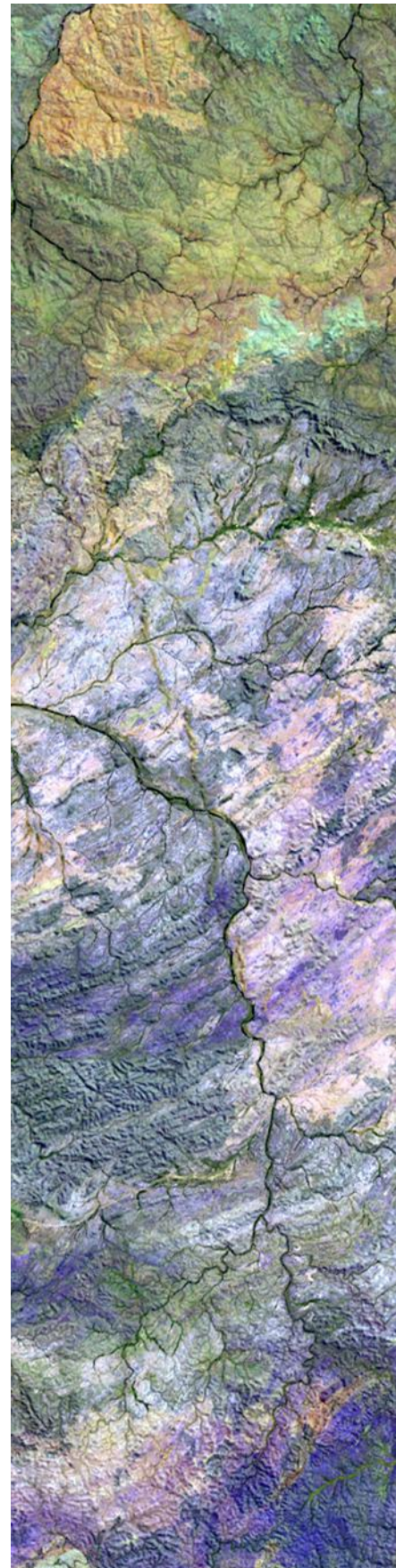
## low vision

By Davi Schweizer

can't see the forest for the trees  
the headlights glare and flicker in the other lane  
can i see your glasses? wow you are really blind  
frequent squinting or blinking  
the billboards are a blur and  
can you read the top line again for me?  
look through the phoropter now  
corrections, your optic nerve is fucked

the forest or the trees  
headlights flicker  
can i see you wow you are  
frequent  
a blur and  
again for me?  
look through now  
corrections, your nerve

the forest the trees  
headlights flicker you frequent  
a blur and again



## **i dreamt of you last night**

By Beatrice Bleakley

i went to feed you,  
while your nails did the *tap tap click* against the linoleum  
as you bounced around.  
you bounced so little, near the end,  
but, much like myself,  
you were always pretty food motivated.

i reached out to pat your head  
and when i touched you, i remembered.  
i remembered the text from my mom,  
not twenty four hours ago,  
and i knew you were gone.

i put your food bowl down  
and we sat on the floor together.  
you lay there on the cool faux tile,  
calm as ever.  
i ran my hand against your flank.

you were so warm,  
and i knew you hadn't been for hours.  
i knew you never would be again.

all our time together, i sang you songs with your name in them.  
pop songs, rock songs, show tunes,  
all modified to wedge you into the lyrics.  
you would give me this look from the couch,  
this one that said you didn't understand what i was saying,  
but you were disappointed in me nonetheless.

i didn't do that this time.

this time, i sang you "you are my sunshine".  
i sang it over and over.  
i couldn't remember all the words,  
knew i could if i was conscious,  
but it didn't matter.

i choked them out  
through heaving breaths and wet cheeks.  
i ran my hand against your side,  
scratched the top of your head,  
played with those big soft ears.

you breathed, still and even,  
and you were so warm.

## Trending

By Desiree Remick

For a while, everyone I knew was getting their teeth removed. First the incisors, then the canines and bicuspid. The molars stuck around longest, but eventually even they got yanked in the name of beauty. Dating profiles all showed close-ups of parted lips and smooth pink gums, sometimes inked or bedazzled by rhinestones. Blender sales went through the roof.

At first I was reluctant to have the procedure because my teeth, crooked and yellowing as they were, suited me fine. But Marinda and Sal convinced me in the end. On my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, they blindfolded me, put me in the back of Sal's van, and drove me to the Clinic.

"We're paying," said Marinda.

"No more excuses," said Sal.

"Let's get those uggos out of there," said the clinician, brandishing a pair of pliers. Two hours later, I had an empty mouth and a palmful of bloody teeth.

"Smile," said Marinda, snapping a photo. I looked like a pufferfish.

"The swelling should go down in a few days," said the clinician. "Just keep sucking on ice."

The first week, I kept dreaming I was in the graveyard digging up my teeth (each had a tiny tombstone of its own) and placing them back in my mouth. After I finished the two rows, upper and lower, I put two more rows on top of them. They fit together like Legos. I had the biggest smile in America.

"Colgate's going out of business," said Sal. Their speech was a bit blurry without teeth. Everyone's was. We were all getting used to it.

"If you can't keep up with the times, you fall behind," said Marinda. She had really gone all out with the rhinestones; they even covered her lips and tongue. She claimed it made her better at cunnilingus.

"I don't know, guys," I said. "Don't you miss chewing gum?"

"My Achilles heel," said Sal. "At my peak, I was going through eight packs of Juicy Fruit a day. Now I've switched to mints."

