

RC Alumni Journal 7 • Fall 2023

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No. 7 • Fall 2023



# Introduction

This winter, Cameron Finch (RC 2016) posted on Facebook about some favorite Ann Arbor trees, and it got me thinking about the trees of East Quad (the oldest of which were likely planted after the Quad was constructed, in three parts, during the 1940s). Some of the big trees are now gone (most recently, the big tree outside the “main” entrance on East U near Willard). If you look at one of the pictures accompanying the Benzinger article (page 106), you can see a line of elms lining East U. All gone . . .

Our cover image is a photo of the sycamore (I think it is) filling most of the Quad’s southeast courtyard near Hill. Several other old beauties are still alive and well (including two in the southwest courtyard, and three in the north courtyard).

(Trees have been in campus news in recent years: a seedling from the Tappan Oak near the grad library (cut down in November 2021) may keep its family history alive. The tree was estimated to be over 250 years old, and named after U-M president Tappan in honor of his interest in campus trees. And in 2014, U-M moved a 200 year old burr oak to accommodate the expansion of the business school,

across the street from East Quad, near East U.).

(To further digress, but continuing on the subject of presidents “connected” to trees, even if we can’t technically include the two Bushes, in regards to U.S. presidents, we still have “Burr Oak” Obama and “Linden” Johnson . . .)

Anyway . . . welcome to the seventh issue of the *RC Alumni Journal*!

We feature RC alums and Creative Writing graduates from 50+ years of the University of Michigan Residential College, which opened its doors in 1967.

This issue, among the usual things, there’s a brief history of the late, great Halfway Inn, an article about the Benzinger behind Benzinger Library, brief bios of the RC’s directors, and a brief interview with RC alum Carmen Bagan.

If you’d like to financially support the journal, or the Emerging Writer Award, there are specific instructions on the next page. Thank you!

We look forward to seeing you next year, if not before!

*Dan*

To financially support the journal:  
 go to [leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lisa](https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lisa),  
 click on "Write In Your Gift,"  
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 and whatever amount you wish to contribute.  
 Or send a check to Carl Abrego at the college.

To support the Emerging Writer award, Its "giving" number is 323069.  
 There's more about Emerging Writers on p. 120.

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"Go ahead, deny up and down that the delicate act  
 of turning the doorknob, that act which may  
 transform everything, is done with the indifferent vigor  
 of a daily reflex." — Julio Cortázar, *Cronopias and Famas*

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## Permanent

Jacqueline Giessler

Hannah got her first tattoo the day before her college graduation. She and her friend Jamie came up with the idea the summer before their senior year of college. In their last semester, they would go together. Getting tattoos—doing something so permanent—would be a release, a monument to their time together, one of the few exciting things left for them to do.

Jamie came up with the idea for the tattoo: a peony. The June day that they decided to go, they were on a walk. Under the bright sun, they commiserated about not having boyfriends, about having to find jobs, about dealing with overbearing mothers. Hannah suggested they go to the university's garden, since they were already walking. When they got there, the peonies were in full bloom in white and soft pink and magenta.

Hannah couldn't remember what they were talking about, but out of nowhere Jamie turned around with bright eyes. *What if we got peony tattoos?* she'd said. Hannah had felt so happy in that moment that her friend wanted to be connected to her forever.

But in March, when Hannah asked Jamie when she wanted to go, Jamie said that she was feeling better than she had been in the summer—she meant mentally—and no longer had the urge.

"Oh, I forgot about that!" She laughed. "If you still want to go you definitely should!"

Jamie's mom had apologized for not listening and they were working on rebuilding their relationship, she had gotten her dream job at Duolingo in New York City, and she was making friends in the new hires group

chat someone had set up. The tattoo idea had made her feel like she was in control, and she didn't need that anymore.

Hannah had nodded along to Jamie's explanation, trying to be supportive of her friend's newfound peace. But really, she didn't understand. More than that, she didn't want to understand why she still wanted to get the tattoo. If Jamie's change of heart came from positive change in her life, what did Hannah's insistence say about hers? She ignored the thought and pushed down the feeling that her only friend was abandoning her, deciding to go alone.

From the time Hannah was young, her mom had instilled in her a contempt for people with piercings and tattoos. *Never, ever do that to yourself*, she instructed. The frequency of these little reminders increased as she grew up into the kind of person that would get more piercings, would have a tattoo.

Hannah drove to the nearby tattoo shop that Jamie had picked out. The shop had a pride flag and a sign that said "Black Lives Matter" in the window, two more things her mom had taught her to avoid.

The tattoo artist was a woman named Izzy, probably in her late twenties. She was nice and her work was impressive, but making awkward small talk with her kept reminding Hannah that she was not supposed to be doing this alone.

"What made you pick a peony?" Izzy asked.

"Oh, uh, my friend came up with the idea," Hannah said.

"Aw, that's cute," Izzy said. "You guys must be close."

"Uh . . . yeah." Izzy raised her eyebrows at Hannah's lukewarm response, which didn't sound convincing even to Hannah. "She was supposed to get one too," she explained.

"Ah." Izzy paused. "You could pick a different design, you know."

This made Hannah pause. She hadn't really thought about changing the design. She felt a little silly, now that someone else suggested it, that it hadn't even occurred to her. But what else would she get? Even if she was upset with Jamie, she would probably be sad if Hannah changed the design. Besides, Jamie was the one who had the ideas, not Hannah.

"I think I'll still do the peony," Hannah said. "Thank you, though."

"Alright," Izzy nodded. She put on a pair of black plastic gloves. "Okay, lay down on your side for me. Can you hold your sweatshirt up? . . . Yep, just like that, perfect."

When Hannah showed Jamie the small pink flower on her ribs, she excitedly clapped her hands and enthused about how good it looked. *Was it painful? Did it bleed? How long did it take?* she asked, and Hannah told her even though it hurt, because Jamie was supposed to know those things too. It was nice that someone was excited, at least, because Hannah was realizing that having one half of matching tattoos was not as satisfying as she had hoped.

Before the tattoo artist had even finished setting up the ink that would become her second tattoo, Hannah's skin was buzzing.

She had been living in Philadelphia for three months, working in HR at Comcast. When she was applying to jobs, it had seemed so important to get out of the Midwest suburbs, to accept anything that would take her somewhere *interesting*. Philly seemed good enough, then, and so did HR—what type of job did she really expect to get with her Communications degree, anyway?

Now, she thought she would describe Philadelphia less as interesting and more as grungy. All the buildings, especially the old ones, the ones she had expected to admire the beautiful architecture of, looked as if they were covered in a layer of soot. And they probably were. Her job at Comcast was worse than she had imagined, too, just days of flipping through forms and checking off boxes, sitting in the cubicle in the corner under the fluorescent lights. The only co-worker she knew was Betty, who had been tasked with "showing her the ropes" and was probably the same age as her mother. Betty seemed content to file paperwork and email people about their missing documents all day, but it was starting to make Hannah want to pull the fire alarm, just to be less bored.

Jamie, on the other hand, seemed to be having no such problem. The last time they'd Facetimed—which was almost a month ago—she couldn't stop talking about all the wonderful things about her job and New York and all the people she was meeting.

"There's a gym in my office building!" Jamie said. "It's, like, so cool. Aaand, I get to see which of my coworkers have got it goin' on, if you know what I mean." She winked.

Hannah gave her a half-hearted

smile. In college, Jamie's flippant, impulsive nature drew Hannah to her. She was always having fun, and Hannah wanted to have fun too. Now, though, Hannah wished Jamie would be a little bit more attentive than thrill-seeking.

"How's your job? Are you liking Philly?"

"Yeah, it's alright. I've been—" Hannah started.

"Have you been to the Reading Terminal Market? One of my co-workers, Jake, is from Philly and he says it's super cool. And *he's* super cute, so I trust his judgement."

"No, I haven't really been to that many places yet."

"Oh, you gotta go! No, wait! When I come to visit, we can go together!" Jamie grinned. "It'll be so fun."

"Yeah," Hannah had replied.

But aside from that conversation a month ago, Jamie had only texted back sporadically. Hannah got the feeling that, no matter what she'd said, she wasn't really spending her time and energy planning a trip to come see her.

She glanced down at the text she'd sent Jamie last night. *miss you! talk soon?* Still no reply. Even Betty got more texts than Hannah did these days, which she knew because Betty didn't know how to turn the ringer on her phone off.

She grabbed her phone to put it away when the screen lit up with texts from Jamie.

*miss you too!!  
i am soooo busy  
but in a couple weeks my project should be done  
what about then??  
i have updates about the cute guy i*

*was telling you about!!*

*jake the one from philly!*

Hannah stared at the texts for a full minute. Without responding, she put her phone in her desk drawer and closed it.

She went straight to the tattoo parlor after work, spending only a minute looking up the closest one. When she got to the shop, she hadn't even decided what she wanted to get.

"What did you want to get tattooed?" the woman at the desk had asked, not thirty minutes earlier.

Hannah had paused and asked for a minute. She scrolled through her phone, ignoring the unopened notifications from Jamie, trying to think of ideas. In the end, she had gone with a design inspired by her favorite song from high school, "Greek Tragedy," by The Wombats. It had come up on the playlist she put on shuffle for her commute this morning. Hannah told herself this was a sign. The tattoo artist drew up several simple comedy and tragedy mask sketches based on Hannah's description and Hannah picked one quickly. She felt untethered to reality, so focused on wanting to feel the needle piercing her skin.

That buzzing, heady feeling remained until the tattoo was halfway done. By then, the artist stabbing ink into her right hipbone felt like exactly that, and Hannah was starting to wonder what she was doing. When the artist finished, Hannah looked at the tattoo in the provided mirror and forced a smile. She thanked the artist and tipped her well and started crying the second she got out the door.

What a ridiculous, tacky tattoo idea. She felt like a teenager, making impulsive decisions just because no one

was around to make her think twice.

When she got back to her apartment, she changed into her pajamas without looking down at her hip. She couldn't stop thinking about how long a lifetime was. How she would have to remember tonight forever, because of that stupid tattoo.

Based on the way her life was going, Hannah thought, she should've just gotten the tragedy mask by itself.

--

Hannah's apartment was packed with people. It wasn't a crazy amount of people, maybe ten, but her apartment was so small it felt like a real party. She didn't have any wine glasses, so they were drinking the cheap Chardonnay she'd bought out of her plastic Target cups. She didn't even have a living room, so everyone was standing around in her tiny kitchen, leaning on counters and chatting with one another. Looking around at it all, her heart was so full.

There was her coworker Carly and her gym friend Gemma standing by the sink. They both brought their roommates, and all four of them were having an animated conversation about the Great British Bake-Off.

Hannah met Carly at lunch one day, when she decided to brave the cafeteria instead of sitting at her desk and trying to ignore the smell of Betty's tuna salad. It had taken her fifteen minutes to find the place, but once she was there, she loved the big windows that let the sun in. She couldn't imagine going back to lunch at her cramped little desk again. The number of tables and people was still a little intimidating, so she picked

a table next to one where a woman was sitting alone. She looked about Hannah's age, stylishly dressed in a soft green sweater and flare-leg gray pants, and Hannah wondered if she was new too.

The woman had been Carly. Lucky for Hannah, Carly was as extroverted as they come, complimenting Hannah's shoes within minutes of her sitting down. They talked all through lunch, comparing moving stories and their thoughts on Philadelphia. When Carly made a joke that the city looked like it was built inside of a smoker's lung, Hannah laughed harder than she had in months. She asked Carly to meet up for lunch again. To her delight, Carly agreed and they've been friends for almost a year.

She'd become friends with Gemma in a similar way, noticing that she went to the gym by Hannah's apartment at the same time as her every day. She started a conversation by asking her where she got her workout clothes. They started getting smoothies together after their workouts, and soon became good friends. Gemma was a little quieter than Carly was, but she seemed to be getting just as loud as they shared their outrage at the GBBO's disastrous "Mexico Week."

Over by the stove were three of Hannah's friends from the pottery class she started taking a couple of months ago. One of them, Priya, had brought two of her friends from college, who were visiting. The five of them seemed to be chatting about where everyone was from.

Hannah hadn't been surrounded by this much pleasant noise since she'd left home. Her apartment felt warmer than it ever had. She couldn't believe

she had been so worried this morning when she started cooking the food for the party, regretting even coming up with this idea.

As she soaked in the chatter around her, Hannah felt her phone buzz. She pulled it out of her pocket, hoping it wasn't her next door neighbor, who had a habit of texting Hannah to complain about the noise coming from her apartment.

It was Jamie. *hey girl!* the text read. *i'm in philly meeting jake's parents!! are you free tonight??*

Jamie hadn't visited once before. Hannah had gone to the Reading Terminal Market with Carly instead. A year ago, she would've jumped at the chance to see her old friend, no matter what was going on.

She put her phone back in her pocket.

"Hannah!" Priya called her. She was waving at her to come join the group.

"Hey Priya." Hannah walked over to their little circle. "What's up?"

"We have kind of a crazy idea," she started. "And it is absolutely okay if you say no."

"Okay . . . ?" Hannah said slowly, tilting her head and raising her eyebrows.

"So Rebecca," Priya said, gesturing to one of her college friends, "is trained as a tattoo artist, and she was at another friend's apartment before this tattooing them. And so she has her tattoo stuff with her now, and we were thinking, what if she tattooed some of us here?"

"In my kitchen?" Hannah asked. Priya grinned and nodded. This was so like her. She was always trying out wild ideas on her pottery. Some-

times, they came out horribly, but sometimes they were beautiful.

"At the kitchen table, I was thinking," Rebecca said. "I have a sort of portfolio on Instagram if you wanted to see my work."

"Yeah, sure," Hannah said. Rebecca found her page and showed it to her. It was full of black line art tattoos, the exact kind that Hannah liked. There was a mushroom, a bee, a line of planets—all simple, clearly done with a careful hand. "These are amazing!"

"Thank you," Rebecca smiled.

"So . . . what do you think?" Priya bounced on her heels.

It was a crazy idea, but so were her other tattoos, in their own ways. The peony, for going along with an idea to get a matching tattoo with no one. The comedy and tragedy masks for letting her insecurities turn into impulsiveness. She still looked at both of them with mixed feelings, part of her always wishing she could go back and tell her past selves in those moments that things would work out in the end. She didn't feel the urgency she had felt then, the need to do something permanent so she could feel more grounded.

But hey, maybe the problem was that she got them done at tattoo shops and not in her own kitchen. "You know what?" Hannah said. "Let's do it."

Priya cheered and grabbed her arm. "This is going to be so much fun!"

"It'll take me a little while to make the stencils," Rebecca said. She raised her voice to address the whole room, "Anyone that wants a tattoo, text me a picture of the design."

Rebecca went to grab her stuff from her bag. The overlapping sound of

people talking started up again. Gemma wandered up to Hannah.

"Are you getting a tattoo?"

"Yeah," Hannah said. "Yeah, I think so. Are you?"

"Nah," Gemma shrugged. "Not really my thing. You have a couple already though, right?"

"Yeah, a peony and the comedy and tragedy masks."

"Right, right. What are you going to get now?"

"I don't know yet," Hannah replied. This felt so different from picking her second tattoo, even though she was picking this one in the same way, right before getting it. This felt more comfortable, maybe, more deliberate. "Do you have any ideas?"

"Hmm . . ."

They both watched as Rebecca laid out her tools on a piece of paper towel, wiping each one down with hydrogen peroxide as she went.

"Well, what's something that's important to you right now?" Gemma said.

"I don't know. This moment is important to me, I guess?"

"That's a start. What about right now?"

Hannah took a breath. "I don't know. Like, when I first moved here, I was so sad and lonely. And it's nice to be surrounded by people now."

"Okay, hm. Maybe you could get little people? Like an outline or something?" Gemma suggested.

"Mmm." Hannah tilted her head. It wasn't a bad idea, but it didn't feel like her.

"Or . . . maybe hands?"

"Hands?"

"Like, hands reaching for each other. You know, kind of symbolizing

community or something."

"Like the Creation of David?" Hannah asked, confused.

"No, cuter than that." Gemma patted her pockets. "Can I borrow your phone?"

Hannah laughed a little as she pulled her phone out and unlocked it. Gemma was always leaving her phone in random places. She just hoped she would find it when it was time for her to leave.

Gemma scrolled for a couple seconds, then smiled triumphantly. "Like this!"

Hannah looked at the picture. It was a simple drawing of the outline of two hands reaching for each other. Gemma was right, they were cute.

"I like that," Hannah said slowly. "But what about just one hand? Reaching out, like to the future."

"Oooh, I like that," Gemma enthused.

"Then it kind of symbolizes how I had to push through some of the bad stuff to get to the good."

"Yes. Yes!" Gemma grabbed Hannah's arm and squeezed. "It's perfect."

Hannah grinned. "Can you send that picture to Rebecca for me?"

"Of course." Gemma walked over where Rebecca was drawing another design in a small sketchbook.

It took a while for Rebecca to create the designs on the transfer paper, but soon enough she was done. As Rebecca got everyone's attention, Gemma slipped Hannah's phone back into her hand. When she did, the screen lit up, reminding Hannah of Jamie's unanswered texts.

"Who wants to go first?" Rebecca asked. Everyone glanced around at each other nervously. Even Priya lost her normal boldness.

Squeezing her phone in her hand, Hannah stepped forward.

"I'll go."

"Woop woop!" Priya cheered. Hannah smiled at her, sitting in the chair next to Rebecca.

She laid her arm on the T-shirt she'd grabbed for Rebecca to act as a cushion and took a deep breath. As Rebecca disinfected the area, Hannah felt a hand in hers. She looked up. It was Carly.

"You got this, girl!" she said, and the sentiment was echoed from others around the room. She looked around at everyone smiling at her. Gemma gave her a thumbs up.

"Are you ready?" Rebecca asked her. Hannah took one last look around the room before turning to Rebecca. "I'm ready."

# Three Poems

Caitlin Cowan

## Bigheart

My heart feels big in me, tonight—  
maybe because there are two, one mine  
and one I've built from love. But the new one  
wouldn't add much weight. I just stopped  
to look up the size of a hummingbird heart,  
because that's what feels right. I don't care  
if it is, because it is. There might be a ruby  
throat in here, too. I feel full of jewels. While  
she died, I read my grandmother a poem  
about them, hummingbirds, and today I wear  
her opal ring. *Not her good one*, my mother  
reminds me. No one knows where it went.  
I think someday we'll find it and we'll cry,  
because that's what we're supposed to do.  
My aunt told me to rub it on my nose. The opal.  
They get dry. They have needs. Suddenly  
needs are my daily halo. When a cartoon  
cat gets clobbered, we laugh at the spangled  
birds that dance around his concussed  
little head. It's like that, this grief, this twoness—  
it clobbers me. How I could hold her  
paper-crane hand, then turn to my needlework,  
count stitches for a baby blanket, say only,  
*I lost count. Remind me: Where was I again?*

## Self-Portrait with Overdraft Fee

Sometimes I just stare at the numbers,  
watch them, look for a green shoot in the garden.  
Can't eat 'em though. Makes me feel sick—  
there's a bad man out there who tells folks we split  
because I didn't understand the numbers.  
He tended their inky garden alone, jealous farmer  
who wouldn't get down on his knees to weed.  
The longer I stare at the numbers the less I see, the more  
I need. Numbers like hat racks, scaffolding, River Rouge  
reeds. Sometimes you just start going and here they come,  
stepping stones. Other times you drown. The numbers  
don't make great life preservers, prefer to ferry expensive  
hors-d'oeuvres on their sharp little corners. Numbers, see,  
don't have hands. Just mouths, and they're hungry.  
See those white teeth? Dentist says he'll whiten mine  
but tells me how to do it at home on the cheap.  
I want all the sharp canines the numbers can buy,  
want to be like them, see: lupine and mean. The dentist  
looks at the planting rows of my teeth, knows how much  
a mouth costs. Sees numbers inside of me.  
He made the same sounds my grandfather does  
when he's on the bandsaw, cutting into all that dead meat.  
No numbers in the woodshop—about the purest  
place you could ever be. The numbers don't plague him  
much: he gives the best gifts and retired at 53. Yesterday  
I looked at those black numbers until they made me  
heave. Some say it's the screens that sicken, but  
numbers stoke the fever in me. It's just a game,  
isn't it? Like the oaknuts we used to hoard up  
our shirtsleeves: how many can you carry? How many  
will you give up just to whip them back at me?