"You're a chain-minter," said Marinda.

Sal unwrapped another mint and popped it in their mouth. They offered me one, but I declined. I hate how icy breathing feels afterwards.

"All my nails are coming off on Friday," Marinda said. She showed me her hand. Each fingernail had a little red X painted on it.

"Won't that hurt?"

She gave me a glitzy grin. "I've heard it's not nearly as bad as the teeth. You should come with! You'd look amazing without those keratin monstrosities clinging to your fingertips."

"Is Sal going?"

"I can't," said Sal, sadly. "I'm learning mandolin."



I didn't want to go either, but on Friday, Marinda came by on her motorcycle to pick me up and we drove to the Clinic, where I watched her have the procedure. The beds of her nails were like rose petals.

"Let me take yours off too," the clinician begged.

"I don't know," I said. "What if I develop a chronic itch?"

"I'll take care of it for you," said Marinda, wiggling her scratchy tongue at me.

By the time I walked out of there, I was down eleven fingernails (the clinician charged extra for my polydactyly) and I had an appointment for my toes the following Friday.

"Bye bye nail clippers!" Marinda sang. "So long, nail polish! I'm a free woman now."

That night, I dreamed that my nails had regrown but were now fish scales, iridescent and tingling, and that my angelfish was covered in fingernails which were growing at a dreadful rate. I clipped them, but in my haste I was overzealous and hurt my poor fish.

I woke feeling sick to my stomach and ran to check the aquarium. The fish was fine. I touched the soft places where my nails had been and wept.

Sal was envious of our newly unarmored fingertips. They kept asking to see our hands, then muttering about how the mandolin wasn't worth it. After three days, they dropped their lessons and had the procedure. I bought a flexible backscratcher because Marinda couldn't hang around all the time.

A month after that, people started showing up to parties hairless. I didn't pay much attention, thinking that alopecia might be more common nowadays, but it wasn't long before Sal's mohawk and Marinda's gorgeous afro were gone. The two of them invited me out for a "surprise." I pretended to be ill.

My phone rang before my alarm the next morning. "Go outside," Marinda said. "You'll be so happy."

The mobile Clinic was out front, and the clinician was armed with tweezers. A sandwich board on the sidewalk read: *To baldly go where no one has gone before!*

"Your friends booked you for a full removal, including eyebrows and pubic," said the clinician. "Just have a seat and we'll get started. Now, it will regrow, so you'll have to come in for follow-up treatments every two months, but think of the amount you'll save not buying shampoo, brushes, dye, haircuts, all that jazz. And you'll look like a billion bucks."

I stepped into the back of the van and sat down in the swivel chair. "Okay, I'm ready."

The clinician put on André 3000's album *New Blue Sun*. "This will take a while, so try to relax. Would you like some almond milk to sip on?"

"No thanks," I said. As I felt the first tiny tug at my hairline, I was already starting to wonder what life would be like without bones.



## VOICE

By Ellie Ellias

it evaporates.

I try to pour my voice down like concrete;  
somehow,  
I trace the path to its erasure

So certain have I felt in my declarations  
until I have stood before you,

my naked mouth agape,  
my whirling incantations lost

I would swear up and down I am not afraid

and still of this I am sure –

There is mercy in hesitation,

I would perish without my contradictions.  
I would suffocate without the things that I fear.

# Death Cannot Live Without the Dying

By Serge Lecomte





## Shoes

By John Greenwood

A growing teen outgrew his shoes.  
He used to have a much bigger brother.  
Which was, I suppose, quite lucky.

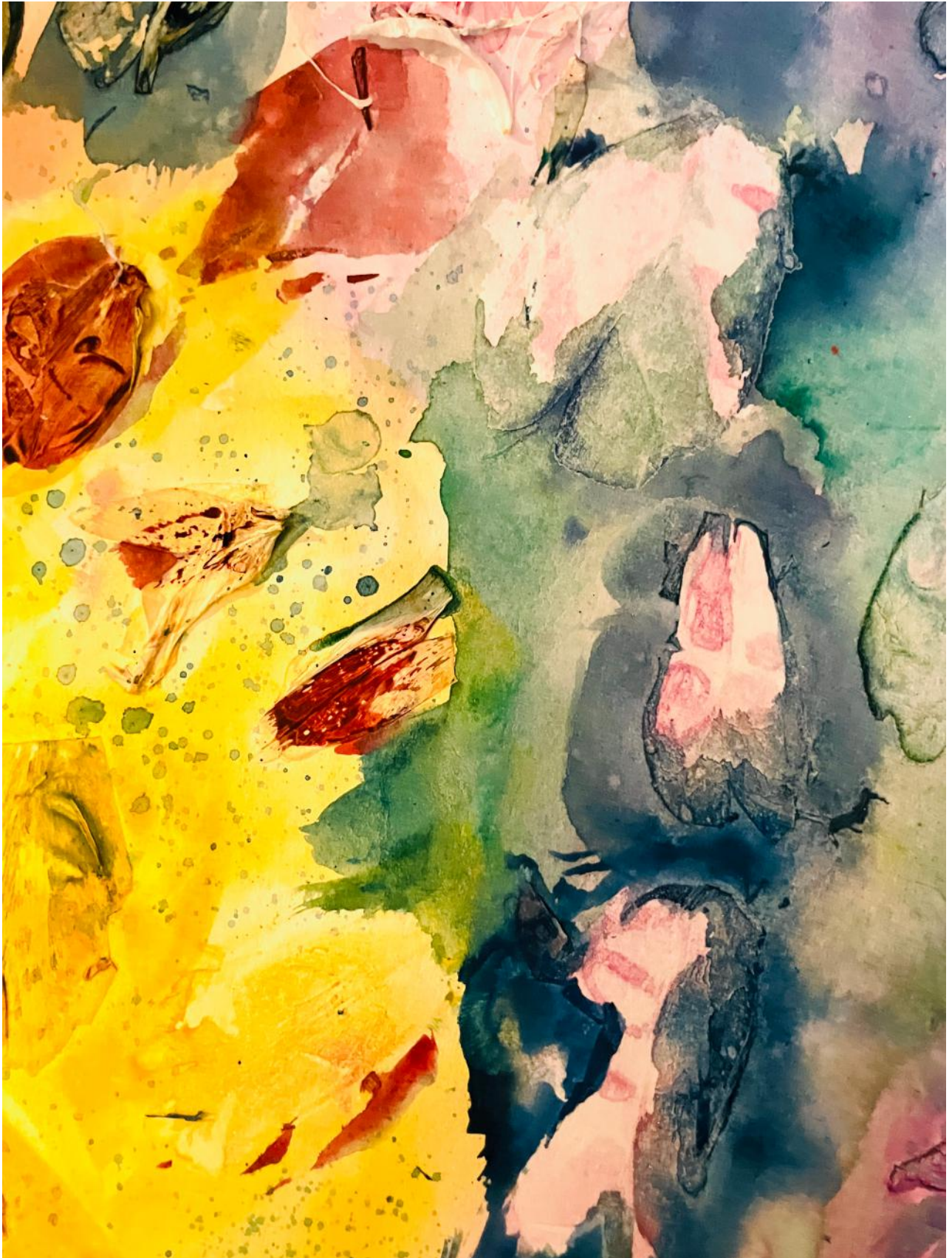
## Lingering

By Zhu Xiao Di

At this stage  
in life  
the present is  
always better  
While most are waiting  
to cheer for the first snow  
I can't bear to let go of  
another inch of time  
under the warm sunshine

# Peonies

By Rachel Coyne



## Someone Died

By Arshia Iqbal

Someone died. An aunt, I think, or maybe it was a distant cousin or someone in the village who waved at me that one time we went back.

Someone, who is an ocean away, had passed. And now, the tides of grief were making their way on to our shore. But for some reason I was far enough from the water to be left dry. And usually, being dry during a tidal wave of sadness would be a blessing, but when other's tears of loss remind you of the things you've never had, you begin to realize that the one who has lost the most, is you.

Do I not deserve to feel grief, or am I forced to endure it in the secondhand? I want fresh grief, the grief that feels like the first monsoon of the season. Tears that could water the next batch of plants for an eternity. A red splotchy face stained with the pain of knowing. Not the kind of grief that feels like an old sweater my sister gave me the week she moved out. Not the kind of grief that feels like a missed bus that everyone else got on except me. Not the kind of grief where I'm left alone with the shadow of what I should be feeling.

So I sit there and think about her. I imagine her. I make my own memories with her so that when mom and dad cry, my tears can match the velocity of theirs and I'm no longer an outsider in their circle of sadness.

I think of hand rolled rotis she would make every morning. How I would sit next to her while she squatted by the stove on the ground. She would smoothen out the balls of dough until they became flat, like pancakes. Then she would haphazardly throw them over the open flame, only for them to be removed with the pinch of her finger when they inflated. Her calloused hands beating the rough dough, the sweat dripping off her forehead from the heat of the country, her careful movement around the fire as to not ignite her battered sari.

I think of Eid morning. When mom and dad would push me to touch her feet for blessings, and how she would grab me by the shoulders to stop it. She would slip a few takas into my hand, I would refuse, she would insist and somehow with my head hanging in defeat I would pocket the money. Money I knew she needed. Money that would help buy food and clothes and maybe a toy for her kid, but money I knew she needed to give me so that one day she could look back and tell herself she did it. Then her henna stained hands would touch my face in adoration of my youth. Her greying hair that once flowed all the way down to her back now tamed by a tight bun, her brittle skin that was once softened by creams and lotions in her youth, her tongue stained from years and years of chewing paan after dinner.

I think of the night before we left. I would stumble into her on my way to the bathroom, sitting on the veranda looking far off into the distance. When I sat down next to her, she would tell me of her own youth. The way she would wash her hair and line her eyes with kohl so the boy next door would stumble when he saw her. She would smile sadly at the thought of her own marriage. The boy next door would become a fantasy when my voice jolts her back into reality. Her eyes watering with the memories of what could have been, her hands shaking from the realization that it would never be, her mind wandering in an attempt to chase down her own fantasies.

But this itself is a fantasy. My own mind playing tricks on me so I could feel something for someone, somewhere, somehow. My desire for grief overtakes my value for truth, and then I'm left alone with my own reality.

Someone died. An aunt, I think. And I wish I could grieve her like a person instead of mourning the loss of what we could have been.

# Rocks

By Alaina Hammond





## Not Cursed

By Ryan Davidson

My friend Ben mailed me a rock. It arrived in New Jersey  
just in time for me to get it before I moved to Morocco.  
I got it and read it and,  
when I unpacked in this apartment  
I've lived in for two months,  
I placed it on the dresser.

My now apartment comes with a cleaning service.  
One day the rock was gone  
after the cleaning happened.  
Part of me still thinks it's here somewhere.  
I'll move the furniture before I leave.