### Staff Meeting After I Learn the Meaning of the Word *Anatta*

The matter-of-factness of the woodpecker's black and white skull—blade glinting like lake sun through blinkers. The sharp flashes kill the drone of our weekly review. Frequently asked question: What is a bird but a reminder that we are all machines? I have heard thoughts and impressions are not the self, but I too can hear someone chirping, *If I've seen it already, I won't have a different thought about it next time.* Frequently asked question: what is the self? We are bored and sure of some forthcoming answer, squirrels gluttoned on seed. Status reports paper our only salvation: the large window peering out onto the not-mind of winter. If eternity is real, then each moment is eternal, even this one. We are deathless because we can be replaced. Not perfectly, but close enough. Frequently asked question: can you tell one snowflake from the next?

## The Other Thing We Didn't Talk About

Martin Sherman



What everybody was wondering was where could I get a gun. I don't mean just me. Everybody wondered that.

I heard pssst. Jocko scrabbled the window. There was a whole lot of dust, and with the sun the way it was, it looked more like me than him through it. I looked gray. Jocko jabbed his finger so I moved that way into Aux. Coatroom. When he came in, Jocko didn't hang his up. I clapped his shoulders and big puffs went off which I watched instead of him. Just sun and little rocking mote-boats of dust in the room where they weren't hanging any extra coats. Me and Jocko discussed the divorce which was going to be some kind of infection for a long time. These things don't come clean. I said I'd rather die. He said it scabs over, don't worry, Jawbone. Don't pick at it. That's what we said our Moms would have said.

We peered out the doorway. The Bar Mitzvah boy shown like everybody's

memory. Like Jocko without the dust.

You hear him? I said.

He was good, said Jocko.

He looked good, I said.

Yeah?

I gave him that suit, I said.

What do I owe you?

Better him than the bank. He looks good in blue. You both do.

How do I look? he said. He looked worried.

Limpid, I said.

In the reception everybody shone so bright it hurt my eyes to look. All I could see was me. I had a shine myself but with me, with the warp I was, I could see people talking to me, walking up and back and up again watching the way the reflections bent off me.

Some of them wondered about Jocko. I kept it shut. You know me. I open it up and you can holler down my throat and listen to the echoes answer you back.

The other Sara had to talk to me because my Sarah was going to drag me everywhere after the dust she saw growing on me. Standing by the window. Drinking in those shafts of sun. She sees my head nodding with the rhythms of a boat rocking, she knows she better toss me a line, drag me along.

Mazel Tov to you, Sarah without the (H), I said. Really good. Voice like glass. Is that your voice?

Sara wanted to know how it was going. Really wanted to know, she said. That was one of the things we didn't talk about. It could have shattered glass that question. In all that dust. My Sarah turned like her ears were bleeding. Instead I said, You mean work? Oh, okay, Sara said. We're doing Chekhov. We could hear clack-clack, clack-clack, my Sarah's heels coming over. I'm directing. Direction is another thing we didn't talk about. Sarah and Sara looked over, they hooked arms and cut me free where I bobbed along in a pond of second cousins.

There was a lot of war talk. Everybody could have done someone in. You could have handed around the

guns and everybody would have beelined somewhere. Me, I could just stand there. It was a funny thing to talk about at a Bar Mitzvah. The details and all. The other things which were targets for discussion were: who was still left in Montreal and the more you sell the more you lose who could afford to be in business you're better off a doctor or a lawyer or in accountant. I said accountant, nobody shoots accountants.

In the car she said I know you saw him.

Not how was he.  
I couldn't drive.

I said, Oh about the divorce. He was saying it gets better after a while if you don't pick at it.

She said she didn't want to talk about it. That was one of the things we didn't talk about.

One of the things they wondered about was, if they figured out how to get it, the gun, would it be clean? How to keep it clean. Didn't want to leave fingerprints. They all had in mind what happens afterward.

Afterward?



## Excerpt from Exhale

Kathryn Orwig

*Post World War I, a desperate New York mother takes a perilous train journey to Colorado, seeking a cure for her son's TB, while confronting robbers, disease, and her own deceptions.*

RUSSELL CALDWELL (4) sick, coughs. Looking up at a woman's face. A white bandage by her hairline and bruise starting.

IDA CALDWELL (33) dark hair and eyes, whole lotta drive, instructs firmly but softly --

### FADE IN:

#### INT. LUGGAGE TRUNK - NIGHT

Dark. A single hole of light through a crudely cut hole. Heavy breathing.

The luggage trunk rattles with the bumping and dipping of the taxi. From the dark comes a rustling. A knock. Another knock.

A double snap of locks.

The lid lifts and there's a toddler cramped inside.

IDA

Don't come out. Whatever happens, stay in the box and stay quiet.

#### INT. TAXI - NIGHT

The luggage beside her on the back-seat, Ida checks the locks again to make sure they are secure.

#### EXT. TAXI / WESTFIELD TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

**SUPERIMPOSE: JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK. 1921**

Lugging the heavy box out of the taxi, Ida gestures to her son SAM CALDWELL (7) lanky and watchful to take her hand.

IDA

Hurry now. We can't miss it.

She ushers them into the busy station. Eyes darting back over her shoulder. *Checking for anyone following them...*

### INT. WESTFIELD TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

The sharp whistle of a train as it pulls in. Wheels churn to a stop. The LAKE SHORE LIMITED in all its glory hisses and smokes. Gleaming black solid metal.

A PORTER (33) carting bags, glances at his 21 jewel pocket watch, cups a hand to his mouth --

PORTER

Last call! Ten minutes!

Ida hears the call and quickens their pace.

At the ticket counter, Sam guards the trunk.

IDA

Two tickets to Model, Colorado, please.

### INT. LUGGAGE TRUNK - NIGHT

Russell looks out the hole at Sam's legs, his mother's skirt, the man in suspenders leans over the divider.

### INT. WESTFIELD TRAIN STATION - TICKET COUNTER - NIGHT

A TICKET MASTER (42) mustache --

TICKET MASTER

Sorry, Ma'am, the train is about to be pulling --

IDA

Out. Yes, I know. Just the two tickets will do.

TICKET MASTER

It'll be 28.50.

Ida looks at her purse. An empty flap.

IDA

I don't -- um.

She swallows, fiddling with her wedding band. A hard choice. She takes it off.

IDA (CONT'D)

Will you take this?

TICKET MASTER

Are you in trouble, Ma'am? Is there someone I can --

IDA

I just need to get on that train. Now. Please.

He nods, takes the ring, and brings out the tickets.

TICKET MASTER

You'll have to transfer in Chicago to the California Limited. Trinidad station is your closest stop --

A muffled cough.

Ida, Sam, and the Ticket Master freeze. He scans them over for the source of the coughing.

TICKET MASTER (CONT'D)

Sick passengers are not allowed on the train. Spanish Flu policy.

Sam coughs to cover Russell's cough.

SAM

Sorry, Sir, candy stuck.

Ida holds her breath. The Ticket Master slides the tickets.

IDA

Thank you.

Grabs up the trunk and hightails it for the platform.

IDA (CONT'D)  
(whispering)

Good work, Sam.

Awfully grownup for a child, Sam nods and keeps pace.

### INT. / EXT. LUGGAGE TRUNK - NIGHT

Through the hole, Russell glimpses legs and bags passing his line of sight. Then the huge steel wheels of the train. Another whistle peels the night air open.

PORTER

Last call!

The wheels lurch. Sam lags behind -- child legs pumping.

### EXT. WESTFIELD TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

WALTER CALDWELL (35) races down the street, pushing past people to get in --

### WESTFIELD TRAIN STATION

-- He sprints past the ticket counter. A last whistle. The wheels pick up pace. Steam hisses.

He spots Ida getting on --

WALTER

Ida! Ida!

She hears him. They meet eyes.

The train pulls away from the platform. Walter nears the end, prepared to make the leap, but the back of the train is too far and he comes to an abrupt stop.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Ida!

She turns from him.

### INT. LAKE SHORE LIMITED - CABIN - NIGHT

Ida scans the passing rooms for an empty cabin. Nothing. Nothing. Not that one. Finally, an empty one.

IDA

Here we go.

She ushers Sam into the --

## CABIN

-- and shuts the door. Locks it. Then pulls on the latches to Russell's trunk. Taking her child out of the cramped box.

## IDA (CONT'D)

Good boy, Russell. You did so wonderfully.

## RUSSELL

I don't feel well.

## IDA

I know honey. We're on our way to getting you better. Don't you worry. It'll be just like it used to be...

Ida looks out the window. The landscape speeds by. Determination stretches the lines of her mouth thin.

# Frozen in Place

Bailey Burke

I can't bring myself to erase the hearts next to your name,  
Or remove your photo from my frames.

I sit here in a daze, aching to find a way  
to hope that your love for me won't stray.

I think I've gone insane,  
My obsessions remain,  
I can't get you out of my brain,  
Release me from this pain,  
What more do I have to gain?

I can't let you go but I also can't let you stay.  
Love is a crazy match I wish I'd known how to play.

Who gets to decide the winners of love's cruel games?  
I just know I don't want to quench this ever-burning flame.

Please let me know if you feel the same.





# Come What Will

Michael Koenigsknecht

The rain and mud were everything. My bright uniform was stained with earth and grass; my face and hands were streaked with mud. Under a dark sky and pelting rain my equally filthy and exhausted comrades and I stumbled through the mud and brush along the road from Ligny to Liege.

A fierce battle had erupted yesterday near Ligny. The Emperor Napoleon had directed his troops against our Prussian Army. Of course, my Rhinelander mates and I had rarely spoken to a Prussian and could barely understand the dialect. We had been conscripted into Field Marshal Blücher's Prussian Army almost immediately after having escaped from our forced French Army service. Napoleon's defeats in 1812 had allowed foreign conscripts, such as ourselves, to melt away. But now, forced into Prussian service, I was facing the

French on a battlefield south of the city of Brussels.

The artillery roared fire and smoke. Shells flew high into the sky and then crashed down. We stood as ordered, waiting. At first, standing in an artillery barrage it is all thunder, howling and crashing. The shells just keep coming. We were trained to stand still, seemingly indifferent to the violence and slaughter. However, a metallic bile rises in the throat as panic grips the soul. Time expands and the body tenses, waiting for the impact. It becomes very warm inside one's clothes. After a while the earth, the sky, the very air take on a rust-colored tint and the sound diminishes. One can almost see an individual cannon firing and the arching shot. The impacts are now more like a blossoming than a blinding flash. One can actually see the earth absorbing the shock,

the flying dirt, the the fragments of equipment and body parts. Instead of thunder, now the sound is more like gurgling water. Each moment lengthens and I can hear my own breathing. Afterwards the exhaustion feels like days have passed.

As the smoke cleared I recognized the various kits of the French battalions as they maneuvered into position before us. I had acquaintances in those uniforms. I recognized their songs and cheers as they swung to the attack formation. I felt their excitement and energy; it was as contagious now as when I had worn the tricolor. We removed bodies and debris so we could reform our lines and bring up men to replace the dead and wounded. I could see that some of my comrades had not stood through an artillery barrage before. Eyes and bowels were both watery. Hands were clumsy with tremors.

Suddenly the French cannon resumed firing and holes again appeared in our ranks. The French skirmishers' muskets downed more of our men. As we scrambled to fill the gaps, I could hear the music and cheers of my former comrades as they charged through the smoke and fire, bayonets fixed. I knelt, a single shot ready, my bayonet fixed. Out of the craters and smoke they came, grinning and shouting as they ran, fired and fell. I fired and turned to reload as my mates stepped up to fire into the charging mass. I was buffeted by falling bodies and deafened by the roar of battle. My powder was knocked from my hand and lost.

Somehow we Rhinelanders were retreating to another line. A timely cavalry charge had checked the

French and saved us. I do not know what happened over the next hours. All was a swirl of noise and confusion. Near sundown, when we were collapsing with exhaustion, Napoleon sent the Imperial Guard into the center of our line. They crashed into us, killing and maiming. Only the arrival of darkness saved us from further suffering. As it was, we heard the French loudly celebrating their annihilation of the Prussians that day.

We were told later that we had managed a tactical retreat, grudgingly falling back under the relentless assault of the French until mutual exhaustion and darkness resulted in disengagement. Blücher's staff directed the retreat from Ligny, to regroup the army and form the left pincer of the Allied Army. The right pincer was to be directed by the English general, Wellington, from his base near Waterloo. It poured rain. At first, we were merely seeking firmer ground on which to stand, ground not blasted and trampled into deep, sucking mud. There were seven or eight thousand of us Rhinelanders, who had been pressed into Prussian service. In the beginning, we appeared to be marching parallel to the Prussians. But gradually we veered further east toward Liege. After all, the Prussian communications and supply lines went through Liege; it was natural to fall back to supplies along a known route. I don't know if we were consciously separating from the army, but at some point we all knew the main Prussian Army was moving north, and we Rhinelanders were walking east and looking over our shoulders, fearing to be noticed

and ordered back. We endured a wet night in the open.

As the light came up my mood lifted as I realized that we were leaving the battles and headed home. Mid-morning the rain stopped. The puffs of cannon smoke on the horizon grew smaller. The sounds of armies grew fainter as we walked. If I just kept walking into the rising sun I would reach the Rhine. I could then follow its west bank toward the river Mosel, to my home in the Eifel.

Midday, battle trumpets blared far behind us and the dull, pounding roar of many horses could be faintly heard. The trumpets became more urgent as they came closer and the thunder of hundreds of galloping horses seemed to control my breath and heartbeat. Fear filled my throat. Our shambling march away from battle and towards home turned to a stumbling run; packs and muskets dropped to the ground as we Rhinelanders fanned out, running for our lives. It was a large body of French cavalry running us down. Did they know that we were leaving the battle; slinking off home, hoping for a day or two before our Prussian masters noticed our leaving? Would we be slaughtered? Or, forced back into French service?

I don't know about the others, but a few near me and I threw ourselves into a thickly overgrown depression in the earth. Fellow Rhinelanders and French all passed by in a confusion of shouts, screams, and pounding horses. We lay as quietly as possible under the brush for many hours. I thought of home.

My name is Hans Frank and my family has lived in the Eifel district of

the Rhineland for as long as any man can know. Mine had been a happy childhood in a prosperous family. In time I owned the family farm with my wife, Ursula. We were children when I first met her. She was so lively and certain about everything that it was both attractive and frightening. She was not like the other girls who were quiet, reluctant to express opinions or ideas. Ursula would say anything; funny, provocative, smart, silly things all came tumbling out. Some people did not like this about her, but I did. To me it seemed we were destined to be together from the beginning. Our parents desired the match, and Ursula seemed to have decided on it while we were still children. As we matured, the physical attraction became powerful. Ursula was not afraid of removing her clothing and exploring the possibilities of a man and a woman. She was assertive in her nakedness and greedy for every pleasure. Her face a mask of fierce concentration, her body seemed to act entirely on its own with surprising strength and passion. I found this intoxicating. The fierceness of her passion increased my own. I had never experienced anything like this before and I would not give it up for anything. We married. We had our son, Bernard. We worked hard, but life was good. What had happened to the wife and baby boy I had left so long ago? Were they safe? What had happened to the village?

It was growing dark when we emerged from our hiding place and continued in the direction of the Rhine. Over the next few days we came upon other Rhinelanders, singly and in small groups, all headed home. As we walked we talked, as men do,

to pass the time. It was going to be a long walk; we might need each other's help and we may have to fight again before the end; it was better to know one's companions.

I only listened at first. I hardly knew what to think, let alone speak. The last thirteen years of my life could have been another man's life, or perhaps a bad dream. In 1802, I had been twenty-five, my wife nineteen and our son three years old. I was established on our family farm with a field hand and a housemaid to help Ursula. We required the help to produce enough grain, cheese and flax for sale to pay off the debt incurred for me to take the farm intact. It was long days of hard work and close figuring to manage, but we were so pleased to have our own home and land that we were content and could see a secure future for ourselves, and several more children.

Then the wars came to the Eifel. Our lands had seen many wars. Several generations earlier the French King Louis XIV had sent his armies to ravish the land and destroy what they could not carry off. Before that, our lands had been fought over and occupied for thirty years by either Protestant armies or the Catholic forces of the Emperor. So, we Rhinelanders had known invasion and destruction for many generations. Now, a revolution in Paris had overturned the old order entirely. The King and Queen of France were beheaded; priests and bishops were slaughtered or fled; the nobility fled France or turned their coats inside out to take a leading part in the new order. We heard about all these things in the years after the great uprising in Paris.

We saw the French clerics and nobles streaming into our lands seeking shelter. They were followed by the Citizen Armies of the new Republic of France. The Republic was at war with every monarchy in Europe.

As our Eifel is situated near the French border, we were among the first to be liberated by the Republican armies. Our lords and bishops were defeated or fled and we were told to organize ourselves in the new French manner, but we did not know how. Then Napoleon took control. We did not know much of the story, but he had a tremendous reputation: never defeated, perhaps impossible to defeat. In 1802 he declared our part of the Rhineland to be part of France. He appointed officials to run things and collect taxes. We were stripped of everything movable, but we had our land. It was those above us who lost everything or disappeared.

I only hoped that the turmoil might end. After years of contending armies, war taxes and uncertainty, I just wanted it to end so that we could rebuild our lives to what they had been. Then, I was taken into the army of France. Now our Eifel was French, and all France was mobilized. All men past childhood and before old age had to serve in the army. All youths, elders and women had to work to produce the food, munitions and supplies for the army that was to defend France and spread Republican ideas. I was taken, clothed and armed, trained and drilled. Then we marched away in the service of France. For ten years, I marched Europe east-west and north-south. No foot soldier has a good life. But marching with a winning army is much better than marching with a

losing army. In the years I was with them, France's Armies of the Republic almost always won. While our casualties were usually very near the levels of the losing side, those of us that survived the battles were better supplied and better treated by our officers.

While I had not seen my home or family in all those years, I considered my military life temporary only, certainly not the life I hoped to have. During those years on the march, in the long nights, I told myself that this was not my actual life. My life was in the Eifel with my wife and son. I imagined myself home, working my fields, loving my wife, holding my son. I imagined talking with Ursula, telling her how difficult this journey was, how lonely, how terrifying. In my mind she held me, soothed me and thanked me for being so brave and surviving. I imagined laughing with my small son as I told him colorful and amusing stories about the details of camp life and military absurdities. It was those thoughts and daydreams that kept me alive, gave me hope and respite from the reality of the wars.