Ben asked to me leave it somewhere I love in Morocco,  
and I'm still trying to figure that out,  
but in the meantime, in the apartment I live in now  
I can drop my laundry off

and they clean it for me, at a price.  
The last time I got my laundry back  
there was a new rock

on my cleaned and mostly dried clothes.  
I don't know if that means I've been cursed,  
but it doesn't feel like it.  
Not at this very moment anyway,  
so long as I don't think too much  
about any one thing for too long.  
Both rocks sit on my mantel still.

## Jacob and Esau

By Sydni Errickson

The dry earth is hot against my skin  
bending like the crook in my staff,  
I ask for mercy, seven times.

I assume I will be delivered  
to the death, I have rightly earned.  
While I wait, I bow.

You come down the path,  
a long way up but— deliberate  
as storm clouds gather.

You have a limp you did not before,  
when we were boys together.  
So do I, brother, so do I.

Have you too wrestled with things through the night?

Your gait is nearly a dance,  
arms open so wide not only I can fit  
but all the grief, too.

I search desperately for anger in your brow,  
but find only silver and sweat.  
My God, we are so old,

yet we are still boys together.  
I am still that liar, and you  
are still the one I wronged.

# Facing It Together

By Jack Bordnick



## You Owe Me a Ghost

By Fernando Contreras

After my mother died, my wife and I started a new tradition. Instead of spending the holidays in Monterrey with my family, we traveled to places as far away from Mexico as possible. We didn't plan it that way, but like many traditions, this one was born out of need. The loss of my mother was too painful, and without her, Christmas dinner with my father and brother would have been just three men picking at a turkey leg, mumbling.

On our trip to Egypt, my wife and I met Guy, a photographer from New Zealand. We became friends, and ever since we've tried to meet somewhere in the world every year or two—we met in Rio once and saw him in Queenstown on another occasion. On this other trip (my wife couldn't join us), I flew to Las Vegas to meet Guy because he was attending one of those conferences where people behave like it is their last day on Earth and down tequila shots at nine in the morning. But that was not the actual trip. After the conference, our plan was to rent a car and drive from Las Vegas to San Francisco in a week.

First, we stopped at Death Valley, where we took photos of the desert at 2 am. It was darker than expected, so we took two-minute exposures to capture the landscape in detail. I was wearing a hoodie, so I pulled the hood over my head to make it seem like I was wearing a cloak. Then I ran fifty yards, stepped in front of the camera, stood still for about forty seconds, and sprinted out of the shot. Because the exposure was longer than the period I stayed still, the photos featured a slight ghostly silhouette in the middle of the starry desert night. That was me. I was the ghost.

The next day, we arrived at the historic Jeffery Hotel in Coulterville, California, famously known for being haunted. This three-story hotel was built in 1851 and originally served stagecoach passengers. It has been preserved and restored, capturing the ambiance of that era.

The owner checked us in and informed us we were the only guests that night. He then gave us a tour, showcasing the famous Teddy Roosevelt room and the Magnolia Saloon. The furniture and the wallpaper were busy with decorative elements that didn't match, and the beds creaked if you stared at them hard enough. "Pick any room you like, but rooms six and seven have recorded the most activity," the owner told us. I chose six, and Guy picked seven.

He handed us paranormal detection equipment and showed us how to use it. He pressed buttons and twisted dials, and the machines squealed and crackled. He said high paranormal activity would cause the lights to go off. The instruments reminded me of the walkie-talkies my mom bought me at Radio Shack when I was eight.

"If you arrive here before ten, I'll open the bar just for you. Just knock on the door back there. That's my room," the owner told us.

We walked around Coulterville, but the town seemed dead. Stores were closed, and you could hear the tree leaves twitching with the breeze. Eventually, we found the only open restaurant, but neither of us was hungry, so we returned to the hotel.

When we arrived, it was night, and the only lights working at the Jeffery were the emergency flood lamps at the end of the second-floor hallway. We had left our phones charging upstairs, so we used the moonlight beaming through the windows as a guide and headed to the bar. We knocked on the owner's room and waited. Then, we knocked harder a few more times.

"He cannot be asleep in there," Guy said.

"It's only half past nine," I said.

We grabbed our cameras, went outside, and set up our tripods across the street from the hotel. The moon perched itself behind the building—it was the brightest light source since most streetlights were out. I fidgeted with the aperture and the exposure and kept looking through the lens at each of the hotel's windows in hopes of finding ghostlike activity. The town remained silent until we heard a car's engine—it was a cop car. We hadn't seen it because it was parked behind a billboard about fifty yards away. But now, the lights came on, and the two cops slowly approached us. Guy waved hello, and we waited for one of the cops to roll down a window. But they didn't. The cops stared at us and drove past slowly, disappearing behind a hill.

A few minutes later, the cop car reappeared down the same hill and parked in the middle of the street, about twenty yards away. They turned their lights off and sat in the dark, looking at us. Guy packed his equipment, and I took a few more photos because I wanted to get the image right, given that I was either overexposing the lit window on the second floor or underexposing the clouds surrounding the moon.

"I think they want us to leave," Guy said.

"And I want to be the god of the underworld, but nobody has offered me the job," I said.

The cop car moved slowly and parked in front of us. This time, the driver rolled down the window. "How is it going?" the cop asked.

"Good night! We're just taking night photos. The weather is nice as. Isn't the weather nice as?" Guy said.

"As what?" the cop asked.

"It's a Kiwi expression. We say, for example, 'the moon is full as.'"

"Where are you from?" the cop asked Guy.

"I'm from New Zealand, and he's from Mexico."

"I'm an American," I said.

"Right. He married an American woman," Guy said.

"Did you?" the cop asked me.

"Yes," I said.

"Do you have your passports with you?" the cop asked.

"He does," I said.

"And you?" the cop asked me.

"I don't need to carry a passport in my country," I said.

"What brings you here?" the cop asked.

Guy gave them a description of our whole itinerary. First, he told them we went to

the Ghost Bar in Las Vegas. Then he told them about the coyote that walked past us outside Death Valley and the multicolored horizontal stripes that decorate the rock formations at Zabriskie Point. "Death Valley is the lowest point in the United States," Guy said. "There's salt on the ground of Badwater Basin."

"Are you okay?" the cop asked me.

"I don't understand the question. Do you mean right now or in life?" I asked.

"We haven't been drinking," Guy said. "We're about to head back to the hotel."

"What are you doing on the street?" the cop asked.

"Taking night photos," I told the cop. "You see this tripod? It helps me steady the camera."

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

I pointed at the Jeffery in front of us.

"We're the only ones at the hotel," Guy said.

"Who let you in?" the cop asked. "I thought the hotel was closed."

"The owner let us in," I told him. "But we can't find him."

"The place is haunted," Guy said.

"So why are you staying there?" the cop asked.

"I want to see if ghosts exist," I said.

"When are you leaving?" the cop asked.

"It depends on whether we survive the night," I told the cop.

"We're leaving tomorrow morning," Guy said.

"All right. You guys take care. Careful with the ghosts." The cops drove away.

"They're gone," Guy said.

"They're not—they parked again by that sign." I pointed at the car.

"I've never had this experience before," Guy said. "That was tense."

"You were so friendly that they probably thought you were a mass murderer."

"We're all friendly in New Zealand. Cops are friendly in New Zealand, too. Murderers in New Zealand smile and wave goodbye before they kill you."

"It doesn't translate well here. You need to sound more like a single parent who can't finish paying off his student loans."

"You were a smart ass with the cops."

"Well, yes, but I was doing it to help you. I was trying to balance out your homicidal Kiwi vibe."

We heard a noise and turned around. Two men and two women were staggering down the hill toward us. They peeked inside each car parked down the road as if looking for valuables.

"What are you guys doing?" Male #1 asked.

"We are done taking photos. How are you guys doing? The weather is nice as. It's a beautiful night!" Guy said.

I gave Guy a look.

"Can I see them?" Male #2 asked.

"Show us some pictures," Female #1 said. "I love pictures."

"Are you the ones staying at the Jeffery?" Female #2 asked.

"How do you know we are staying at the Jeffery?" I asked.

“I don’t remember. How do we know?” Female #2 asked.

“Because we know everything,” Female #1 said. They laughed.

“Can I see?” Male #2 grabbed Guy’s incredibly expensive camera. “How do I turn this on? Is it here?” He pressed some buttons at random.

“Let me show you,” Guy said. “Press this button here. Then, move this dial to go to the next one.”

“How about your photos?” Male #1 asked me.

“They’re fantastic,” I said.

“Let me see,” he said.

“I ran out of battery.”

“But we saw you taking pictures,” Female #1 said.

“Just now, I ran out of battery,” I said.

“I think you don’t want to show us your pictures,” Female #1 said.

“Where are you from?” Male #1 asked me.

“I live on the east coast. Near the Atlantic Ocean.” I said.

“But where are you from?” Male #1 asked.

“I was born in Mexico,” I said.

“Where in Mexico?” he asked.

“Monterrey,” I said.

“Where’s that?” he asked.

“Just south of the United States.”

“I can’t say I have ever been,” he said. “But I love tacos.”

“Monterrey is full of tacos. You’d be happy there,” I said.

“These photos are awesome,” Male #2 said. “Great job!”

“Thanks!” Guy said.

“Do you guys have anything to drink?” Female #2 asked.

“Water,” I said.

“I was thinking vodka,” Female #2 asked.

“We don’t,” I said.

“Apology accepted,” Female #2 said.

“I’m hungry,” Female #1 said.

“Let’s go then,” Male #1 said. “Good luck with the ghosts,” he told us.

“Yeah, you guys are brave,” Male #2 said. “Have a good night.”

“Great meeting you!” Guy said.

“You are all right,” Female #1 told Guy as she walked away. But not you,” she pointed at me.

The four drunks walked to the billboard and stopped to talk to the cops. I couldn’t make out their conversation, but they laughed as they pointed at us. The clouds had covered the moon, so we finished packing our gear and returned to the hotel.

“Everybody seems to know we’re staying here,” I said.

“Yeah, that was weird as,” Guy said.

We went to the second floor, and Guy entered his room.

“Are you just going to go to sleep?” I asked.

“I’m knackered,” Guy said.

“Aren’t you worried?” I asked.

“About the ghosts?”

“No, the people. We’re sitting ducks here,” I said.

“If somebody wants to come in, they’ll come in,” Guy said.

“I’m going to keep watch tonight.”

“I’m too tired,” he said.

“But first, I’m going to explore the top floor,” I said.

“Say hello to the ghosts,” Guy said.

I was the perfect candidate to explore the hotel at night because, unlike most Mexicans, I don’t believe in ghosts, devils, angels, saints, etcetera. However, there are times when my amygdala fires up, and I’m convinced Satan is staring at me from the dark space behind an open door after watching a horror movie. I know there’s nothing there, but the fear is present. So, when my mind plays tricks on me, I don’t panic or block it, and I certainly don’t look at it through the lens of a self-aggrandizing religion. I let it happen, and eventually, the feeling goes away.