We walked for many days, sleeping in the open and always on the lookout for food. Many men's stories were much like my own: pressed into one army, then another. We had done what was necessary to survive, ants scurrying among horses' hooves, but were now looking for a way home. My service with the French had ended informally. After years of victory upon victory, the Emperor Napoleon overreached. He raised the largest army ever seen and marched east to Russia. Praise God, my mates and I were left to garrison a fortress in the area where Polish, Prussian and Lithuanian

lands met. We felt alone and isolated in our windswept, cold quarters; but, when we heard what befell the mighty army that marched to Moscow, we felt less cold and damp. Then the retreating troops began to appear. All order and discipline gone, all pride stripped, they were more like a horde of beggars. Of course, there was nothing we could do: their needs were too great, our supplies too small. More importantly, our officers feared that any contact would spread the disease of defeat and fear. We were forbidden to open the gates. Before long we could not think why we Rhinelanders should be holding a fortress on a forlorn plain among Poles, Prussians and Lithuanians. Even our officers began to doubt our purpose. Soon, we too were walking west. I allowed myself to hope. While faced with a long journey through hostile lands, I was headed home. I could almost smell the grass and trees of the Eifel as I walked. Soon I would be together with my wife and son on my land.

After several miserable weeks, trudging through spoiled, chaotic country, we were intercepted by Prussian units. While we spoke German and swore we hated the French, we were in French uniforms. Many of us were Catholic, like the French, rather than followers of Luther, like the Prussians. In the end we persuaded them that we had been conquered by the French and been forced to comply with orders. To prove ourselves, they demanded that we join the Prussian King's service on the spot. With minor modifications of our kit, we were sworn in as a Rhinelander company in the Prussian

Army. Thus, we were assured our lives, at least until the next battle.

And so, in 1815, I was marching with the Prussians under Marshal Blucher against France, against my former comrades. We marched to the Low Countries, right past my homeland. We were not allowed to stop. Napoleon planned to separate the English and Prussian armies then in Belgium and defeat them one after the other. He had us where he wanted us, and he thought he had decisively defeated the Prussian Army at Ligny. So had my fellow Rhinelanders and I, as we sidled off towards the Rhine after the battle.

As we walked to the east, away from the battle, men talked and I listened. We were all from the Rhineland. I am from Langenfeld. There were men from other villages in the Eifel, all speaking the same dialect as me. Now we were walking home. We reached the Rhine and turned south, following the left bank. Soon we reached the place where the Mosel joins the Rhine. We could see Koblenz across the Mosel where the two rivers meet. I knew I was close to home and could find my way. Our traveling group continued to fragment as men went their separate ways to their home villages.

I entered Langenfeld as though in a dream. My eyes looked for details that matched my memories of my earlier life. Trees, hills, buildings I remembered, faces I almost remembered. Some approached tentatively, spoke my name, not sure if it was actually me returning. I had been thirteen years soldiering, now there were no French soldiers or officials in the village; they had run off with

the Emperor's Russian defeat. I strode down the lane, past familiar fields towards my cottage. I saw a young man in the field. Could that be my little Bernard grown tall and broad? He looked at me warily from across the field. My feet broke into a run of their own accord. I shouted. Ursula stepped out of the cottage door. She put her hand to her mouth, then looked to the young man in the field. Ursula patted her hair and removed her apron as I ran to her. I swept her into my arms and kissed her lips, eyes, ears and hair. I held her tightly, scarcely believing that I had survived the years and now held my love again. I melted into the warmth. The terror left me, my mind could rest. I knew what was to come each day: my fields, my stock, my family; the peaceful monotony of my old life. I would work hard each day, but it was work I knew and it was for my family and me. I would sleep deeply each night, fatigued in body but my soul refreshed. I was home.

Ursula squirmed out of my arms. "So, you've come back" she said, sounding as though she had lost a bet. I followed her into the cottage. My eyes slowly adjusted to the dim interior. The two rooms were the same, but most of the furnishings were unfamiliar. Only the bed frame was the same. Crouched in the corner was a young girl, four or five perhaps, surely too young to be a servant. Who was she?

"Ah, Bernard is here," Ursula said as she fussed over the tall young man from the field, now standing in the doorway. He shrugged her off. "This is your father", she said. I thought I could see my little Bernard in his

eyes, but the rest of his face was unfamiliar. My little slip of a child was now a tall young man with the shadow of a beard on his chin. The shrugging and tilt of his head, though, were just as my little boy used to do. My heart swelled and I wished to hug him, but he would not look at me and held back by the door. I greeted him, and asked how he had been. Bernard raised his eyes, regarded me silently, then left the cottage.

Ursula began to speak about little Bernard's grief when I had left with the army. Soon she was talking about other things. She mentioned in the course of rattling on that she had told our little boy that I was dead. I stopped her. "Why did you tell him I was dead?" Ursula replied: "Really, Hans, you are being ridiculous. You were in the wars. Everybody knows that men do not return from conscription. You fight until you are killed. The longer you live, the longer your service. When you were taken, that was the end. I was not alone in this. The other girls thought the same. When you were taken by the French, it was the same as a funeral. I had to look out for me and mine."

I was disappointed and sad to learn that my wife and son had not kept me in their thoughts. "Ursula, I lived each day with one thought: to return home to my wife and boy. I marched, stood before cannon, assaulted cities, was wounded. I survived all of this by praying for God's protection and aid in returning to my wife and son. I thought that we two were praying for the same thing."

"Well," she said, "I am glad those thoughts kept you alive and so on, but life was different here. When you

were taken into the army we were left without men, cattle or food. We women and children were on our own. It was all very well for you in the army. They gave you clothes and food. We had nothing." I told her: "My darling, I did not wish to leave you. I was forced to go." Ursula glared at me. "Well, I was forced too. I had no choice in the matter."

I was taken aback by her vehemence. Her eyes shifted to the little girl. "This is our daughter." My face showed my surprise. "Johanna is a child of this house," she said. "She is five years old." I sought to question Ursula but she stopped me. "Hans, she is a child of this house, your child if you live here. I told you before; I had no choice either."

I left the cottage and walked. I could not think about it. As I wandered I saw land that I remembered as cultivated now overgrown. Formerly tidy terraces on the hillside were gone, small trees and brambles overrunning generations of hard work. Well-marked fields and pasture boundaries blurred; land and buildings abandoned. How could I have been so wrong about everything? As I sit here now, I can see what happened and even why. But at that moment, all I could think about was running.

In the end, I stayed. She was still my wife; he was still my son. I still could hope that in time we would be a happy, loving family. And, the reality was that all the Rhineland was degraded and many families were shattered. There was nowhere else to go. At least in Langenfeld I was on my family land.

However, ours was not a happy

home. Ursula was defensive and took everything I said in the wrong way. Her assertion of necessity to explain her infidelity made some sense, but did not explain her attitude toward me. She showed no love or affection towards me. At best, she was indifferent; any relations with me felt impersonal. It was clear that my efforts to reconnect with her, to establish an intimacy of feelings were not welcome. Perhaps her experience had driven all feelings from her. Perhaps she had never loved me. Had I loved her? We had been so young, pre-occupied with making a success of the farm. How was it between us, so long ago? I do not know anymore. Perhaps it was all just passion.

Bernard was very angry with me and only spoke to me when absolutely necessary. I know that he had felt I had abandoned him when I was forced into the French Army. In his child's mind, I had the power to protect him; I was not merely a man like other men. At his age he could not have known that I had no choice. He just knew that I had left him and did not return to rescue him, despite his prayers. It was very difficult being such a disappointment to my son. My experience of the last 13 years was so different from his experience and he was not interested in hearing my story. He only knew what he had experienced and the pain he had felt all those years. He refused all my attempts to make amends to him.

Ursula was defensive with Bernard. He was surly and showed his contempt for his mother in many ways. His boyhood had been lonely and confused. He had felt betrayed by both his parents and Johanna's

presence provoked his still burning humiliation and anger.

Ursula's distance from Johanna was more puzzling. Johanna was a delightful girl; beautiful and sweet. Even I could see that. But, Ursula seemed to view her as a badge of dishonor. Either she ignored her or was dismissive of her daughter. Perhaps she sought to sacrifice her relationship with Johanna to mollify Bernard, or perhaps to mollify me. But if so, why did she keep so distant from Bernard and me? Ursula was distant from all of us.

It seemed the only happy person in the cottage was little Johanna. She was a sweet bundle of energy. She was always talking: to people, to her dolls, to animals and to no one at all. Her voice was light and cheerful, like the music of birds. Her voice gave me peace and made me happy, even when I did not understand the words. Her hair was thick and wavy, but light as air. Her face and limbs were round, with a sweetness to them that reminded me of marzipan. She was delighted with my arrival each evening. She ran to me, greeted me and wanted a hug. Even when I tried to ignore her, she was not deterred. She was always bright, happy and loving. Gradually, I stopped pushing her away. I began to return her greetings, and then her hugs. She called me "papa." I could not resist, could not correct her. My heart opened to her. All my tenderness and love poured out and she took it all happily. She was starved for affection and I was longing to give it. I was starved for love and she was overflowing with love. I called her "Jo". In the evenings she walked



with me. Jo told me about her day and was eager to hear me tell stories about my life. She was full of questions and listened to my rambling answers. We became very close. I came to love Jo and cherish our time together.

Not too long after my return to Langenfeld I learned through others in the village that I no longer owned my family's farm. During the French occupation, Ursula had become close to various French officials and soldiers. One, possibly Jo's father, had even lived in our cottage. Using these connections, Ursula had arranged to have my family land transferred to her and her children. I was considered dead and gone. I was upset about this, of course. My family had lived on this land from ancient days. How dare she steal it behind my back? Once again, rather than wait for me and protect what we had together, at the first opportunity she put me out of her mind and looked to her own comfort and security. My anger and frustration made me physically ill. How was I ever to have a harmonious life with Ursula? I began to feel hopeless about my relationship with her. I suspected that the future held revelations of still more betrayals.

With the French now gone I could have tried to get my land back, but I did not try. After Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo, our district was awarded to Prussia. Again we were taxed to the extreme to pay for our liberation. It was excruciating to choke down the anger and humiliation of losing my family land. Worse was Ursula knowing that I was unable to do anything to right

the wrong; but, given my manner of leaving the Prussian Army, it would have been folly to draw attention to myself with a court case. I had to live with this demeaning situation; and, Bernard had another reason to despise me.

So, the seasons went by. Ursula, Bernard and I were tense and on guard. Only little Jo gave me happiness. The third year after my return, Bernard decided to leave. He said that he saw his future in America. The Eifel was in decline and the future bleak. Taxes were high and opportunity lacking. I could not disagree with him. Harvests had been very poor and others were leaving. Many farms and even entire villages were abandoned. I asked Bernard to consider his family; beside the land, he had family here. While he might find land elsewhere, his only family was here. All his anger and shame came out in a torrent. He despised me for leaving the battle just before the decisive defeat of the French at Waterloo. He could not accept that I chose to keep my wife and live in my house, after what he had witnessed there. He despised Ursula for taking French lovers, bringing one into the house and then bearing his child. Finally, my relationship with little Johanna was an insult to him that was too much to bear. For him, family was not a warm cloak against a winter chill but a smothering blanket to be shaken off and discarded. It hurt me, but nothing I said could change his feelings. As he was determined, I offered my blessing on his journey. Bernard stood for it, but without gratitude.

After Bernard left, Ursula went from being distant to being absent.

As Jo grew and was able to take on more of the household chores, Ursula would leave the cottage without explanation. She spent more and more time off on her own. When I asked on an evening where she had been and what she had been doing, she would bristle with hostility. When I said I was merely making conversation, she would accuse me of accusing her of misconduct. Eventually I stopped asking her about her days.

As time went on, Ursula became more like a boarder in our home. Then one day she was gone. Without saying a word, she had gathered a few items and left the house and the village. I was told she had been seen with a Prussian officer passing through Langenfeld. I was left with Jo. Jo was growing into a young woman and cheerfully performed her tasks. We were content and life was good.

As I worked the fields, I thought a lot about how my life, which had started so well and which I had expected to be prosperous and happy, had gone so differently than I had expected. I thought about my wife and son, both now gone, and on bad terms. I spent time blaming the French, the Prussians, Ursula and even Bernard for the loss of my family. If only they had not done thus and so, my life would have been happy and prosperous. Gradually, these thoughts lost their heat. I came to believe that people and nations act, and events occur, for their own reasons, even if I cannot see or understand the reasons. Like the weather – it's not personal. All I can do is adapt to the conditions and keep my spirits up; I have fields to cultivate. What good does it do to be angry, resentful or

depressed about the weather?

With this attitude, it was fairly easy to find peace in regard to the French and Prussians, but much more difficult with Ursula and Bernard. With the French or the Prussians, I felt little sense of hurt and betrayal, even though I did not like what they had done to me. But, I had opened my heart to Ursula and Bernard and they had hurt me deeply. I may never heal that hurt completely. But I tried to find understanding and forgiveness. After all, if I carry anger and pain around with me, who am I hurting? Only myself and, of course, those around me. I had Jo in my life and she was all I had hoped for in a child. I wanted to bask in her love and return it. I did not wish to bring pain and resentment into our happy home. So, I did my best to leave pain behind and live in the present.

Then, one day, five Prussian soldiers came to the farm and arrested me. While I always knew it was possible, it was a shock when they marched up, charged me with desertion and took me away. It was worse for Jo. She witnessed their ruthless arrest, was given no leave to speak to me nor gather clothes and food for me. They took me quickly as I stood, and left Jo completely alone on the farm. I was concerned about my future and terribly worried about Jo and how she would manage alone.

Other men in Langenfeld and then other villages were arrested. We eventually learned that the Prussians had an informer, someone who had told them of the Rhinelanders leaving the battle. It was Ursula. She had gone to them with the story and my name only. I guess she could

no longer tolerate my presence in the cottage. Perhaps she feared I would try to take back my family land. But, if she thought she could simply use the Prussians to rid herself of me, she was wrong. Ursula had always had a compulsion to curry favor with anyone in authority. She had been sweet and sexy with me when she wanted a marriage. Then came the French and the Prussians, so many men and opportunities for her to shine. I know it could be said that I cooperated with authority. It is true that when the French came I did as they required. Same with the Prussians. Faced with unalterable facts, I did as ordered to survive. But while I tried to avoid making unnecessary enemies, I did not set out to seduce anyone either.

It appears that once Ursula went to the Prussians about me, it wasn't long before she was giving lots of names of men who had served. She must have realized at some point that the situation was out of her control and she could not remain in Langenfeld, or anywhere in the Eifel, once the arrests started. Now I understood her abrupt departure.

All of us Rhinelanders who had left the battlefield to return home were accused of desertion. Many suspected that the reason the Prussians were pursuing us so many years later was financial. If convicted of desertion, a man's property could be confiscated by the State. With the passage of years and what we had learned later about the battle, we had thought we were free. But apparently the taxes that the Prussians extracted were not enough.

Men gathered to talk about our defense. We could not deny walking away; but whether that was desertion,

or a stroke of strategic genius was a valid question. By this time everyone knew the true story of Waterloo. After Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Ligny, he calculated that they would retreat east, up their supply lines. He sent Field Marshall Grouchy with 33,000 men and 80 cannon after them, with instructions "to keep his sword point in the Prussians' arse." When Grouchy caught up with his quarry he found, not the main Prussian Army, but us Rhinelanders, walking home. Realizing his mistake too late, Grouchy broke off his attack on us to search for the Prussian Army.

In the meantime, Napoleon had attacked the outnumbered Anglo-Allied Army where they had dug in after retreating the previous day. It was a desperate battle, back and forth. If Napoleon had had Grouchy's men and cannon, he would have easily overwhelmed Wellington. As it was the French were furiously assaulting the ridge yet again when the Prussian Army unexpectedly appeared on the unprotected French right flank. The Prussians rolled up the exposed French line and a route ensued. Napoleon never saw it coming; he had believed that Grouchy was pursuing the Prussian Army away from the battle.

So, we believed that we Rhinelanders had provided the crucial element in what was a very lucky win for Wellington and Blucher. If we had not provided a false trail for Grouchy to follow exactly where he expected it to be, he would have pushed the Prussian withdrawal from Ligny into a headlong retreat, allowing Napoleon to conclusively defeat the outnumbered Wellington at Waterloo.

Because we had deceived Grouchy completely, not only was Napoleon deprived of a third of his army, he was completely surprised by the Prussian Army at the crucial moment. We Rhinelanders all deserved medals. But, were we given any credit? No. We were deserters.

Now, I am a prisoner in a makeshift camp while the Prussians decide what to do with me. I have time to look back on my life. Nothing happened as I expected; all of my plans came to nothing. I am tempted to try to make sense of it all, but I know that is futile. It is simply what happened. I cannot change it. I cannot make it fair or just. I can only make peace with it and find some joy and

contentment where I may. Looking back, I had some good times and some adventures, and I have Jo.

As for now, I have no property to be confiscated, thanks to Ursula. I take some satisfaction from that. My Jo will be secure with the land. She will marry and there will be children on the Frank farm again. This makes me happy when I think about the future.

The French gave us some good things. I am told that the great Voltaire wrote: "Uncertainty is uncomfortable, but certainty is absurd." My life has taught me that the only way to be content each day is to become comfortable with uncertainty. What will the Prussians do with me? I do not know, but come what will, I am at peace.

# Two Poems

Peter Anderson

## Elephant

Turns out I'm the elephant in the room. Contrary to what has been said, they do talk about me — a lot. Even the couch complains loudly when I sit on it. Other topics occasionally dominate the conversation but sooner or later it always comes back to me. They deny it but their voice is not as sotto as they like to think. When the chain on my foot clanks too loudly I read their lips. At first it was harmless jokes, calling me Little Peanut, Sentient Vacuum Cleaner, Living Shower Head, that kind of thing. But that all changed when I crushed the family dog underfoot. They told each other it was an accident but I could see they had their doubts. Now they worry I've grown too large. They don't consider that maybe the room is getting smaller. The renovations, which took longer than expected (as expected), were supposed to make everything airier. But no sooner had the floor plan opened than they began filling it with more stuff. No one stopped to consider how the ivory smile of the piano in the corner might make me feel. They just keep chattering on about where I came from, what I'm doing here, how long I'm going to stay, why I smell like that, etcetera. Sometimes late at night their voices drift up to the ceiling and hover there in a noisy little cloud. It reminds me of the monkeys and that makes me sad.

## Shiver

Air was getting in but where we didn't know. Old towels under the doors didn't stop the whistling. The windows were cold to the touch and rattled in the wind but had no visible cracks. We wrote messages with our breath — haikus that faded before they were finished. We plugged sockets with foam and nailed plywood over the fireplace, but still the furnace banged like a caged beast dreaming of the wild. Nothing quieted our chattering thoughts. We poured steaming liquid into tea cups but couldn't take a step without spilling. Like children, we burrowed under skins and hides, but that didn't stop our shaking. We put our mouths to each other's spines, warming our cervical vertebrae with what hot air we could muster, the way our Italian mime teacher had taught us. He'd survived a night in the mountains during the war, but now he was dead and we were still cold. Lucky to have each other, we said, but the words were so muffled we couldn't be sure what we'd heard.

*"Elephant" was first published in The Last Stanza Poetry Journal #6, edited by Jenny Kalahar and available online. "Shiver" was first published in Flora Fiction Vol. 2, Issue 3, edited by Flora Ashe and available online.*

# The Top Half and the In-Between

Fez Fessenden

The other day I was face-up on an examination table in the cancer wing of the University of Michigan Hospital. I found a lump in my breast about a month before, and this was the third time I'd been outside of my house since. The first two appointments couldn't confirm anything other than the size of the mass; all other information was kept tightly sealed between med-techs. So there I was, back under an ultrasound, this time with three more doctors and two needles beside me while I lay with the top of my robe open, one arm above my head, squeezing a rubber ball to keep my blood moving.