The hotel’s third floor was pitch dark, and I wondered whether to feel my way through or use the flashlight on my phone. I opted for total darkness and took small steps with my arms stretched out, and then I stopped because I heard something near me. First, I heard squeaks and creaks inside one of the rooms. Next, I felt someone standing behind me, staring at the back of my neck. Then, after my eyes adjusted, I saw shadows. It was like being inside Plato’s Cave minus the philosophical insight.

I turned on the flashlight and scanned the corridor, expecting to see a human-like shape. I imagined finding a nurse from the 1900s sticking a pair of forceps inside the open torso of a corpse. I imagined seeing a grimy man crouching, speaking gibberish. I imagined chains and hooks on the ceiling and a pale, naked woman hanging from the skin of her back and legs. Then, I heard whispers at the end of the hallway. All the doors to the rooms were closed, so I opened them one by one.

I thought it would be great if ghosts existed because it would confirm another plane of existence, one where the mind can exist without the brain. If so, memories and personality traits can be preserved in the ether and transported to other parts of the universe. It makes no sense, but imagining the chance of my mother being alive elsewhere was comforting.

I opened all the doors and found no one, so I returned to my room, where I noticed a rocking chair next to my bed for the first time —and no piece of furniture spells “haunted house” more than a rocking chair. I stared at the thing for twenty minutes, thinking it might eventually swing on its own, but nothing. Then I checked the streets from the window, but they were empty.

When the sun rose, I showered, collected my bags, and opened the door. On the floor, there was a silver tray with a banana. I knocked on Guy’s room.

“Did you also get a banana?” I asked Guy.

“I did. On a tray,” he said. “You, too?”

“Yes.”

“Just the banana?” he asked.



“And the tray,” I said.

“I’m keeping the banana,” he said.

“Are you crazy? What if the hotel owner stuck needles inside it?”

“Not everyone is like you,” Guy said.

“Anything else to report from last night?” I asked.

“Only the water,” Guy said.

“What about it?”

“I didn’t drink water last night, and now all the bottles are half empty,” Guy said.

“Maybe the ghosts were thirsty,” I said.

“Ghosts need hydration, too,” Guy said.

We packed our SUV and searched for the owner but couldn’t find him. We locked the hotel, left the keys in a box, and drove to Yosemite National Park.

“Tonight, I want to sleep in a Holiday Inn,” I told Guy.

“A haunted Holiday Inn,” he said.

“I think they’re all scary.”

As we drove off, I thought of the night my mother died and how I spent it searching YouTube for ghosts caught on camera. I saw videos of doors opening and closing independently, translucent human figures photobombing a family reunion, and invisible forces tugging the bed sheets while someone was asleep. I looked at ghost videos until five in the morning. I wanted to find a real ghost, but the apparitions were camera tricks. I remember listening to “If I Ever Leave This World Alive” by Flogging Molly on repeat. I heard that song on a loop for hours and imagined myself singing it in concert and jumping on stage.

The song started again, and I paused the ghost videos, got up from the computer, and jumped. I jumped and jumped and jumped, and if you had opened the door to my room, you would have seen a thirty-five-year-old man wearing headphones, mouthing a song in silence with his eyes closed, jumping in place. I wasn’t making a sound because I didn’t want to wake my father and brother up —although I doubt they were asleep. They were probably jumping at another concert. Jumping in place, mouthing a song, three men in their rooms, disconnected from each other, vanishing.

## About the Creators

**Beatrice Bleakley** is a writer, and that's all there is to be said about that. Tonight she is lying in bed listening to The Mountain Goats for the second straight hour, playlist on repeat, and intends to push it to a third. If you like her work, you can find her [@beableakley.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/beableakley.bsky.social) on Bluesky, or [bleakleybeatrice](https://www.instagram.com/bleakleybeatrice) on Instagram.

**Arno Bohlmeijer**, queer winner of a PEN America Grant 2021, novelist and poet, writing in English and Dutch, published in six countries – US: Houghton Mifflin, two dozen renowned Journals and Reviews, 2019 – 2024, and in *Universal Oneness: An Anthology of Magnum Opus Poems from around the World*, 2019.

**Jack Bordnick's** interests are to create artistic, meaningful works of art that can be enjoyed by all peoples and cultures. Being a designer and sculptor has allowed him to share his professional experiences in a beneficial way for both business and community projects of this nature. He has been a successful designer and has over twenty years experience in design, fabrication and installation of numerous and diverse projects of this nature. He is an Industrial Design/Sculptor graduate of Pratt Institute in New York, where he had his own professional design business and had been a design director for numerous companies and local government projects.

**Joseph Cooper** is the author of six books, most recently *Splash Fields* (VA Press, 2024). He lives in Lewisburg, WV.

With over twenty-five years of experience, **Fernando Contreras** is a writer whose portfolio includes plays, short stories, interactive fiction, and the forthcoming novel *A Monopoly of Violence*. Born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico, Fernando draws inspiration from his cultural background and life experiences. Holding an M.A. in Latin American Literature from New Mexico State University, he has delved deep into the tapestry of Latin American storytelling traditions. Additionally, he earned a Ph.D. in Humanities from the University of Texas at Dallas, focusing on creative writing and absurdist theater. Fernando now resides in Boston, MA.

**Rachel Coyne** is a writer and painter from Lindstrom, MN. These images were created from collages of peony petals and watercolor that were then photographed and digitally altered.