"So, just to confirm, what are you here for?"

"An ultrasound-guided biopsy."

"And your date of birth?"

"Two, twenty-eight, two-thousand."

"Are you ready to get started?"

\*

When I moved into my college house last August, six months into the pandemic, I elected to leave behind all of my nice clothing. After all, with my social interactions confined to a 13-inch laptop screen and Ann Arbor constantly on lock-down, what need had I for anything but loungewear? It is now February, with snow a blanket over the sky and a bedroom that is dark by 6 pm, and I have never in

my life needed to play dress-up as desperately as I do right now. I am reminded of the mixers they held at summer camps when I was 15, where the nicest thing I had to wear was a tie-dye t-shirt and the shortest pair of shorts my mom would buy for me. Now, like then, I construct myself from the meager wardrobe before me: sweatpants, jeans that no longer fit, sweatshirts, and period underwear.

\*

We've all heard this one before: a cat is placed in a box with noxious gas that has a 50% chance of killing it within one hour. At the end of the hour, the cat's theoretical owner (piece of shit that he is) asks, "what is the state of the cat?" Common sense tells us that it's either dead or alive, but remember, this is a hypothetical situation intended to demonstrate a complex principle, and nothing is that simple. So instead, quantum physics tells us that at the instant before the box is opened, the cat is equal parts alive and dead at the same time. With heavy hearts, we open the box to reveal a dead cat. This is its definite state. Perhaps we should have kept the box closed, while the poor thing was still a blur of probability.

\*

I can hardly feel the needle for the first few seconds, but as it ventures deeper into my breast I start to imagine all of the little wormholes it's digging in my tissue. The ultrasound shows me the mass I've been hiding. I try to lighten the mood, "maybe I can get prints of the ultrasound to keep in my wallet and show my loved ones, like a proud grandad." The two doctors with their hands on me and the one working the computer laugh nervously and settle for no, I don't want that. I wonder how many biopsies they do a day.

\*

I am told that gender is a product of the interactions between biology and society, but this is an oversimplification. There are actually three levels to the social construction of gender: the individual level, the interactional level, and the institutional level. The individual level is easy to explain--do you feel like a girl or a boy? When you were born and the doctor looked down at your tiny body and determined the rest of your life by listing your sex on your birth certificate, did you agree with them? I'm kidding of course. You couldn't have agreed or disagreed until much later, when you learned that bodies mean something to adults, and yours should mean something to you. That meaning is the beginning of your gender.

The interactional level is where you perform this gender. Despite what I just told you, this is about your body, it has nothing to do with how you feel in it. If you perform well, you'll be rewarded. I was born with the ability

to grow breasts, so I am supposed to keep them out for people to enjoy and keep them to myself to preserve modesty. I was born with the ability to give birth, so I am supposed to take up very little space and keep my head tilted slightly down when I walk. I was born without a Y chromosome, so I am supposed to flirt with boys long after I know I won't marry one. Sometimes I fail this performance. At age 10, I cut my hair short in solidarity with a friend who had recently undergone chemotherapy. That year, on my way in and out of school, I often held doors open for strangers who responded with, "Thank you, sir." I didn't correct them. When the doctors at the hospital referred to me as "her," I didn't correct them either.

At the institutional level, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. Again, this has everything to do with your body. Whether you like it or not, gender exists not just in your individual experience, but as an entity in itself. It is a building block in the social structures built on unequal statuses. When I leave college, my paycheck will be determined by my boss's ability to translate my top half into the potential quality of my work.

In high school, I had an argument with my best friend, who insisted that male gynecologists can be just as good at their job as female gynecologists. They were right, of course, but that didn't assuage my fear of someday glancing above my open gown, feet in the stirrups, to find a man peering into me. Surely

he would see through me, or worse, not see me at all. What I didn't consider then was how little the doctor's gender would matter in this interaction. Laying down on the examination table with my robe open, listening to the doctors talk about me as if I'm not ten inches below them, I understand: in this moment, all I am is the body I was born into.

\*

I was peeling an orange today, having trouble removing all of the little strings and chunks of white fluff. In the process, I noticed how pathetic it looked. Picture it: you're peeling the fruit and removing this bright, beautiful outer shell that anyone could recognize as "orange!" But before you bite into the vesicles underneath, what are you left with? A thick skin of white pith, bitter and in-between. So thick, you might not, if you didn't know better, attempt to peel past it to get to the sweet juice inside. It's a shame, really, how the naked in-between is neither the fruit you know by sight nor the one you know by taste.

\*

Clothing that I left behind when I moved to my college house last August: a red leather skirt from the 1970s; two tasseled flapper-inspired dresses, one from the 50s and another from the 60s; a short, houndstooth shift dress from the 60s that I wore with a thin, gold-chain stopwatch around my waist and white knee-high socks; a red and yellow, floral, quilted, two-piece suit from the 70s; and a brown, knee length dress from

1954 that buttoned up the front and that I wore nearly twice a week with navy blue suede heels, bright yellow dangly earrings (made in Uganda and purchased at an art fair), a red leather belt around my waist, and floral wooden bangles from the 70s. To name a few. Now they sit in a closet or a cedar trunk at my mom's house in Lake Leelanau, Michigan, getting older with me, without me.

\*

According to sociologist C. J. Pascoe, we all participate in a "heterosexualizing process" beginning in elementary school, during which we learn to act like "normal" girls and boys. As it turns out, being a girl is just as much about sexuality as it is about gender. Being a girl requires not just the existence of a certain set of genitals and chromosomes, but also one's acceptance of their place in society and what is expected of them. So if I've failed to love a man, want a child, and take care of others, am I still a woman? With a jury consisting of myself and the child who recounted over and over the times she was mistaken for a boy, we've decided against it.

\*

They say that everything in our universe is random. Well, they say that now, in the age of quantum physics, a huge leap from deterministic classical physics, but that's neither here nor there. There are three states of what matters: 1. nothing can be known with infinite certainty. 2. everything is about probability. 3. we are all made of quantum stuff.



Take an electron, for example, which appears to us as a wave, rather than a particle. Not a physical wave, just an abstract mathematical wave we use to calculate its position and momentum. I know you're thinking, is the wave real? Well, we don't know that either. It exists in the hidden quantum realm, and in our realm, the electron is a particle. The only thing standing between our realm and the quantum realm is measurement. See, the wave is only a wave until you measure it, and then it becomes a particle. No one can explain why the wave-function collapses, but it's true for everything in our universe.

\*

My appointments at the hospital are always scheduled when my housemates with cars are at work, which makes Uber my only option unless I want to walk an hour and a half there and back in snow up to my waist. On my most recent trip, I hoped aloud to the driver that vaccines would come out before my senior year. He assured me that I needn't worry, that I "still had plenty of time to break boys' hearts." I attempted a laugh and returned to my phone to finish filling out the intake form for my appointment. Under my name, it listed gender, with two possible options. As always, I hesitated, hoping another option would appear from thin air to rescue me. I reminded myself of the purpose of this question: biology. Even so, you'd think that with all of the information they already have on file about my top half, they wouldn't need me to confirm it before every visit. Especially because it felt more like compromise than confirmation.

\*

Strip me of my clothing and all you have is body. Notice how pathetic it looks. You might crack open an oyster, excited to reveal an iridescent pearl (iridescence is so popular these days), only to be disappointed by the cold, grey creature inside. I wouldn't be surprised if the first person to catch one didn't dive any deeper. But oysters are interesting creatures—many species have two sexes and can produce both eggs and sperm depending on the need. They're also solitary animals, and don't require a mate to reproduce. They spend most of their youth male, sending out milky clouds of sperm into the open ocean. If a female happens to catch the drift, she'll discharge millions of her newly fertilized eggs, which develop into larvae in about six hours. The trick with oysters is that although they can use either reproductive organ, they can only produce one at a time. In an absence of eggs, a male oyster can start producing them to fill the gap. Oysters must think our way of naming them is so peculiar. If they can produce eggs and sperm and don't need a mate, why do we insist on sticking to male and female to describe them?

\*

Within my first semester of college I dropped ten pounds, started dating, and developed a shopping addiction. I came barreling into Ann Arbor with a brand new sense of independence and excessive enthusiasm for musical theatre, which led me to

seek attention on and off the stage. When I wasn't cast in a production I auditioned for or performed poorly on an exam, I took myself on a treat trip to the vintage store downtown. Within a few months I had amassed the wardrobe that would become my most memorable feature when friends recalled their first impressions of me. Although this was not the beginning of my love for 1940s through 1970s fashion, this novel access to clothes that made heads turn my way became as important to my sense of self as my own name.

I find some situational irony in my preferred era of fashion, given that the 1940s through the 1960s was a period of intense sexism, homophobia, and gender-policing. The proper performance of gender and, consequently, sexuality, was of the highest importance to maintaining the structure of what sociologists of sexuality call "the Repression Era." Especially in the 1950s, images of the nuclear family were at the forefront of social expectation, an integral part of the American Dream. If you were suspected of straying from the set of gendered norms assigned to you, you might as well have been suspected of being a Communist. The clothes I so gravitated towards were once someone else's attempt to survive this world, to embody womanhood. But, like bodies, the meaning of clothing changes. 50 years later, the knee-length hem of my dress communicates a parallel divergence from my sex's 21st century gender expectations. I still check off a lot of boxes for traditional womanhood: my dress is tight around my waist, my earrings match my belt, I smile when smiled

at -- the only difference between my dress and the one on the Alpha Beta Phi freshman drunk outside my dorm room window on a Friday night is time. I like to think there's a bite-back in my high heels. If I can't be a woman, I'll dress like the pinnacle of femininity: a bombshell, a housewife, a highschool sweetheart.

\*

There are many possible wave-functions for an electron, like one that has two peaks and a valley in the middle. Determining the location of the electron depends on the shape of the wave: there is a high probability that its position will be at either of the two peaks and a very low probability that it will be in the valley. Say these peaks are exactly the same height, or amplitude--which is the electron more probably positioned at? Trick question! The electron is most probably positioned at the tip of both peaks at the same time. Superposition, the notion that a particle can exist in two or more places at once, is the cornerstone of quantum physics.

\*

The moment I begin to exist is the moment someone asks me to. The able body that takes my disabled head from room to room has a distinct shape and size and sensitivity to tight pants, salt, and itchy sweaters. As for my memories and mistakes--well, it's sort of, "out of sight, out of mind." A lack of existential permanence, to pair well with my already troublesome lack of object permanence. I have memorized myself so that I don't have to think when I am

asked: name, year, major, pronouns, one interesting thing about you. Easy; I'm a junior. I have pet rats. My pronouns are.

That one I haven't memorized, not yet. My pronouns are. Making me think too hard. Will I get an A for careful deliberation or a P for participation in a set of pre-existing options?

Do I become real when recognized or do I simply change states?

\*

Today I learned that an MRI machine detects all of the hydrogen molecules in your body and makes them spin around in two directions at the same time. Even our bodies are made of quantum stuff. Even we can be in more than one state at once.

\*

Since we're all online all day anyway, I would bet that many people have perfected the art of dressing up their top half for Zoom calls while leaving the bottom half in pajamas. I've taken it one step further. So far removed from the discomforts of going outside, my top of choice is a soft, oversized t-shirt and neither a binder nor a bra. If all you can see when you look at my name and video feed on your computer screen is from my sternum up, know that I'm living the dream.

\*

I don't see myself these days. Maybe that's just what happens when you're

in the present tense. Looking back, I recognize myself in phases of the moon. The same rock with different light reflecting off of it. Looking in the mirror, it takes 1/100,000,000th of a second for the light to travel from my nose to the mirror and back to me, even longer still for me to register the reflection as alive.

\*

The biopsy results came back indeterminate, just as in-between two possibilities as before the procedure. I'm scheduled for a consultation with the surgeons to have the lump removed in March. I am hoping to find someone other than an Uber to pick me up.

I miss my mom for the first time since summer camp. She's worried about me. Since the pandemic started, I've taken notice of small things that improve everyday survival, like stretching and leaving the house. Some things I can't improve right now. I miss putting on earrings and a self in the morning, my feet aching after walking across campus in oxfords. I miss sunlight, contact, purpose, deadlines. I am learning to live without the things needed for living. I am told that because of my asthma, I could be vaccinated by early summer. Imagine. I could go home, into my closet and my cedar trunk and bathe myself in identity, an old friend. It'll be a year this March. God. When did we collapse? How fast are we going? How will we know when this ends?

# Michigan Winter

Theo Poling

The path takes the scenic route following the u-bend of the creek

Brown below, churning and burbling,

Grey above, dense and unyielding

The world feels smaller in winter.

\*

Dark comes early these days

Heralded by the last dry call of the robin

But people still live, in golden squares and streetlights,

And I will, too.



# Two Chapters from Out on Good Behavior: Teaching Math While Looking Over Your Shoulder

Barry Garelick

## Chapter 10: More on Making Sense, and a Fickle Bookseller

What *making sense* means varies for different people. For Lucy, if she could do the procedure, it made sense. Same for most of the seventh graders I've taught, although there are other "nuances" depending on the person and at what level of silliness or seriousness they were operating.

My Math 7 class at St. Stephens was a mix of different abilities and personalities. John was an aspiring athlete who had difficulty with math facts and remembering procedures. He worked earnestly and trusted me, but felt that ultimately math wasn't something he would need. His vision of the future

was that he would be a superstar in the sports world and have enough money to hire people to do various chores—math being one of the things.

Whereas Lucy from my algebra class might utter "That doesn't make sense," John was more likely to say "That's a lot of work" when faced with tedious procedures like adding or subtracting large mixed numbers.

He once asked in all seriousness why I assigned so many problems. I asked if there was a particular play in baseball that he had to practice a lot. There was—it was a tricky play that first basemen had to perform automatically and perfectly. "It's the same thing in math," I said. "We have

to practice certain procedures so we can use them automatically to solve problems."

Two-second pause; then: "But Mr. G., I *like* baseball."

My reply was performed automatically and perfectly. "You don't have to like math; you just have to know how to do it."

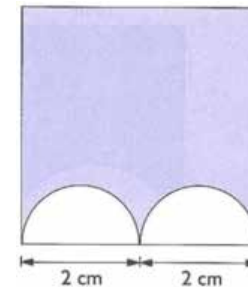
Donna, another student in that same class, had a different idea of *sense*, which vacillated between childish whimsy and pubescent whimsy.

Example of childish whimsy: After I explained that letters representing numbers were numbers going by different names, she proclaimed that the number 10 should be called "Jerry."

Example of pubescent whimsy: I had passed out a worksheet that had on it a problem asking for the area of the shaded portion of the figure below:

Upon seeing the figure, Donna shouted, "What the ?!" and covered her mouth to stifle a giggle. When I came over to see what was the matter she turned the paper over so the figure would be out of sight. She did not disclose the source of her outburst to anyone in her class, but started to work on the problems.

Looking at the picture a few minutes later, I could see that one could interpret it to be any of two portions of human anatomy, one of which



lacked nipples.

A completely different facet of the word *sense* came from my seventh grade student Jimmy the year before at the Cypress School. I have previously described his penchant for asking questions during a lesson on multiplication of negative numbers. Before I could teach multiplication of negative numbers, however, JUMP Math required covering how to evaluate expressions such as  $3 - (2 - x)$ .

Knowing how to multiply by negative numbers would make this a lot easier. But JUMP decided on a micro-scaffolded approach, which in retrospect I would not choose to do again. JUMP's approach was to first look at something with no variables like  $10 - (5 - 2)$ .

"We know we can do this easily by just doing the subtraction in the parentheses first," I said. "So we get  $10 - 3$  which is 7. But suppose I wanted to do it by distribution."

"Why would we want to do that when we can just subtract what's in the parentheses?" Jimmy asked.

"Because pretty soon we're going to evaluate expressions like  $3 - (2 - x)$  where we don't know the value inside the parentheses."

This quieted him for the moment, so I went on. I decided to make up a story to go along with the problem. "Say you visit a bookseller and he says to Jimmy, 'I'm going to give you a special deal. I'm going to reduce the price of this \$10 book by \$5.'"

"Yeah, that would be a good deal," Jimmy said.

"Yes, it is, but then at the last minute he says, 'I changed my mind. I'm only going to take off \$3.'"

"Wait a minute, he said he was

going to take off \$5," Jimmy said.

"Right. So you're going to pay more, aren't you? Originally you would have paid  $10 - 5$ , which is \$5. But he reduced the discount by \$2. So how much more are you going to pay now?"

Jimmy thought a minute. "Two dollars more."

"Right," I said. "If I wrote it now as  $10 - (5 - 2)$ , we can see that you end up paying two more dollars than what you would have paid had he not changed his mind. And what you end up paying can be written as  $10 - 5 + 2$ ."

The whole idea being that we evaluated the expression using an intuitive approach, thereby sidestepping multiplication of each number by  $-1$ . As I say, I wasn't fond of the approach. Jimmy was strangely silent.

"Now, let's suppose at the last minute the bookseller says, 'Wait, I changed my mind; I'm going to take off \$7.' Now you're paying less than you would have if he only took off \$5. How much less?"

"Two dollars," Jimmy said with a sigh.

I then summarized it as a rule: The signs of the numbers inside become the opposite. The homework problems were to evaluate various expressions in this manner, including those with variables, like  $10 - (5 - x)$ .

"It just doesn't make sense," Jimmy said.

"What doesn't?" I asked.

"I don't understand why he would give less of a discount than he said he would. The guy said he would take \$5 off, and then he only takes \$3 off. Why would he do this? What sense does that make?"

"The bookseller is a bit strange, I admit," I said. "But on the other hand, in

the end he took off \$2 more than he said he would. So he's not all bad."

"I don't trust him," he said. "I wouldn't come back to his store."

With Jimmy it was hard to tell whether his questioning was serious or a means of wasting time. Either possibility made sense.

## Chapter 17:

### "Math Talk," Stalin's Hemorrhoids, and a Murder of Crows

The energy that accompanies the start of the school year begins to dwindle noticeably around Thanksgiving, continuing through the approach of Christmas. It starts up again for a short time in January. Around February or March, when the rains bring tree frogs, students (and teachers) start to sense that spring break is near, with summer vacation soon following.

Seventh graders are growing and starting to look like eighth graders. And eighth graders are now looking ahead and becoming nostalgic for what will soon be a big part of their past. It is a nostalgia in advance—a holding on to the familiar at the same time as saying goodbye.

In my Math 8 class at St. Stephens, the holding on to the familiar manifested itself in even more conversations than normal. The literature on math education does not talk much about eighth graders' conversations. I recently saw an article claiming that "research shows" that students who talk about their math thinking are motivated to learn. Another article said that "math talk" allows for deeper understanding through communication. In addition, this "math

talk" is viewed as a form of formative assessment that gives teachers a peek into student thinking and where they need help.

To help students have a conversation there are certain cues they are taught to use, sometimes written on a poster in the room. These include prompts like "So Hallie is saying that..." "I disagree with Bob's solution because..." "After listening to Lynn I think the answer should be..." "Dave is right but I want to add..." and so on.

I believe that motivation comes from proper instruction, which allows students to carry out the tasks and achieve success. Math talk is an effective tool only if the instruction they received allows them to make use of it. Otherwise, it is like children dressing up in their parents' clothes to play "grownups."

For my Math 8 class, sometimes the conversations pertained to the math problems they were working on—and sometimes not. But as long as they were working on math, I didn't mind. Shortly after the tree frog incident when Jared tried unsuccessfully to find the loud croaker, I was putting my plan to teach them more algebra into high gear. I had introduced some simple factoring exercises, which Jared found fun—and he even said, "Invigorating!" as he did them.

We were making fairly good progress with factoring, but when we got to algebraic fractions they got a bit bogged down. I had to continually remind them to factor in order to simplify.

"I don't like factoring," Jared said.

"Why? You told me factoring prob-

lems were invigorating a few weeks ago."

"That was before they got complicated," he said.

His friend Kevin chimed in. "Factoring messes things up," he said.

"When you take algebra next year in high school, you will have seen all this already," I said. You'll be wondering why you thought this was difficult."

Mary and Valerie had their own private conversations, which would often merge with the others'. One particular conversation and its tributaries comes to mind. Valerie, avoiding saying the word "hell," said "H, E, double hockey sticks."

Lou reacted to this. "There's nothing wrong with saying the word 'hell.' It's a place," he said. Discussion followed about when "hell" was permissible to say and when it was not.

"I don't see the big deal," Lou said.

"You would if you were Catholic," Valerie said.

"Okay, I'm not Catholic, but I believe in Jesus. I just think Catholics are too strict about some things."

Kevin chimed in. "Well, this is a Catholic school so there are certain things you have to go along with."

"Hell shouldn't be one of them," Lou said, although it was unclear whether he meant the concept of hell itself or about saying the word.

Kevin then asked me how to find the lowest common denominator of two algebraic fractions. As I was showing him, Mary, who clearly did not want to do any more work, asked, "Lou, if I died would you cry at my funeral?"

"Well, I would be sad," he said. "But I don't cry easily."

"What would it take to get you to



cry?" she asked.

He appeared to be in thought. "I don't know. When my grandmother died I didn't cry, but when my dog died, I did. I don't understand why."

I had finished helping Kevin with his problem, and thought I might help Lou with his. "You don't always cry when someone dies," I said. "When my mother died last summer I was sad but I didn't cry."

"Sorry about your mom," Valerie said.

The room grew suddenly quiet; students are listening when you least expect it.

"But then I had a dream about her one night," I said. "And when I was telling someone about the dream, I started crying."

"You probably cried because you knew you were saying goodbye," she said.

Which, unbelievably, was what the dream was about. I had to go somewhere but couldn't take my mother with me so I had to say goodbye. There was no need to mention that, so I didn't and conversations returned to less somber topics—in particular, the history paper Lou was writing about Stalin. "Stalin died from hemorrhoids," he said.

"How can you die from hemorrhoids?" I asked.

"From complications."

"I assume that will not be covered in your history paper," I said, but his answer was drowned out by a noisy chorus of crows in the tree outside.

"Can I chase the crows away?" Jared asked.

"Stay seated," I said and shut the door to the classroom.

"The door won't block out the

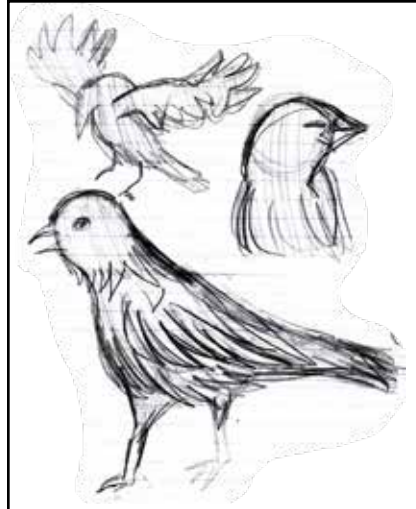
sound," Jared said.

Once the door was shut, the crowing stopped. I said "Do you hear them now?"

Never at a loss for a rejoinder, Jared said, "The motion of the door scared them away."

"Do you have proof of that?" I asked. He didn't answer.

"I'll take that as a no," I said.



*A student's drawing of crows.*

"Can we play hangman?" Jared asked.

"If you're all finished with your math problems."

"There's only two minutes left of class," he said.

I gave the go-ahead, and Lou and Jared jumped up to put their hangman challenge on the board. I realized at that moment that I had grown quite fond of this class and that our little rituals were starting to feel like we were saying goodbye.

*from Out on Good Behavior: Teaching Math While Looking Over Your Shoulder, John Catt Educational, 2021.*

## White sand

Carmen Bugan

I arrived in a white storm.  
The land is cut up and parceled:  
Bulldozers, workers, and cranes.

Wind blows over the sand.  
Palms sway in the wind.  
The sun scorches the whiteness.

It is not possible to breathe outside.  
The white haze shrouds the roads,  
Bridges, islands, and the city.

At night the red moon hovers  
Over the hives of bulldozers,  
Cranes, workers, and dust.

\*

The sand looks like snow.  
The city appears and vanishes  
In the white clouds.

White sand dervishes swirl  
Beyond the windows.  
In the morning, haze stifles sun.

The wind blows again  
And this time the city appears  
Glittering and glimmering.

In this land without rain,  
I have memorized the smell  
Of hot burning sand,

Learned the panic of heat rising  
From beneath my feet; wrapped  
Myself in the hot milky gauze

Of the white sandstorm.  
These days it feels as if  
The sky fell upside-down.

\*

Since I have gone, my children  
Speak their love to me  
In a new language: they cook

The food I taught them to cook.  
They make the food I learned  
How to make from my mother.

In the freshly baked loaves of bread  
They have kneaded all that I am  
To them. White sand, I pray you

Swallow my bitter heart  
And give me a heart of light  
For my journey back home,

Keep the pain of life I brought  
To you. White hot sand,  
You called me, and I came.

-



## Tonight

Andrea Wong

The bedside lamp shone weakly behind his shoulder, so that his swoop of dark hair was the only thing I could see. I traced my index finger down from his forehead to the tip of his pointed nose, and he kissed the palm of my hand, bringing it into both of his.

"I don't want to go to sleep," I whispered, my voice breaking the comfortable silence of the room.

There was a pause, and I imagined his eyes roaming my face, the way they always did when he was thinking, as if the answer was written somewhere on my skin.

"Me neither," he said softly, squeezing my hand.

The few stars outside his window blinked curiously beside the crescent moon that hung low in the sky.

"It's pretty, right?" he asked, following my gaze.

"Yeah... I never see stars anymore in the city," I replied. "It's just bright-ass billboards and motorcycles racing on the streets at night."

"That sounds pleasant," he said, laughing softly. I could see the silhouette of his finger rubbing against his upper lip. "God, I'd never want to live in a big city."

His words stung the still air, and the beat of my heart quickened with the ticking of the clock.

"Wait, I didn't mean it like that, Vi," he said, shifting near. The thin sheets rustled, and I saw the outline of his legs tense.

I brushed his fringe out of his eyes. "It's okay."

"No, Vi. I'm sorry," he insisted.

"Let's just focus on right now, okay?" I pressed my thumb against his furrowed brows, and he relaxed.

"Okay," he whispered, laying his

head on the crook of my neck. I could smell the lingering smoke in his hair. Roasting marshmallows in his backyard was our weekly tradition in high school, and it was nice to relive it again tonight, pretend we were still young and had all the time in the world.

Now, we scrambled for a few days together after months apart. Not even knowing when we would see each other next. Sure, technology existed. Phone calls during odd times of the day, video calls during lunch breaks and late into the night. But it wasn't the same. And it wasn't just the distance. We had bills to pay, people to please, mouths to feed. We weren't kids anymore. We had more to worry about.

Well, not *literally* mouths to feed. Just mine.

I laid my chin on top of his head. "I wish I could freeze time."

"And I wish I could keep you here forever," he said, kissing the base of my neck. I sighed, twirling my finger around a strand of his hair. The bedside lamp flickered, leaving the room pitch dark for a split second.

"Remember that night after Bella's party?" I asked. He laughed. "Of course I do. When we all jumped the fence and chased each other around in the field?"

"It was so dark, I'm surprised none of us got hurt."

"I mean, Bella certainly did," he said. "Her pride, at least."

"Oh, *god*, the look on her face when she saw her dress," I laughed. "I did feel bad for her, though; I knew it was pretty expensive."

"She told you how her mom reacted, right?" he asked. I smiled, still playing

with his hair. "Of course. Bella was so bitter, she wouldn't stop bringing it up even *months* later."

"I don't blame her. Imagine being grounded for three weeks straight right after your birthday."

We both laughed, and I felt his body shudder against mine. There was a pause, and the ticking of the clock filled the room again.

Ian leaned back to look at me.

"Hey, hey. I know what you're thinking. Stop it. Like you said, focus on right now, right? Focus on us."

When I didn't reply, he shifted so that he was level with me. My hand fell onto his shoulder.

"Vi."

I scanned his face, or the vague shapes of it, before settling on his eyes, trying to follow the kaleidoscope within them. These were the eyes that I fell for years ago in the library, though I would never admit that was when it happened.

\*\*\*

I had been waiting for that day for weeks. I heard from the school librarian that they were bringing in a highly-anticipated series at the time – *The Dragon's Knight*. Despite being a freshman in high school, with all my friends way past their reading phases, I was still enamoured with it. There was something about it that just filled me with joy. I supposed, in a cliché way, that it was my only form of escape from this small town. The only time I could be someone I wasn't, live strong, brave lives that were a thousand times more exciting than mine.

I practically ran to the library

during my lunch period, expecting the books to be available for checking out, untouched, reserved for me. But when

I walked to the shelf, scanning the letters to find Lee — the author's last name — for the first book of the series, I found a gap instead. I searched for the missing book on the surrounding shelves. This must be some sort of mistake, I had thought. Who could have checked it out?

My eyes slowly landed on the boy perched on a stool in the aisle, a book, flipped to the middle, on his knees. I had seen him when I entered the aisle but had paid no attention, fixated on finding the book that I thought only I would want. I crouched down, pretending to look for something on the bottom shelf, then inched closer to him. I glanced at the book he was holding.

On it was the cover art with the luminescent purple-scaled dragon in the background with a knight in armour in front, holding his sword across his face. *The Dragon's Knight*. There was no way. That book was supposed to be mine; no one else was supposed to read it before me.

I must've been staring for too long, because the boy looked up from his book and started, probably from my glare. I realised he was in my grade, and I had taken a couple of classes with him before.

"Ian," I had thought.

"Uh." He closed the book and moved it behind him. "Can I help you?"

I frowned, disliking how he was hiding the book from me.

"Why are you reading that?" was the first thing that came out of my mouth.

Ian looked taken aback. "Wh-what do you mean? That's none of your

business," he said, shifting deeper into the stool. "I *mean*, I was looking for that. It's supposed to be mine," I said. Wanting to come off as nonchalant as possible, I crossed my arms.

He froze for a few seconds then burst out laughing, his hand, still holding the book, covered his mouth. I felt myself redden, realising what I said was pretty stupid. I had just told a random guy in my grade that I was into fantasy romance between a dragon and a human.

"Oh, shit," I thought. "This is going to spread real fast."

I considered grabbing the book out of his hands and bolting, but as I was about to lunge forward, he caught his breath and said, "I didn't know anyone else in this school read the *Dragon's Knight*. I thought I was the only one."

*Huh.*

"It's my favourite series." He shrugged.

Ian must've had seen the look on my face, because he added, "I'm serious."

I raised an eyebrow, and he rubbed his index finger across his upper lip, smiling. "You wanna read together?"

\*\*\*

I looked at him now, late at night in his bed. He brushed my hair away from my forehead and kissed me.

"It's gonna be alright, Vi."

I inhaled, breathing in the scent of him. Wood smoke mixed with laundry detergent and cigarettes that customers smoked in the corner store where he worked, but also familiarity, freedom, childish dreams, love, and

home. He smelled like home.

Any second I spent away from him, my heart spent aching for him, my body tugging itself towards him. I couldn't really focus on my job, on my friends, on my shitty, glorious life that I had always dreamt of in New York City. Somehow, my mind always drifted back here, to my hometown, to him.

Maybe what they said about the red string of fate was true. Some part of me was always drawn to him, like he had a magnetic field that reached across states, pulling me, orienting me towards him. He was like the North Star that people searched for when they were lost — a single, shining, light in the night sky.

His chest rose and fell, and I placed my hand on it, feeling the movement and the thumping of his heart underneath. He wrapped his arms around me, pulling me closer.

"I'm gonna miss you," I murmured, my voice muffled by his shirt.

When I looked up again, he kissed me. He tasted like the sickly sweet marshmallows that we roasted. I pressed my lips against his harder, desperate to savour this feeling, desperate to savour him.

We pulled apart. His eyes searched mine, but I knew my answer was him. I didn't know what was going to happen tomorrow, or the day after that, but tonight, with him, it would be alright.

## Three Photos

Bailey Burke





# Rhododendron Flowers, and Other Poems

Paul Meyer

## Rhododendron Flowers

When the blossom withers,  
the unseen root  
is inching ever outward  
in the cool damp dirt,  
as if to grasp, in counterpoise,  
another loamy grain,  
to purchase summer's increase,  
and the branch sustain.

When the flower goes to seed,  
observe the tender shoots  
that spring from underneath the bract,  
radiating out,  
to multiply the breathless show,  
when buds at leafy ends  
endure the winter snow, to find  
their season come again.

When the blossom withers,  
do not despair:  
Subtleties of growth and form  
await discovery there.  
Tend the plant, take pleasure in  
the elegance of every part,  
with the memory and promise  
of the flower in your heart.

### **My Scary Valentine**

In February, when the snowflakes fly,  
I feel the heat, yet chills run down my spine.  
I set the rendezvous, and breathe a sigh;  
For I must meet my Scary Valentine.

I tremble as our liaison draws near,  
For I know not if pain or joy awaits  
When we act out our dance of hope and fear.  
My heart is torn with greed, and love, and hate.

And when at last I look into his eyes,  
He bares my assets, calculates what's mine  
And what is his, and then the taxman cries:  
"You get a refund! Happy Valentine!"

So, from relief and joy my flood of tears.  
"Good bye," he says. "Please, come again next year."

### **The Long Way Home**

The guts are lovely, says my surgeon wife,  
A marvel, glistening with bluish veins;  
Warm to touch and pleasant, she maintains,  
And pulsing with the flow and ebb of life.

My mother's guts were lovely, said her surgeon,  
Not weathered from the garden sun and rain,  
And widowhood, and guilt, and belly pain,  
But pink, and healthy, once he had begun,

Except for one large, ugly tumor, there,  
Seen choking off the colon, which explained  
The findings on the scan, and all the pain  
She'd had, and made her children come to fear.

O Mother, I am glad you know my name,  
And that you notice how my beard grows white.  
You don't recall that I was here last night,  
But still I know it pleased you that I came.

And now, your lovely gut securely sewn,  
The tumor not a cancer, but benign,  
Your insides will work better than your mind,  
And you, it seems, will take the long way home.



## You're So Young

*(Inspired by Lewis Carroll's "Father William")*

### Surgery Waiting-Room Lotto

*(During my mother's surgery, my siblings and I waited in a room where, when a patient's number flashed on a screen, the family would go meet the surgeon in a little glass walled cubicle to get the news.)*

Patient tracking-numbers scroll across  
The anxious monitor. The family  
of 6073 sits stoically, while  
3574's is bored with reading magazines.  
2010: case cancelled, family  
gets their money back, and won't be  
winning big today, but neither  
will they lose their chips.  
Some feed the nickel slots:  
3215 a minor skin procedure.  
Others play the big crap shoot:  
The hole in 4700's heart has been repaired!  
But 6315 will not be walking anymore,  
The spinal nerves are shot.  
The neatly-uniformed attendant-  
Croupier announces "Cancer, colon cancer."  
What's that number? Lights and bells, an  
Undesired jackpot mounding up  
Around the feet of  
Some unlucky gambler-souls.

"You're so young," said the gray, balding man to his son,  
"And your head is still soft. You're aware  
That this skateboarding park can be dangerous fun?  
Are you sure you can handle big air?"

"In the past," said the youth, "when my brain was a tool  
That I thought I might possibly use,  
I was worried. But now that I'm flunking at school,  
What the heck, I've got nothing to loose!"

"You're so young," said the Dad, "and it's still early Spring;  
So I don't want you catching a chill.  
And to overexert is a dangerous thing,  
Put this coat on, and rest, if you will."

"I feel great," said the lad, "but you look kind of tired.  
You can find a park bench over there.  
It's these energy bars that are keeping me wired;  
If you'll buy me a box, we can share."

"You're so young," said his father, "to take flight, and sail  
In the air, with hard concrete beneath.  
And I can't help but think, as you grind on that rail,  
Of the money we've spent on your teeth."

"Hey, I'm radical, dude," said the lad as he flew  
Down the halfpipe full tilt, "Get a grip.  
I do Ollies asleep, and I'm way overdue  
To be landing a double-kick flip."

"You're so young. Oh, my boy!" his poor father exclaimed,  
As the lad launched a 360 spin.  
"I don't think that my heart is quite up to this strain,  
Even with a new pacemaker in."

"OK, now you can chill," said the kid, with a scowl,  
"Cause that single handplant was my last.  
I don't think I'll be doing much boarding at all  
For six weeks, with my leg in this cast."

### Fickle Beach

Yesterday, egged by the breeze,  
waves rose on tiptoe,  
Overpoured themselves  
And crashed exuberant  
to taunt the darting sandpipers  
With frothing ornamental filigree.

This morning, reminiscent wavelets  
lap morosely at a beach of broken shells.

Yesterday, the spiral involutions  
of sand-windowed conchs and whelks  
enticed us down their pink and silken passages  
to vortex memories  
of warm and deep.

Now, great solitary sea birds  
ride the windy sky; aloof,  
serene, wings fixed in the  
lugubrious sunshine.

### What Compulsion?

I  
I used to feel I had to break  
Each little cell in bubble wrap,  
Which sometimes took a while, because  
I had to search out every scrap.

The hardest time was Christmas morning  
I just simply couldn't leave.  
I popped those bubbles by the tree,  
Sometimes 'til almost New Year's Eve.

But now I zap that bubble wrap  
With my new, more efficient drill:  
I stuff it in the microwave,  
Then I press "start," and oh, the thrill!

II  
I used to have to count the holes  
In every single ceiling tile  
In every room that I'd be in.  
Yeah, it could really take awhile.

But then I figured something out,  
That made me feel, well, pretty lame:  
Those tiles whose holes I had to count  
Were actually all the same!

So now I simply count the tiles,  
And multiply, which cuts the strife,  
And lets me finish just like that,  
So I can get on with my life.

III

I used to have to check the stove.  
For fear I'd left a burner hot.  
I thought about the toaster too,  
So I ran home an awful lot.

The dryer can be dangerous,  
So can a lamp that's left plugged in.  
I had to check each hour or so;  
The patience of my boss grew thin.

But now I monitor remotely,  
With this sensor from Japan.  
Oh! It's been five minutes now;  
I'd better make another scan.

IV

I told my doctor all these things.  
He frowned a bit, and wasn't moved.  
He says he thinks I'm getting worse,  
But I, for one, think I've improved.



## The Silver Loneliness of Night

J. L. Hagen

Kay Porter loved a good time—a serious party girl. But to Carl Iverson, a small-town kid growing up in the sixties in northern Michigan—Hemingway Country—she personified the Lost Generation women profiled by the immortal author. Not like his adolescent high school girlfriends. Instead, Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*. In his college sophomore year, he had tumbled crazy in love with Kay's free spirit and lively sexuality. After almost a year together in Ann Arbor, she perfectly fit his image of a soul mate.

One evening at the Village Bell, Carl intimated to her a profound revelation. The previous semester, for a diversion, he had taken an extra-curricular life drawing class at the Art School. Now, during dinner, he carefully laid a small watercolor on the dining table. It portrayed two nude figures melding together. He had worked all weekend

to render it.