**Ryan J. Davidson** is a poet and scholar. His first book *Under What Stars* was published in the summer of 2009 by *Ampersand Books*. His second collection *Statues Need Stories* was published in 2019 by *Cyberwit books*. He is assistant professor of writing, rhetoric and world literature at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco.

**Zhu Xiao Di** is the author of *Thirty Years in a Red House* (memoir), *Tales of Judge Dee* (novel), *Leisure Thoughts on Idle Books* (essays in Chinese), and some poems lately at *Blue*

*Unicorn, Eratio, Eunoia Review, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, The Beatnik Cowboy, and WestWard Quarterly*. He contributes to *Father: Famous Writers Celebrate the Bond Between Father and Child* (anthology).

**Maurice Dorsey** is an MFA student majoring in fiction and nonfiction writing at SNHU. He has been a writer since his retirement from the United States Department of Agriculture in 2012. He has published five books: *Businessman First: Remembering Henry G. Parks, Jr., 1916-1989, Capturing the Life of a Businessman Who Was African American, A Biography*, 2014; *From Whence We Come*, 2017; *Of Time and Spirit, A Tribute to My Father*, 2020; *Zelma's Aphorisms: Old School Wisdom, Instructive, Inspirational, Hilarious, to Outrageous*, 2022; and *So Many Angels*, 2023. Each of his books have been added to the permanent collection of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City Public Library. *Businessman First* was nominated for the Phillis Wheatley Award by QBR at the 2015 Harlem Book Festival. *Businessman First, From Whence We Come, and Of Time and Spirit* were recognized Distinguished Favorites for the Independent Press Awards. He was a student spotlight for his submission: "Remnants of the Past", *Assignment Magazine*, 2024.

**Ellie Ellias** is a ghostwriter-turned-poet who currently lives in and writes from the woods in Quebec.

**Sydni Errickson** is a 20 year old poet originally from San Antonio, Texas. She is currently living in Whitehall, Michigan and finishing her final year of undergrad in Oklahoma. She has been writing poetry since she was 12 years old, and has pursued the craft into higher education. Her reason for writing is to remember, to preserve this sweet life and pass it on to others.

**John M. Fredericks** is a doctoral student studying educational policy at Arizona State University. His work has appeared in *Newsweek* and *After Happy Hour*, among others.

**GJ Gillespie** is a collage artist living in a 1928 farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, WA. A prolific artist with 22 awards to his name, his work has been exhibited in 65 shows and appeared in more than 167 publications. Beyond his studio practice, Gillespie channels his passion for art by running Leda Art Supply, a company specializing in premium sketchbooks. Whether conjuring vivid collage compositions or enabling other artists through exceptional tools, Gillespie remains dedicated to the transformative power of art.

**John Greenwood** is a Macclesfield-based writer and father of three. For over ten years he has supported children and adults with diverse emotional and social needs to challenge their narrative and engage in education in ways nobody thought possible. In 2021, after receiving an ADHD diagnosis, John embraced his creativity to become a full-time writer, exploring themes of connection, social justice, and personal transformation.

**Alaina Hammond** is a poet, playwright, fiction writers and visual artist.  
@alainaheidelberger on Instagram

Born in Australia in 1975, now living in California, **Sandrine Jacobson** has refined her artistic craft, driven by passion, tenacity, and a commitment to growth. Working in oils on canvas, she employs layered techniques to imbue her creations with depth and emotional resonance. Each new piece showcases the evolution of her artistic maturity and the potency of her creative voice. Sandrine consistently pushes the boundaries of artistic expression, crafting pieces resonant with authenticity and emotional depth.

**Arshia Iqbal** is a recent graduate of Vassar College, majoring in English. She is primarily a playwright who found her love of playwriting through writing and putting on weekly Zoom plays during the pandemic. Now she also writes prose, and poetry on her blog where she plays with Desi identity, American culture, and religion. In the Summer of 2022, she was a member of the Powerhouse Theater program where Arshia explored playwriting and the theater space firsthand with a group of other young theater professionals. In her senior year of college, Arshia wrote and produced another original play called “Wedding Scraps,” in which she employed a fully South Asian cast on the PWI campus. While writing and producing “Wedding Scraps,” Arshia became familiar with grant seeking, space booking, and dramaturgy as the play was fully self-produced. Arshia moved back to New York City to explore her passion for playwriting, essay, and short story writing and continue creating work that inspires and includes people like herself.

**Lorraine Jeffery** earned a library degree and managed public libraries for twenty years but learned more about life from raising her ten children (8 adopted, two bio) than in any university. She has won numerous prizes in national and state competitions and published in various journals. Her first book titled *When the Universe Brings Us Back* was published in 2022. Her chapbooks were published by Kelsay Books: *Tethers* in 2023 and *Saltwater Soul* in 2024.

**Luna Moore Latorre** is a writer of poetry and fiction living in Southern California. Her first two books, a novel and a poetry collection, are being published and distributed in 2025 through Library Tales/Simon & Schuster and The Poetry Box. Her poems and short stories have been previously published or are forthcoming publication in *Literally Stories*, *Eunoia Review*, *Yellow Arrow Journal*, and *Rising Phoenix Review*. When she is not writing, Luna loves reading, dancing, hiking, swimming, and being with her cat, Da Vinci. She is 24 years old.

**Serge Lecomte** was born in Belgium in 1946. He came to the States where he spent his teens in South Philly and then Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden H. S. he joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force. He earned an MA and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature with a minor in French Literature. He worked as a Green Beret language instructor at Fort Bragg, NC from 1975-78. In 1988 he received a B.A. from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Spanish Literature. He worked as a language teacher at

the University of Alaska (1978-1997). He worked as a house builder, pipe-fitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender and painter.