Kay leaned forward to study the painting.

"I believe we are two halves of a spiritual whole," Carl whispered. Earlier, he had rehearsed this conversation in the men's room—a proposal to the mirror over a row of bathroom sinks. As he reached across with trembling fingers and grasped her hand, she raised her gaze and peered at him with a questioning look. "I-I don't pretend to understand it," he added, "but I hope to over the rest of our life together."

She let go and pulled back, examining the picture with a cool, silent stare. Carl's cheeks flushed. Not the reaction he expected. For the rest of the evening, they engaged in a polite couple's conversation, punctuated by her repeated side glances at the image.

The next day, she called him. "Hey,

Carl. I've decided not to see you anymore."

It was a gut punch. "Why?" he asked.

"I'm not ready for that kind of relationship."

By the start of second semester, she was introducing everyone to a tall, tanned fellow in sunglasses she had met skiing over Christmas break. And Carl was medicating himself into oblivion with drugs and alcohol.

\* \* \*

Toward the end of the school year, a couple of friends—Nick James and Keith Cartwright—took pity on him. Carl had to admit they were quite a pair. Keith was the classic nerd, his small face smothered by horn rimmed glasses and a perennial need for a haircut. Freckle faced Nick, who might have been the sixth Beach Boy, could and sometimes did chug an entire pitcher of lager—or two.

"Com'on, Carl, it's Thursday," Nick implored. "We know you don't have class tomorrow."

Keith chimed in. "Yeah, man, we found this cool bar downtown. Let's knock off early."

"Mr. Flood's Party," Nick added. "We can listen to some live music and get stinking drunk."

Carl chuckled. The comic irony of the bar's name was not lost on him. He was familiar with the sad poem about a lonely old man drinking with his imaginary self, having read it in his high school English class. He launched spontaneously into his favorite lines.

"For soon amid the silver loneliness of night he lifted up his voice and sang. Secure, with only two moons listening," he pointed at them, "until

the whole harmonious landscape rang—"

Nick shook his head and threw a wry sideways glance at Keith. "Jeez, Carl, you are definitely one weird dude."

\* \* \*

As they walked into Flood's looking for a seat, Baby Boy Warren, an old blues musician from Detroit, was seated on a stool playing a vintage Gibson electric guitar on a small stage set against the front window. "Whiskey pulled the trigger . . . but my baby held the gun . . ." (1)

Carl was captivated by the blues veteran's gritty baritone voice grinding out the iconic tune. Maybe if he were taller, more muscular, or could play a musical instrument like the bluesman, Kay might not have dumped him. Yet there must be a girl somewhere looking for a "nice guy" who liked to have fun but whose aim was a serious relationship.

Rows of shopworn wood tables were jam-packed with students and saturated with the smell of Pine-Sol and cigarette smoke. Carl and his two companions got lucky and snagged a location near the entrance from a couple just leaving. Across from the bar, it was the best seat in the house.

Carl checked around. Now a college hangout, the stamped tin ceilings, suspended Tiffany lampshades, and hardwood floors couldn't hide the fact that in its previous life, it had been in every way a "joint," a beer-and-a-shot workingman's tavern.

Behind the bartenders sat a large aquarium containing only two inhabitants, a small octopus and an

eel-like creature. They circled each other endlessly, twisting and undulating, searching for a lethal advantage. As Keith signaled for a server, Carl sat transfixed by this existential conflict of marine life. Smoking a joint on the way over had markedly enhanced his powers of imagination.

He looked up to see a girl with thick, sandy hair and a splendid face. Not beautiful in a classic sense, but her prominent nose, bright green eyes, and dimpled chin caught his attention. She seemed distracted about something and ignored his repeated glances. As she cleared the table from the last guests, a loud crash back near the restrooms silenced everyone in the place. Broken glass. A thin guy with long black hair and a mustache sprinted behind her toward the front door, blood and beer streaming down his face. He twisted around and shot back an angry glare, then kicked the door open and ran into the night.

She peered in his direction for a long moment, then released a deep sigh. "Sorry, fellows," she said. "I'll be back shortly for your order."

"Just bring us a pitcher of Stroh's," Nick said. "When you get a chance."

She wheeled around and left with an armful of empty glasses, dirty dishes, and tableware.

Keith's gaze followed her to the kitchen entrance. "I wonder what the hell that was all about."

"Yeah, did you see that look he gave us?" Carl added.

"Us—or her?" Nick asked.

Over the course of the evening, she served them four more rounds. Each time she brought another, Carl brooded, trying to think of a snappy line to engage her.

Keith and Nick attempted to distract him. "Com'on, Carl. Snap out of it. Let's play our favorite game," Keith said.

It was Nick's invention. They liked to call it "Hot or Not." Keith, who was studying computer science, was the scorekeeper. The idea was for a designated player—the Initiator—to point out a girl in the bar and say, "Hot—or not?" On the count of three, all the players had to hold up an index finger or a fist—for one or zero. Whoever matched the Initiator received a point; whoever didn't, received nothing. After five turns, the player with the least points had to buy the next round, and the player with the most points became the next Initiator. Carl ended up paying for all four rounds.

Finally, Nick confronted him. "Hey, Carl. You're like totally distracted and you keep staring at our bar maid. What's up with that?"

They turned in her direction as she retreated to serve another customer.

"Nothing. What're you talking about?"

"Yeah," Keith said. He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

"You keep eyeing her like she's Janice Joplin or something,"

Carl hesitated. "Aah, it's nothing. I just keep thinking I've seen her somewhere. Guess I've had too much to drink."

"Okay, lightning round," Nick said. "Whoever loses has to leave the tip." He shot a look at Keith. "Hot—or not?"

On the count of three, Carl pushed up his index finger. Nick and Keith both made fists.

"Well, you know what they say?" Nick said.

Carl stared at him, waiting for the

answer.

*"Drink her beautiful!"*

Nick and Keith both cracked up. Carl laughed politely, but he was preoccupied with how to get her attention and draw her into a conversation. The problem was the bar. It was way too raucous and congested. Baby Boy Warren was only four booths away and ripping through one blues number after another. Nick and Keith finished slugging down their beers, spitting out more obnoxious jokes, and otherwise trying to break him out of his funk.

All the way home, he kicked himself for being so squeamish. His lack of confidence had wrecked his opportunity. Every staggering step triggered another line from the Flood's poem. He couldn't get it out of his head.

\* \* \*

The following Tuesday, Carl was running late for his Film Studies class. The lecture was held in a stadium-style auditorium with about three hundred students—and always well attended. He typically sat down-front on the left side, but that day, he popped in on the upper level. As he scanned the back of the lecture hall for an empty seat, he spotted the girl from Flood's a few rows below. Leaning forward, writing in a notebook, she was dressed in white slacks and a pale blue cashmere sweater. Her hair was pulled around to one side of her neck and fastened in place with a jeweled metal clasp. The effect, stunning. However, every place around her was taken.

He found an empty chair off to her right and settled in with his books.

The professor was explaining the effect of Sergei Eisenstein and Soviet Montage Theory on the works of early Hollywood filmmakers. Halfway through his description of the work of Slavko Vorkapich at MGM in the 1930s, Carl ceased paying attention.

He could not stop watching her. Everything about her was sensual, captivating. He waited until class ended and made his way in her direction, running his fingers through his long blonde hair to comb it into place. She picked up her notes and purse, then turned to step into the aisle leading to the second-level exit.

They almost collided.

"Oh! Sorry, didn't see you there," she said.

"No—my fault, eh? I wanted to say hello."

She looked quizzically into Carl's eyes, then beamed as her face dissolved into the arresting image trapped in his head all weekend. "Oh, yeah." She pointed. "I served you last Thursday. Thank you for the tip. Quite generous."

"Great memory," he said. "So, what was the story on the guy who flew out the door, dripping beer and blood?"

She froze for a moment, then shook her head. "Oh, him—what a jerk." She clenched her teeth and looked away toward the exit door. "Supposedly, he got in a dispute over a girl . . . and grabbed this guy by his shirt. So, the other guy clobbered him with a half-empty pitcher. In my opinion . . . a waste of beer." She hesitated. "She wasn't much to look at, let alone fight over."

Carl's gaze lingered on her face. "I was kind of shocked—my first time

there."

She shrugged. "Well, it's a bar," she said with a casual wave of her hand. She started toward the door.

"Hey, I—I'm Carl Iverson."

She stopped and turned. "Oh, sorry for being so . . . impolite. Ellie Montgomery."

"Nice name—from Motown?"

"Does it show?" She glanced down at her clothes in mock alarm.

"No, just a lucky guess."

She smiled. "Mmm—actually, Birmingham."

"I grew up across the Bridge, in Loyale," he said.

"A Yoo-per." She chuckled. "We used to visit the Island every summer. I loved it up there." She glanced at her watch. "Uh-oh, have to run to my next class." She turned again to leave.

"Hey, maybe we could do something together, say, later this week," he said.

She stopped, glanced back at him. "I don't know . . ." She thought about it. "Yeah, that might be nice. I'm off this weekend."

He called after her. "Ellie, we can talk Thursday after class, eh?"

Then she was out the door and gone.

\* \* \*

For the next couple of days, Carl was surfing on smooth air. They made plans to see a movie Saturday evening at the Art School. A campus club ran a series in its auditorium once a month—art house, foreign, and independent films—edgy stuff appealing to college students and cult members. This month's movie was Federico Fellini's masterpiece "8 ½."

When he strolled into the lobby, she had already arrived. Wearing blue jeans and a sleeveless V-necked top with no bra, she carried a blazer over one arm.

After the show, they walked down the street to a bar on the porch of a former residence near the Law Quad and talked about the film over some red wine.

"Sometimes, I feel like Guido, the lead character," Carl said. "Trying to figure out what is the ideal woman."

"So, Carl, are you a romantic?" Ellie asked, grinning.

"Maybe. It's more like I want to find someone who is perfect—not for everyone, but for me—or, rather, for her and me."

"Yes, but the film's point seems to be to accept your life and friends as they are."

Something clicked. Carl gazed into her eyes. She looked nothing like his previous girlfriend, Kay, who had seemed at the time to define classic feminine beauty. Maybe he had been trying too hard to shape a perfect life with a perfect girl in a perfect relationship, rather than letting go, allowing his relationship or relationships to shape him. He sat there, silent, the sea change rolling over him.

"Carl?" She reached for his hand.

He snapped to. "I have to admit, I never thought about it quite that way."

"Yes, I loved that film."

"No, I meant your comment about letting your relationships shape you."

A puzzled look crossed her face.

"I mean, if you are more focused on what your partner gets out of the relationship, it will come back to you in ways you never would expect

and achieve a perfection you never could achieve on your own."

"Oh, Carl, you *are* a romantic!" She gave his hand a squeeze.

They continued their discussion of the movie and drank a couple more glasses of wine. He loved the sound of her voice. It projected a certain musical quality that enhanced whatever she was saying. Even more so, he loved what she had to say, her ideas, her way of expressing her thoughts, her projected confidence. But the bar staff was throwing off signals that it was closing time.

The spring weather was balmy, and he escorted her back to her place on Thompson Street, a small white clapboard house. He stopped in front to say good night.

"Would you like to see my apartment?" Ellie asked. She glanced his way with a half-embarrassed smile. "I actually cleaned it this morning."

He nodded.

She unlocked the front door, and they stepped inside. The house had been split into two units. Her half was the original kitchen and living room, now converted into a studio. He scanned around. It was neat and tidy, everything in its place. Besides a small kitchen table with a couple of chairs, the room contained a gray tweed couch, matching overstuffed chair, coffee table, reading lamp, and a study desk. In the rear corner sat an antique brass double bed. The apartment did smell like it had been freshly cleaned, a faint lemony scent.

"Nice, Ellie. Roommate?"

"No. I need the privacy."

She poured some wine and motioned toward the couch. They sat together, and she handed him one

of the goblets. He swirled the dark ruby liquid, inhaled its bouquet, and took a sip. Flavors of black cherries, leather, and plums filled his mouth.

"Wow, Ellie, fantastic wine." He held it up to examine its color. "What is this?"

She shot a look at the bottle on the kitchen counter. "It's Tempranillo . . . from Rioja. Spanish."

"I have to confess, I'm used to drinking Almaden burgundy or," he smiled, "God forbid, Boone's Farm Apple."

She laughed and took a sip.

"Where did you find it?"

"One of the few benefits of working in a bar," she said. "The wine distributor sometimes lays a bottle or two on the staff."

She clinked her glass against his and downed a generous mouthful.

After a few more swallows, their small talk tapered off. Within minutes, they were immersed in a slow, impassioned embrace. The taste of her mixed with the Spanish wine left Carl breathless. That first kiss, like a dark blue wave, rolled over the seawall of images he had envisioned since their first meeting. It broke like surf and foam across an empty beach. He was immediately, intensely aroused.

They kissed again and once more, even slower this time. His heart raced, his whole body ravenous with desire. He bent forward and touched her skin with his lips. The warm scent of lavender and orange blossoms flooded his senses.

"Mmmm," she whispered, slipping lower toward the arm of the sofa, revealing more of herself.

Carl pulled himself closer. "Ellie, I can't believe we're—together. From the first moment in Flood's, I wanted

to meet you. It seemed impossible—I didn't even know your name. Now, I'm here with you—in this dream. Can it be real?"

"I know, Carl . . .," she whispered. "I feel something too, but . . ."

"What?" he said. He gazed into her eyes, searching for a sign.

She reached for him. "It's—it's not important."

They locked together and kissed again, eagerly. She pulled off his shirt and pressed against him, wrapping him in her arms. She felt smooth as lamb skin.

Carl reached to remove the rest of her clothing. She hesitated, pulled away. He froze—had he done something?

"I don't know if . . .," she murmured. A look of concern creased her face.

Carl moved closer, desperate to have her. He whispered, "Ellie, I—"

She stared up at him, placed a finger to his lips. "Wait . . . give me a minute, okay?" She slipped off the couch and into the bathroom.

Carl sat up in a panic. What had happened? He searched the room for a sign. Dim, cold light from a streetlamp filtered through her curtains, the only break in the gloom that now enveloped him. Had the dream ended? Like Kay Porter, would she pull open the door and thrust him outside—into another dark night of silver loneliness? With each heartbeat, his anxiety deepened.

Several minutes later, the door swung open, and Ellie reappeared. She had cinched a long, black velvet gown around her waist with a crimson sash. Her eyes glimmered deeply, green as an emerald sea. Her sandy tresses curled along her cheek bones

and flowed across her neckline. As Carl rose to meet her, almost breathless, she pulled a strand of hair back from her face and glided into his arms. His whole body throbbed. She undressed him, and wave after wave shimmered and rolled across his naked frame. They kissed once more, separated only by the robe. Then, she let the sash fall away. With both hands, she spread the garment open. Her body, pale as the moon against the black sky of her gown, drew his eye, from the twist of hair around her silk-smooth face, on down. Clasping him to her, she bound them together in the plush velvet wrap.

After a long embrace, they tumbled onto the brass bed, kissing again and again, entwined on the black gown spread beneath her like a photographer's backdrop.

Carl had experienced no one like her. She was as soft as buttercream. As he explored the contours of her body, he grew more and more elated, elevated to a stratospheric plane. Finally, exhausted and satiated, they lay in each other's arms. Waves of electric current danced across his skin like tiny needles. At last, he dropped into a deep, hypnotic sleep.

\* \* \*

When Carl awoke, daylight was streaming into the apartment. He saw Ellie in the kitchen, clad in a white bathrobe and making coffee. He peered out the window. "What's the time? I must have really slept."

"It's early," she said. "I'm a morning person."

He slumped back into his pillow. "Ellie, I loved being with you so much last



night," he said. "It was like a beautiful dream. I'm still not certain it actually happened. I'd love to spend the whole day here with you." The comment triggered an emotional flash that surged through his body. "All weekend!" he corrected.

Her eyes sparkled. "Here, have a café au lait." She set two large cups on the kitchen table.

He rolled out of bed and threw on his clothes, then sat across from her and drank a mouthful. "That's fantastic. Never had it before. Almost as good as you." He reached across for her hand.

She smiled. "I learned to brew it from my aunt—she brought it back from a trip to Paris in the 1950s."

"Paris—I would kill to go there," Carl said. "After eight semesters of French classes, it would be wonderful to put it to some use other than reading labels on wine bottles."

She chuckled.

He paused, sipped some more coffee. "Hate to say it, Ellie, but I have to leave in a few minutes. My work-study job involves cleaning a snack bar in East Quad. I need to finish before they open this morning."

"That's okay. I have some errands myself. Plus, I got called into work tonight, and I need the money."

"Before I go," Carl said, "I wanted to ask you something."

"What's that?"

"My aunt owns a mountain cabin in Harley Creek, Montana. She offered to let me live there and fly fish this summer while she's guest-teaching in California." He gazed into her deep green eyes. "I was hoping you might go with me. It's not Paris and I don't have a car, but we could hitchhike—maybe even

to the West Coast." He grinned. "You know . . . 'road trip,'" he made some air quotes, "—like Kerouac?"

She put on an exaggerated frown. "I can't," she said. "I promised to go with some friends to North Manitou Island. They plan to set up a teepee and live in it for a couple of months."

Gob-smacked. Carl struggled to maintain his composure. "Where is it?"

"Up north in Lake Michigan, more or less uninhabited."

A torrent of troubling images sluiced through Carl's head. He sighed. "Well . . . if anything changes . . ." He glanced around and prepared to leave. She stood up, and he moved closer to kiss her once more. "Thank you again for last night," he whispered. "It was so extraordinary, Ellie. You're perfect."

As he turned toward the door, she stepped around in front of him. She tipped her head to the side and shrugged. "Carl, do you have some money you could lend me?"

He hesitated, then reached for his wallet. He had paid for everything last night, the movie, the wine, all of it. He opened the billfold. Inside were two one-dollar bills. His face flushed a deep red. "Th-that's all I've got," he said, holding them out.

She took them.

As he walked through her front yard to the street, he turned back toward the door. She was standing on the porch in her bathrobe, clutching the banknotes.

\* \* \*

Each step away from her increased Carl's anxiety and confusion. Last night had been intoxicating, almost hallucinogenic. It had propelled his expect-

tation of a serious relationship into the stratosphere. But this morning, their conversation had thrown it into a tailspin.

Why would she spend the summer camping on an uninhabited island with friends unless she was involved with one of them in a romantic relationship? Was last night simply a diversion? Was that why she had hesitated before emerging, transformed, ready for a night of ardent intimacy—eager to make love with him?

Or was her motivation more nefarious? When she asked him to lend her money, was it actually a loan? Or a diplomatic way to request payment for services rendered. A *transaction*. He couldn't help scrunching his nose in disgust. Their deep connection, which seemed so real in the inky passion of last evening, may have been a mere *illusion*; worse yet, he might have been *had*. The image of the eel and the octopus from the back-bar aquarium at Flood's floated across his mental screen. He had never felt so humiliated or ashamed.

An hour later, Carl slogged through his work-study job in the shadowy light of the Halfway Inn, East Quad's basement snack bar. The more he mulled it over, the more he realized how unhappy he was with school, with his failed relationship with Kay Porter, and now apparently with Ellie Montgomery. His idealism—his naivete—had been shipwrecked on an island in northern Michigan. Harder and harder, he scrubbed the counters and mopped the floor, but the stain of his failures and humiliation would not fade away.

\* \* \*

All day Sunday, Carl paced back and forth in his dorm room and stewed over his date with Ellie. At one point, he passed by his bathroom mirror. The person who stared back at him looked incredibly naïve, a mama's boy. He picked up a can of shaving cream, wanting to hurl it at the glass and smash the image, but caught himself in time. Their last class together was Tuesday. He would simply ignore her. She was clearly not who he had thought she was.