**Frederick Pollack** is the author of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS* (Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press), and three collections, *A POVERTY OF WORDS* (Prolific Press, 2015), *LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT* (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018), and *THE BEAUTIFUL LOSSES* (Better Than Starbucks Books, 2023). Many other poems in print and online journals. Website: [www.frederickpollack.com](http://www.frederickpollack.com).

**Desiree Remick** is pursuing a BFA in creative writing at Southern Oregon University. She is also the fiction editor of *Nude Bruce Review*. In her life before college, she taught fencing, picked cones for the forest service, and worked with a partner to translate poetry from Japanese to English. Her writing has won awards, most recently Bacopa Literary Review's Free Verse Poetry Award, and has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gravity of the Thing*, *The Orchards*, *Albion Review*, and other places. You can connect with her on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/desiree-remick-writes/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/desiree-remick-writes/).

**Nina Belén Robins** is a poet and grocery store employee. She was short listed for poet laureate of Westchester. She lives with her husband and cats and can be found at [www.ninabelenrobins.com](http://www.ninabelenrobins.com)

**T.J. Robinson** is a writer and editor based in Australia, living on unceded Wurundjeri land. He is the founder of the literary journal *The Suburban Review* and in 2010 he won the Grace Marion Wilson Trust Emerging Writer's Competition for fiction.

**Davi Schweizer** (they/them), from Philadelphia, is the hottest poet you know. They are the author of *Only Seconds Until Detonation* (forthcoming, Querencia Press) and *Echo Decay* (Kith Books). They are the editor and founder of Troublemaker Firestarter, follow them on Twitter: @trblmkfrstrtr Instagram: @troublemakerfirestarter

**Valerie A. Smith** is the author of *Back to Alabama* from Sundress Publications. She is the 2024 Solstice MFA Spotlight Poet, a 2022 Sewanee Writers' Conference Scholar and 2020 Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts Fellow. She earned a PhD in English from Georgia State University and MA from Kennesaw State University. Her poems appear in *South Carolina Review*, *Radix*, *Aunt Chloe*, *Weber*, *Spectrum*, *Obsidian*, *Crosswinds*, *Dogwood*, *Solstice*, *Oyster River Pages*, and *Wayne Literary Review*. Above all, she values spending quality time with her family.

**Robert Sumner** is an attorney living in California with his two unbelievably adorable dogs. His fiction has appeared in *Crimeucopia*, *Mystery Tribune*, *The Emerson Review*, *Riprap*, *Jokes Review*, *Corvus Review*, *The Penmen Review*, and *The Quotable*.

**Sean Whalen** lives near Pilot Mound, Iowa, and enjoys what life close to home has to offer. Recent poems have appeared in *Last Leaves*, *Smoky Blue*, *After Happy Hour*, *The Ocotillo*

*Review, Oakwood, Unbroken, and New Feathers, and are forthcoming in Thimble, and Stone Poetry Quarterly.*

**Rafael Wolfe** the pseudonym for a young Mexican-American writer who holds a bachelor's in Criminology and Criminal Justice and is seeking his MFA in Creative Writing at Northern Arizona University. Though his work explores many genres and forms, he is most interested in how the human experience transcends time and place.

**Cynthia Yatchman** is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. A former ceramicist, she received her B.F.A. in painting (UW). She switched from 3D to 2D and has remained there ever since. She works primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections. She has exhibited on both coasts, extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, SPU, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Pacific Science Center. She is a member of the Seattle Print Art Association, Women Painters of Washington and COCA.

**Zahra Zoghi** began her art journey in 1990, motivated by a passion for creativity. In 2008, she founded an art gallery in Malaysia, curating exhibitions and building a strong reputation within the art community. Additionally, she taught over 100 students and earned a Master's in Art Research. Her work combines traditional techniques with modern themes, encouraging appreciation for time-honored practices. Her goal is to blend the heritage of art with contemporary expression, celebrating the past and reimagining traditional techniques for today's world.



## **Program Overview**

Our two-year, low-residency program allows students to live anywhere and work a full-time job. We never allow the number of students to exceed 65 total – about 16 per cohort – so our students develop close and sustaining relationships with faculty during our intensive weeklong residencies in the summer and winter.

During the rest of the year, our students work with faculty one on one, receiving thorough, regular editorial letters supplemented with video calls.

Our two principal goals:

- > Create a close and vibrant writing community
- > Graduate every student with an excellent manuscript in hand

Students choose to focus on fiction or nonfiction. Some choose specializations like young adult fiction and environmental writing.

Our full-time faculty members have won numerous awards, published books with major publishing houses and received international acclaim in every literary category from young adult to lyric essay to crime. Their work appears in such forums as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The New York Times Magazine* and *Best American Short Stories*.

Our alumni include a Pulitzer Prize finalist, a Guggenheim Fellow, a Whiting Award winner, and numerous other authors whose work is published by major publishing houses.

Our faculty members, often referred to as "mentors," work to help each student find a literary voice, master their craft and produce a book-length manuscript of high literary quality.

With a Mountainview MFA, you'll get:

- > An award-winning, nationally recognized faculty
- > Flexibility of schedule
- > A curriculum designed to help each student finish an excellent, publishable book (see some of our many successful alumni below)
- > A vibrant and supportive creative writing community
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- > Highly competitive tuition costs

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