That evening, Carl lay sprawled and broken in his bed, drained of emotional fuel yet, somehow, his mental engine continuing to churn. He rolled over and stared vacantly at the blank wall, exhausted, but unable to sleep. His life seemed hopeless.

\* \* \*

Early Monday morning, he passed through the main hall of East Quad—angle on the way to breakfast in the cafeteria. As he rounded the corner to join the food line, someone said, "Carl. I've been waiting for you." On a bench near the entrance, partially obscured by the line of students waiting to order food, sat Ellie. He was trapped.

She stepped toward him and reached to give him a hug. He embraced her politely.

"What do you want?" he said.

"Is there a place we can talk? I need to tell you something."

"What, you're going to ask me for more money?" he snapped.

She stared up at him. "Oh, Carl. I was afraid this might happen. When you left, I knew I had given you the

wrong idea. I was desperate and did something stupid. I've been worried sick all weekend."

His eyes narrowed. What did she mean? Was she apologizing—and for what?

"Truthfully, it's worse than that." She reached out and put her hands on his forearms.

He tightened up.

"Please, Carl, let me explain." She glanced around the hallway. "But not here."

He hesitated. "Okay, there's a reading lounge down the hallway. No one's there this time of day."

She gave him a half-smile of gratitude. "Thank you." She reached out again to touch his hand.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll get some coffee."

A few minutes later, he returned with two cups on a tray. "It's not café au lait."

"That's alright. I wasn't expecting anything."

She followed him to the lounge, and they sat at a small reading table in the far corner.

He passed her a coffee. "So, what's so urgent that couldn't wait until class?" He stared at her, searching for a clue to signal that she would provide an honest answer.

"Carl, I don't know an easy way to say this." She sipped some coffee, then flooded into tears. She stopped, set down the cup, and wiped her face with her fingers while she attempted to regain her composure. She looked up directly into his eyes. "I-I'm pregnant."

"What?" He stared back at her, teeth clenched. "That's nonsense. It hasn't even been two days."

"No. No, I misspoke again. I'm sorry," she said. "It's not you." She laid her wet fingers on his hand. "It's Paolo."

"Paolo? Paolo? Who's that?"

"I met him in my anthropology class. We've been together since last fall. He's Brazilian and doing a 'year abroad.' I thought before he returned home, he would ask me to marry him . . ." She looked up, more tears rolling down her cheeks. "But a couple of weeks ago, I got worried I might be pregnant, so I went to Student Health and had a test. It came back positive. When I told him, he went crazy—said it was my fault, I had trapped him into it, and how could he know it was even his? His accusations were like knife stabs through my heart. I still can't believe it." She wiped her face again.

Carl didn't know what to say. He couldn't imagine someone treating her that way. "So, what are you going to do?" he asked.

"I have to get an abortion."

"An abortion? But isn't that against the law? How can you—"

"I found a doctor in Detroit. One of the other workers at Flood's went there when she got pregnant and told me about him." She looked up at Carl, her face gripped with alarm. "You can't tell anyone."

"I won't, I swear."

She exhaled a long breath. "And it's seven hundred and fifty dollars."

"Seven fifty! Is Paolo going to pay for it?"

"No. No way. Even if he offered, I wouldn't take it—last week when you came into Flood's with your friends?"

"Yeah, Nick and Keith."

"When the guy got hit with the pitcher?—That was Paolo."

"What? He's Paolo? But you said—"

"I didn't want to involve you, so I hedged about the details." She cried again. "I'm sorry, Carl. I'm so sorry."

"And that's the guy who got you pregnant?"

She looked up, snuffled, and wiped away more tears. "Yeah."

"But who hit him over the head? Was that you?"

"No, one of my friends, Donny. He brought Paolo to the bar to convince him to help me."

"So . . . Donny's another boyfriend? How many do you—"

"No. No, Donny doesn't like girls, if you get what I mean. I've known him since high school."

"So, they got into a fight? Is that what happened?"

"Yeah, they started arguing. Paolo said it was my fault. 'Birth control is the woman's responsibility,' he said, 'She probably did it to trap me.' Donny grabbed him and yelled about making false accusations. 'She needs money for an abortion, Asshole, and you need to cough it up.' Paolo knocked his hands away. 'I don't believe in murdering babies,' he said. 'I'm Catholic.' He added his parents would never go for it, and, anyway, he was flying home after the semester to Brazil. 'So, there's nothing she can do about it.' He looked at me and snarled, 'Give it to an orphanage.'" She cried again. "That's when Donny blew up and smashed him with the pitcher."

"What an asshole!" Carl said. He cradled his head in his hand. "What an asshole." After a few minutes, he looked up. Back to square one. "So,

I'm guessing you want me to give you seven hundred fifty dollars and our night together meant something different to you than it did to me."

"No . . . that's not it, Carl. Well, yes and no," Ellie said. "When I first met you and your friends, I was in a panic trying to figure out how to get myself out of this mess."

"You didn't seem upset."

"In the bar business, you learn quick the need to cover your personal feelings. But I was distraught, hoping Donny could convince Paolo to help me. When he came running through the bar, dripping blood, I knew Donny had failed. But then you were so nice to me and left me a huge tip. It was a sign that some way, somehow, it would all work out. Then when you found me in film class, it was, like, confirmation. I thought, *he's really sweet. Maybe there is a guy out there who's not a jerk like Paolo.* When you asked me out, I almost said 'no,' but I didn't want to give up the possibility that you might be the one." She looked deeply into Carl's eyes. "So, I took a chance, but didn't tell you about my situation. I thought, I'll find the money, then everything will go back to normal." She reached for his hand. "I'm truly so sorry."

Carl didn't know what to say. For several minutes, they sat there in silence. Finally, he said, "Ellie, I meant every word I said to you Saturday night. Being with you was so wonderful. I would like that feeling for the rest of my life—but I'm not ready to have a family." He placed his hands on her shoulders. "An abortion seems really scary. Are you sure?"

"I've gone through every choice," she said. This isn't perfect, but right

now, it's the only one that works."

"And your mom and dad, have you told them?"

"I'm trying to avoid that. It's why I have been telling everyone about traveling to Manitou Island with some classmates when school lets out to undertake a hands-on study of traditional Native culture."

"So, you're not actually going up there with your friends?"

"No, I am, just not right away. First, I'm having the procedure. I'm eight weeks in. I have to do this now."

"What about the money? I mean, seven hundred fifty dollars?"

"Actually, I don't need that much. I've managed to put together five hundred. I have to find two fifty."

Carl sat back in his seat, thinking. The previous summer he had run a sales route for a commercial bakery and made a lot of money, twenty-eight hundred dollars. He had used some for school this year but had enough remaining to take the upcoming summer off, plus cover next year's expenses. The idea of an

abortion troubled him, but so did a girl forced to wreck her life—especially Ellie. Could he really *not* help her? In that instant, he knew.

"Look, Ellie," he said. "I probably have enough to cover it."

Her eyes glistened. "Seriously, Carl—are you sure?"

"Positive," he said. He motioned toward the cafeteria. "Let's eat breakfast, then we'll go to the bank. I'll cash a check."

Ellie sprang from her seat. She leaned over, grasped his face in her hands, and kissed him. "Thank you, Carl. Thank you so, so much." She kissed him again. "You don't know what this means to me."

She had knocked over his coffee cup, but Carl didn't care. He peered into her bright green eyes. They shared a breath. The image from his watercolor painting suffused his thoughts. As the two nude figures melded together, they flared a bright shower of sunlight, a golden aura that flooded the silver loneliness of night.

### (1) **Whiskey Pulled the Trigger**

#### CHORUS

Whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But my baby held the gun.  
I said, whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But she know that she the one.  
So, why she wanna do me harm?  
I don't know what I done done.

#### VERSE 1

My baby she as soft and sweet  
As sweet potato pie.  
I said, my sugar she as soft and sweet  
As sweet potato pie.  
But when she drinking that ol' whiskey,  
It put the devil in her eye.

#### CHORUS

(And that's no lie)  
That's why, whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But my baby held the gun.  
I said, whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But she know what she done done.  
(I say) why she wanna kill me  
Just for having me a little fun?

#### VERSE 2

One woman ain't enough to keep  
A grown man satisfied.  
I said, only one woman ain't enough to keep  
A grown man satisfied.  
But when she reach for that ol' whiskey jar,  
Ain't no place a man can hide.

#### CHORUS

(That's why I'm sayin', brother)  
Whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But my baby held the gun.  
I said, whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But she know that she the one.  
I run a race with Mr. Bullet,  
But Mr. Bullet, he done won.

#### VERSE 3

Well, they say I went to a better place  
And doin' very well.  
I may have went to a better place,  
But it feel like a prison cell;  
'Cause when my baby shot me,  
She sent me straight to hell.

#### CHORUS

(That's a fact, Jack)  
'Cause whiskey pulled the trigger.  
But my baby done me in  
I said, whiskey pulled the trigger,  
But she killed me sure as sin.  
So don't roll them dice on the sportin' life,  
It's a bet y'all can't win.  
(It's a bet y'all can't win.)

— J. L. Hagen



## Serving Daisies

Bailey Burke

I hadn't really wanted to work here. Sometimes convenience outweighs desire though. I did like the plants at least; there was something comforting about the warmth of the greenhouses, even in summertime when the heat was insufferable after more than a few minutes. But today is good – every window is open and papers at the third registrar are being blown about by the breeze.

A customer comes up to my register. Lisa grabs their cart and begins boxing them up.

"Can I get a name to see if you're in our rewards program?" I ask with feigned enthusiasm.

"Patty. Patty Smith." The lady with bleached blonde hair responds. She's got a fake tan but she's a little too old to pull it off. There are four Patty Smiths in our system, so I proceed to get her address to narrow it down. Most of our customers live on streets that sound like fictional places. Patty here lives on Flowering Meadow

Lane. I glance at Lisa. She's nearly done packing Patty's overflowing cart. Patty is going to need some help loading this, and I will be the one to help her. I just pray that she doesn't ask for mulch.

"Any soils or fertilizers for you today?" I ask, smiling and hoping that she can see my eyes pleading her to say no.

"Actually, I need six bags of Forest Fines! I'm glad I remembered." I smile and punch it in on the computer.

"You ready?" Lisa asks. I give her a nod.

"20 4PW, 30 QTPW, 10 PGAL, 19 RGAL, and 16 4A." My fingers know the motions well.

"Alrighty. That'll be \$1,755.99." I tell Patty with another smile. She doesn't even bat an eye. She pays with her watch and doesn't want a receipt.

"I'll give you a hand with those." I follow Patty out the door to her Lexus. I take six sheets of trunk paper

with me, coating the backseat and trunk with a protective layer. I load the mulch first. Forest Fines is the absolute worst; the bags are made with a cheap plastic that tears easily, not to mention that it weighs like 50 pounds. Patty gives me a look of pity as I struggle with each bag. Normally we've got some high school boys working that load the mulch, but not on Sundays.

We (I) somehow squeeze everything into Patty's car. She's got a cheetah print steering wheel cover and a bumper sticker that says "Dog Mom".

"Thank you so much, sweetheart." Patty gives me a smile.

"No problem! You have a wonderful day!" I take her cart and return to the store. It always amazes and disheartens me that one single customer will spend double what I make in a week. And almost every customer is a Patty. They don't bat an eye.

We start to slow down in the hour before we close. There will inevitably be four customers who show up five minutes before closing – just to "run in and grab something real quick" they'll say. But really they've got a Patty-load in mind.

Lisa and I chat about our plans for after work – neither of us have real plans, but we pretend that we do and then we act excited about each other's plans. As we're talking, a bewildered looking man and his daughter walk in. The girl looks around twelve; she's dressed older than that but her face looks like she's still in elementary school.

"Excuse me. We're looking for houseplants?" The man glances around him. There's four possible greenhouses he could choose. Three of them would

be wrong though. Lisa – who has worked here long enough to be considered a houseplant expert – leads them down the proper greenhouse. After about ten minutes they return to the register. Lisa's helped them find a plant and pot, along with a small bag of potting soil.

"This one is really low maintenance; I would water it every week to ten days. Just make sure it gets enough light." Lisa says as she scans the pot.

"4H2. And one small potting soil." Lisa says to me. I plug it in.

"Can I get a name to see if you're in our rewards program?" I ask. It's important to follow the script. Though I don't think this man has ever set foot in a plant store.

"Oh no, no. That's okay. It's our first time here." The man says. I'm supposed to ask if he'd like to be added to our rewards program, but I skip that step.

"That'll be \$25.99." I tell him.

"Really? Okay. I better keep this plant alive then, eh Margot?" The man says, smiling at the girl.

"It'll look great in your new place," the daughter smiles back. The man pays in cash, telling me to keep the penny. Lisa offers them a bag for their items, but they decline.

"The truck's already a mess. A little bit of dirt won't make a difference," the man laughs. I hand him his receipt and the pair leave. I watch them as they go. As soon as they get outside, they high five. "Mission accomplished!" I hear the girl say.

"You think he's newly divorced and only has custody on the weekends?" Lisa asks, watching them too.

"Probably. And today was a big

step for him," I respond. He's making a place that doesn't feel like home a little bit more alive.

Three more Pattys – with slightly different names – show up as Lisa and I count the registers. I won't remember any of them after today. But houseplant guy will stick with me I think. To me, all of the Pattys are like daisies. But houseplant guy reminds me of a carnivorous pitcher plant – something with character. He's the reason I'm still here, at this minimum wage job serving unfathomably wealthy Pattys.

That night as I walk home I think about quitting. There aren't enough houseplant guys. Unlike Lisa, I'm

not sticking around to become a perennial expert or anything. I am just passing through. Meanwhile, I dream of spending money I don't have on more worthwhile things than plants that will die at the first frost – I want to travel, to live adventurously. To do the sorts of things that Pattys probably do when they're not buying plants. I want to have a heart like houseplant guy, but have a life like Patty.

I shower when I get home, washing away the layer of dirt and sweat that has mixed to form a congealed outer layer on my skin. Then I eat microwaved Ramen noodles for dinner while watching a TV show I've already seen. But my mind is elsewhere. Someday, I will move on to better things.



## Summer Excursion

Theo Poling

Cal and Andie set off two hours later than Cal had planned. Cal's alarm jolted him up at the appropriate time, but it took some minutes longer to rouse Andie out of her fog.

Breakfast went long, too. Andie couldn't decide what to eat. While she opened and slammed cabinets one by one, Cal began making waffles. By the time she'd finished pulling things out of drawers and abandoning them on the counter, she decided on waffles, and did indeed eat four out of the six Cal pressed into golden-brown grids. She filled hers with pools of amber corn syrup, while Cal ate his plain.

The sun had climbed considerably into the sky by the time they left the house and set out for the woods.

Cal took the lead, first walking them back a familiar trail, the one they'd explored the first day they'd arrived. They knew very little of these woods; they knew how much

they didn't know. There had to be at least a thousand acres back here. Cal's mother had said something about lakes.

That was what had inspired the trip. Andie had been reluctant to come along, but after Marie-Claire's birthday party was canceled because the birthday girl had the flu, Andie had accepted the invitation.

The well-trodden trail crawled over a rise and dipped into a valley, the dirt tamped down and peppered with roots from the mature Elms that dappled the shade and shielded them from the summer heat.

At the top of the rise, Cal looked below and saw the path diverged in the center of the valley, one wide path snaking right alongside a dry, pebble-littered run, another climbing up the far ridge and vanishing into a cluster of secretive Firs. Andie came up beside him. She held up her phone and took a picture.

Cal descended into the valley. He led Andie up the far side. The woods here were younger. Dense with thorny, brackish underbrush, a little cooler and shadier, the path narrowing to the width of a deer's hooves. Andie complained as flies circled her head.

After some time the path became moss, and it was lined with more and more rocks, increasing in size, also covered in moss. Every couple of minutes, Cal stopped to admire the flora and also to allow Andie to catch up. Among the moss, she panted. Cal handed her his water bottle and watched as she gulped it down, the bottom tipping ever skyward as she drank her fill.

When Andie was ready, Cal took the empty water bottle, and they plunged deeper into the woods.

The path widened into a meadow. In the meadow, a small, clear stream kidneyed into a shallow pool. Its eroded banks were supported on the far side by a massive Oak, bigger than three Cals hugging around it. Each of the mighty roots digging into the spring was as big as any mature Quaking Aspen. The canopy it created over the meadow was near complete, the aged branches yawning out over their heads.

"It's like a picture book," Andie said. She used her phone to take a picture. Then another, and another, her phone screen blinking.

Cal ventured closer to the spring. The water was clear and bubbled quietly over the roots and stones. Cal shucked off his boots and socks, leaving them in the grass. He rolled his pants up to the knee, and stepped into the spring.

The water was icy-cold, and deeper than it looked. In just two steps it was up to his knees. Near the center it had to go to about waist height.

Andie watched him from the shore. "Cal, look," she whispered, jabbing her finger toward the Oak.

Among the roots were three fox kits, young enough their fur was still milky-muddy grey. They had bleary eyes hinted with blue. They stared at Cal and Andie without fear as they toddled out of their den.

He and Andie watched them take drinks from the spring and jump out into the meadow, their paintbrush tails sticking straight out behind them, ears pricked forward. Andie held her phone up the entire time.

Cal didn't dare look away for as long as the kits played. The sky swept over with puffy clouds, drawing a blanket of blue over the playing foxes.

Andie took a step forward and made a kissing noise to the foxes. They stopped in their tracks and stood up straight, staring at her and cocking their heads. Andie giggled as their heads went back and forth like little pendulums.

Cal looked toward the den.

"Andie, we should go."

"But they're so cute!"

"We don't want to scare them."

"Okay," Andie sighed. She recorded a video of the foxes as they chased each other out of the meadow and into the woods beyond while Cal put on his socks and shoes. He rolled his pants back over his boots and stood.

He led Andie back the way they came. As they walked, Andie gushed about how cute the foxes were. Something in her words made Cal

feel like the alert kit, standing forward with his ears pricked, watching Andie.

"Let's keep it a secret," Cal said.

"A secret?"

"From the others," Cal said. "Those foxes deserve peace. And that spring should stay clear."

Andie was silent.

"I saw some endangered flowers," he tried again. "We don't want to hurt anyone."

"We don't," Andie agreed.

"So, it's our secret."

"It's our secret," Andie agreed.

Cal had known Andie for seven years, ever since Cal's mother and Andie's father got married. He knew her well enough to know she'd agreed too readily. The walk home, Cal was plagued with a vision of the spring muddied, beer cans floating, sneakers and heels tamping flowers into the dirt, loud voices carrying into the den, where a family of foxes huddled together, staring up at the entrance to their home, with big, dark eyes.





# I Sent My Brother to Alpha Centauri

Daniel Madaj

Finally, the pandemic seems to be over. But some people still wear masks, and some restaurants restrict indoor seating. My brother Ike loved the masks and had gone further: his designs for a personal spacesuit attracted the attention of my bosses at NASA.

Ike comes by his paranoia honestly. I don't know what horrors he suffered in our childhood, but mine were bad enough that I'm still known as the "ice queen," which I guess is fair, although personally I can see a (narrow) pathway where intimacy would work.

On occasion Ike has talked about his "teddy bear space suit" that "protected" him from the worst of the abuse. I guess the suit was generated in his imagination from a scrap of fur that survived the fire after our mom

burned his favorite stuffie, declaring he was now "too old" for it.

Ike's reaction to his trauma has gotten worse, as if each time he remembers it, it gains strength. The practical upshot of this was that he had hardly worked, hardly made any money, and his stability remained tenuous, but he had kept his needs modest, getting by via government dole and a modest inheritance, and what I can provide.

When my bosses saw his designs for a personal spacesuit, they were excited. It needed only a minimal amount of fabric, perhaps the original had none. Here was a prototype 10 times lighter and 10 times stronger than anything NASA had seen.

The excitement about the spacesuit dovetailed with a project, Mission Alpha Centauri. I had argued that

NASA was going at it backwards: the trip out there would take 60 years (although by virtue of what we have learned about space-time it would only six months, by our perspective back here on Earth). NASA was looking to train people to learn to accept 60 years of solitude. But I said, hey! I know someone who loves his solitude! Let's send Ike!

And how could he resist? They offered him a comfy bed, enough mac'n cheese and hot dogs to last several lifetimes, a large-screen tv, and all of his favorite movies and tv shows, including all 431 episodes of "Bonanza."

Because of our "special connection," Ike and I continued our "regular" Zoom meetings during his flight. For him, it was 15 minutes a year, which he could barely tolerate. For me, though, it was 15 minutes every three days, a bounty of inter-con-

nection I had never imagined.

When he arrived at Alpha Centauri (six months for me, 60 years for him), he seemed distracted. "Sis," he said, "I'm pushing 90 here. I've enjoyed my privacy, and, frankly, I want to continue to enjoy my privacy, for what time I have left. So . . ." and he gave an odd little smile, "I am not going to respond to the aliens trying to contact me."

She was too stunned to respond.

"I love you, Sis," he added, implying he would no longer be in touch. "I've left you a little gift." And then he clicked off.

A gift?

Three days later, an email arrived. It said, "your brother Ike gave us your contact information, as well as information about your language and culture. Apologies: it's taken us a while to assimilate . . ."



## Cab Ride

Martin Sherman

Airport? I'll stow the rest of the bags. Hey, no, sit up with me, man. Lemme tell you a story.

Cabbies always got to hear stories so for once I want to talk. I got a right. They say shrinks, barbers, and bartenders hear every story ever told. You think that makes them experts on human nature? No. Guy'll walk out of his shrink's office middle of a gorgeous spring day pull out an AR-15, boom, blow away some total stranger, and the shrink, what's he gonna say? He don't know this guy's gonna do this! Hell of an advertisement. No. He says, and this I believe, he says, of course we all have the *capacity* for violence but . . . But, but, but. That guy puts his finger on the door handle of this cab, I know. Hell, I've got the Not For Hire sign going up the moment I see a guy like that. Barbers? They don't know. You go to any barber. You sit down and practically draw the man blueprints for a haircut and still when he spins you around like Friday the

13th Part 20. They don't know.

And bartenders. That's what I was getting to. This was about four months ago. No, no, let me think. It was December 23. That was Friday before Christmas about 10 p.m. and it was hell. Temperature had dropped about twenty degrees since sundown and it was starting to snow.

I pick up this fare at the airport. First thing I notice—no bags. No carry-on, nothing. Second thing he's wearing what's gotta be a 15 hundred dollar suit but it's beat. I mean this suit is not one of your linen L.A. jobs, this suit's wool blend, double-breasted, fits the man like a glove but stained like he took it swimming in a bowl of soup. And the man inside the suit. You see Gary Cooper in that movie, something, something John Doe? Where he's a guy down and out and gets famous and then gets to be a nobody again? Only to me he always looks like Gary Cooper wearing a bum suit. Well, this is that guy. It wasn't like he was dangerous—just wrung out.

So I pick the guy up and he says, "Downtown." I say, "You want to be little more specific? Downtown's a pretty big place." And then I start telling him how I got here and how the economy shut down all the plants which is why I drive cab. He looks at me a second then reaches in his inside jacket pocket and pulls out a wad of bills. No wallet, just bills, a fistful all crumpled up and he peels off two twenties and says, "Here's forty bucks. Just drive. Don't talk. When we get downtown I'll tell you." I shrug and shut up. Hey, forty bucks. There's no way I have forty bucks worth of stuff to say to this guy, right? The guy buries his face in his hands and hunches down in the back seat so all I can see in the rear view is his hundred dollar haircut.

I take the expressway down to Riverside and turn right, alongside the river, and I'm thinking forty bucks or no, I got to ask this guy where he wants me to cross or we'll pass downtown altogether and I'm just about to say something when he lifts up and says, "Fourth Street Bridge." I'm just about two blocks away. I go down, make the turn. The guy is now sitting way forward, looking out the front windshield through the snow and the wiper slush. He's got his head almost on my right shoulder and he yells "Stop!" We're in the middle of the bridge so I figure he means the other side but he yells, "Stop right now, damn it!" I say, "I can't stop here. We're in the middle of the goddamn bridge." And the guy goes nuts, reaching over trying to grab the wheel and shit. Well, I smack him one backhand with my right hand like this! I hit him smack in the face and the guy just collapses. I think, oh shit, this is it. This suit is some influential bastard, some lawyer who's

just been out drinking for two days and I smacked him. He's gonna sue my ass, sue my company's ass, sue my mother's grave's ass. I pull over on the other side of the bridge and he's just sitting there, face in his hands.

"Jeez, I'm sorry," I say. "I thought you were gonna kill us both back there. I can't stop in the middle of the bridge, you know it's illegal. Hey, you okay?" I ask him 'cause he just stays there hunched over and I know I didn't hit him that hard. But he don't say a thing. So I ask him, "You got some place to go?" and he doesn't look up, just shakes his head. "Let me take you some place." But he don't move, he don't talk, he don't do nothing. "Look," I say, "I can't leave you here. It's snowing like a bastard and it's five below out there. You don't have no coat. Let me take you to a nice place I know. You can have a drink and pull yourself together, okay?" And I just pull out, heading for Charlie's Fireside. You know Charlie's? It's a nice place. Beautiful old bar, nice people, dark, so's the stains on his suit aren't going to look too bad.

So I drive him down to Charlie's and stop. The guy looks up. Man, he is pitiful so I say, "This one's on me," and hand him back his twenties. The guy says, "No, no, you keep it. Here," and hands me another twenty. By now I don't want another thing to do with this guy so I take the bill. Then the dispatcher cuts in and has a call for a cab down on the Strip just a couple blocks south and west. I respond and I'm about to pull out but I just wait and make sure this guy gets in to Charlie's all right. I watch until the big wood door closes behind him and take the call over the Strip. Three college boys

are too plastered. I take them back to the U but I just can't get this airport fare off my mind. So I go off duty for ten and drive back to Charlie's. I go in and tell the bartender there about this fare I dropped off and ask if he's seen him and the bartender jerks his thumb down the end of the bar and there's my fare drinking and staring into the mirror. I tell the bartender, "Look, I don't know what's with this guy but see he's all right." The bartender says to me, "What do I look like, a fucking babysitter?" So I hand him two of the guy's twenties and talk to him hard. "Make sure this guy gets himself a cab and some place to go, got it?" He takes the bills and says, "It's your money." I go back to the cab and run a couple of people from one bar to another. I end up way the hell out the west side and the dispatcher starts bitching I'm supposed to be working the airport which is true only everytime I drop off a fare, I've been round the corner from the next call.

Anyway, I head east on Riverside and I'm there again, at the Fourth Street Bridge. There's cop cars, ambulances, lights flashing everywhere. I pull over and come running out, slipping in the snow and they're laying out my fare. Drowned and near froze solid. I grab a couple of cops and tell them I know the guy and they take me over inside a cop car and I tell them everything. All they want to know is do I know the guy's name and I say no. I ask them are they going down to Charlie's and they say sure, in a couple of minutes. I get back in my cab and the dispatcher's screaming at me. I know I should be heading back to the airport but I go to Charlie's Fireside. The bartender's just saying last call. I don't know what it was about the

guy but I hated his guts. I tell him my fare's dead, the one he was supposed to watch out for. "What do I care?" he says. I grab a fistful of his shirt and tell him he damn well better care. I tell him there's a guy croaked himself after drinking at his bar and the cops want to talk to him. He's not cracking so wise now. He's dribbling and babbling he did what I said, he got the guy a cab, what do I want from him. The cab company, I say. He don't know the cab company, and squeezing his neck don't make him remember. Then the cops come in and pull me off him. What did I tell you about bartenders, all the stories they hear? They don't know. I spend the rest of the night in the slammer.

So that's it. I spent a couple months trying to track down the cabbie. You'd think one driver ought to be able to find another. I didn't find shit. Don't even know what company. What the hell kind of cabbie drops a drunk off, middle of a snowstorm, no coat, halfway across a bridge? Here we are. Just a second. What's your hurry? I'll get your bags.

You know what I think? I think the guy had it all planned out. Maybe last time he was in town his business wasn't going so good or his wife is cheating on him. Maybe he knows this. He sees the bridge and this was in his mind. Like this is some place to jump from. Say then he loses his job, his wife walks out. He could lay down some cash, take a plane, get in a cab, get out and jump. Nobody'd be the wiser. Just him. This is what I think. A guy like that, this could be you. He could have parents still alive, maybe some kids he loves. He don't want them to know he's killing himself. Bet-

ter to just go missing. Nobody knows for sure. Nobody blames themselves.

Only there's me. The guy doesn't figure on me. I start to talk to him the way I do when somebody interesting gets in my cab. And this gets to him. But then for forty bucks I shut up. So what do I really care, he figures. Say I don't take the forty bucks, he and I get to talking. I tell him my story, he tells me his. Things don't look so bad. Maybe I put the Not For Hire sign up a half-hour or so and sit down with him at Charlie's. Maybe we end up back at the airport and he's heading home for Christmas somewhere. He doesn't deserve to end up frozen dead in a fifteen hundred dollar suit. There you go. You want a porter?

This has been driving me nuts four

months now. I mean it's like every time somebody gets in the cab I think, "How's this guy doing? He okay?" He's in my cab but he don't even think about me. People think their life is like a story. They want to end it, boom, story over. It don't work that way. You live, you start a million different stories and all the people you meet are in them. You die and the stories and the rest of us go on, just no ending.

(for I.M.P.)

*Slight adapted from Elephant Hook and Other Stories (NeWest Publishers Limited, 1992). A slightly different version appeared in Alberta Re\Bound (NeWest Press, 1991).*



## Sublingua

Cameron Finch

The dream goes like this: I am standing in a kitchen, standing at the sink. The world is dark outside, morning or night. Over the sink, I am holding a knife, a startling chef knife for chopping very fine onions or apples. Always the knife is arranged horizontally, as if I'm restraining it against the pull of levitation. Sometimes I bring my face to the knife, sometimes I bring the knife to my face. I look at the knife, I really look at it.

Do I look at anything the way I look at this knife?

As if it were a world.

And then, I lick the blade, I just lick it!

The thinness. The slicing part. Left to right, tip to handle, as easy and pleasing as finishing an envelope, or

inspecting the long end of a splintering popsicle stick.

I lick it and am satisfied at the person I have been. I am the one with the tongue that survived another dream.

--

Knives are concerning matters. I know this. Yet I am safe in the cushion of this dream. There is no pain here, no death drives, no fear or stress or anger. And when there's bloodshed – because there is sometimes bloodshed (my real body has been on the hunt for alternate ways of punctuating itself for some time now) – it's the thoughtless blood, the kind that isn't real, cinema blood, the riskless blood.

This is not a confession. It is a releasing of bodily burdens. It is curiosity for *another* way.

Still, in the dream, I look over my shoulder with caution. *Do not get caught.* And yet, the halving through the wide part of my tongue releases into me a coolness, like the outlaw coolness of menthol as it trickles down a lacquered throat and finds itself a home, a coolness that evaporates all concern of being found out. Sensation over conscience.

I imagine the slit scarring my tongue like a nest of striations. You know those rocks with white stripes – I call them measuring tapes – around their bellies. My slit is not a measuring tape – it isn't numbered or readable. It is there and then is not, repairing and preparing for the next dream to come.

Still, imagine having two tongues! Little meats, the one standing on the other's back, keeping each other warm, keeping each other company. Why stop at two? I am fighting – *fighting* – binaries. Let us stack the tongues up like carpets, sliced finely as tomato skins. What a thrill! to possess your own private champion right there in the satchel of your mouth.

--

I've been reading about lemurs and their sublingua, a quest or maybe distraction on the way to knowing myself.

Sublingua. Under-tongue. With no taste buds of its own, the sublingua's function is to remove unwanted fur and debris from the crevices between the lemur's grooming teeth.

Sublingua. I want to speak this word to everyone I meet. Sublingua, the Musical! Sublingua, how luxurious! An under speech, a quieted ecstatic dance, a dust ballet beneath a muscled stage, with a grammar of gestures all its own.

I've been seeking out a tongue body to cast away all this lingual debris that daily enlivens, emboldens our world's mighty impasse. The fricative impasse of my own body, too.

--

So, what is the function of the tongue dream? Other than to have something to tell you about.

Are dreams our brain's sublingua?

--

I keep a knife between the wall and my bed, in case I dream throughout the night. Why the night? Where does the knife tongue spend the day? Is this what it means to be sub-lingua? A night being, a fruit staticking a bowl?

The under-language. Some of us power in the dark with it.

--

If my sublingua is a sock hand in the mouth, marine creature sleeping as I do, who can hear this alien puppet's song?

You can, of course.

You can, and I imagine so can the tongue, with its own unique and impossible listening mechanisms.

--

The body was very difficult last night. Having one > I mean.

Everything is seeping to the surface it seems.

The mounds and their meanings.

I am everywhere I go, and I am tired of assumptions.

Do I wish for myself a tongue body? Chestless, sexless, exempt from public haunt (1), nothing but tongue and the dance of itself.

Do I think of anything the way I think of tongues? As if they were another world.

--

There's a Dutch poem I always liked (2) – *Ik wou dat ik twee hondjes was*. I wish that I was two dogs.

*Dan kon ik samen spelen*.  
Then I could play together.

Play with me for a moment. Let's replace the hound with tongue.

Is this lonely? Sexy?

I can see only tongues as they are. Nothing modifying. Two tongues, plump and significant not-quite-genders, side by side, or maybe stacking. They have no need for contact in order to play together. They are playing, together apart. They are creating their own survival. Their playing and existing are of symbiotic natures.

--

But, what is all this romanticizing about the wealth of tongues? Tongues are not free. Enslaved by our wants, they are ridiculed and beleaguered and victims of quick judgments or no judgments at all.

Here comes the confession, I am ready to confess this part.

I have never consulted with my tethered tongue. Not even at the sink with the knife in my hand.

I ask, the tongue does. Now what does the tongue have to say about that.

--

To my tongue: tell me you can keep a secret. I do not know my tongue's own language – terrible, I know. If not with words, then where does a tongue find its voice?

Robin Wall Kimmerer: "What if you were a teacher but had no voice to speak your knowledge? What if you had no language at all and yet there

was something you needed to say?" (3)

Kimmerer is speaking of plants, but who is speaking for the tongue? What language does our most articulate organ use to express itself? What sound does the tongue make to entertain itself in the dark aloneness of a mouth?

*"Wouldn't you dance it? Wouldn't you act it out? Wouldn't your every movement tell the story?"*

Tongue, what are you trying to tell us? Don't you, too, speak with waltzing, writhing motions? A tongue sliced out of its home body – would it stay still and silent? What then?

*"In time you would become so eloquent that just to gaze upon you would reveal it all."*

Open your mouth, tongue. Your sublingua is listening. The knife is on the table.

--

Tongue:  
It is impossible not to reveal yourself.

Tongue:  
More impossible to unreveal once begun.

--

The knife is on the table. The sweet-heart of the Green Berets (4), with the warning pink sweater and molten oil smeared on her face, the blackened

leather tongues strung like impaled cicadas on a copper coil around her neck – she is nowhere to be found. She will not make a spoil out of you. We are told she is part of the land again, creeping back into it. She still knows power and torture, oh yes. She carries that with her. Just different now. And the tongues? They are returning to the land, too, crawling on their hands and knees as they turn into other things, relieved.

--

Tongues are rampant in literature. Gendered, mostly. Violent, mostly. Hacked, wrenched, stolen, swallowed, molested, held, worn.

Could there still be a chance for us yet? The sea witch is in the other room. Her cauldron is bubbling over, she is distracted, her back is turned (5). We can escape back into ourselves, our pith language, by the skin of our tongues.

--

I feel I am beginning to see myself in every common tongue. Is this true? I don't know. I'm finding it impossible to speak about anything, about bodies, about having one, being one. Tongue or no tongue.

But the mind knife is again in my grasp, slick and spooling, silver between my teeth. My glossary is salivating. The taboo of the lick, the theater of it, I am almost haunted by all this hope.

You see, in my dream, what I lick



can't hurt me. I articulate and it comes out just right.

**References:**

1) The phrase "exempt from public haunt" is from William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*.

(2) The Dutch poem refers to Michel van der Plas's poem, "Spleen" (2012).

(3) Lines from Robin Wall Kimmerer's essay, "The Three Sisters." *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013).

(4) The story of the Green Berets and the tongue necklace refers to Tim O'Brien's story, "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," *The Things They Carried* (1990).

(5) In Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," the sea witch cuts out the mermaid's tongue and boils it in her cauldron.

*Previously published in Gender Queer Literature.*

## Six Poems

Fez Fessenden

### Drugstore Oil Rig

Scrubbing my pink skin with this cheap green soap, I am reminded of my grandfather, who showered every night to scrub the black oil from his hands and face and the smell of natural gas from his hair and chest and came out clean and tired, and when I jumped on the crisp bed to watch cartoons and sink onto the big balloon of his belly, I smelled only this soap and Speed Stick deodorant and aftershave.

He was always tired. He worked in an oil field in southern Ohio for as long as we lived in that house—long enough to buy it, and the rigs, and a truck to take me through the deep muddy ruts that splashed giddy rainwater against the door windows. Like any kid I loved him over the earth. When his lungs gave out from the dust my family sold the oil to buy my education. I walked into his closet after the funeral and smelled every shirt until I went blind with him. Now I buy cheap shampoo because I've been squeezed dry and someone else's caregiver dies. The plastic bottle does not get recycled because my city won't take them and my country runs on blood. The water is hard and cold. When will we stop burning bones?



### Northern White Cedar (*Thuja Occidentalis*)

If I tell you      about a tree      that you  
                 have never seen,  
                 that even I  
                 have never seen      (but perhaps  
I can picture  
  
                 in my head & translate      for you  
         into words  
                 that you might picture  
a similar  
         or even very different      tree),  
  
What value is there      in truth?  
  
                 If you are moved  
         to kneel on the hard      ground      below  
a tall tree      (that may  
                 or may not  
         look like the tree  
  
                 I picture  
or the tree      you picture)  
         and look      up      and  
                 up      through its  
         many needles  
(or few needles, a tree is valuable regardless  
                 of its needles),  
         if you are so moved  
to care--look, this tree  
         is HERE  
         and      REAL.

### Earth Weaves a Blanket to Keep Herself Warm

Before our fingers nimble the first needles, flesh pricked  
and pooling, calluses pushing pine, iron, or bird wing  
bone into hide,  
  
                 Earth was deft and resourceful. She knew the cure  
for the barren.  
  
Before plants dug themselves into the black soil and opened  
their veins in search of an offering,  
  
                 Earth cleft stones  
to cut thread, thimble a pinprick in lambskin and tied loops, then  
french knots. Pinned swaths of mohair to the floor and eventually  
                 we called it moss.  
                 Juniper haircap, pin  
                 cushion, and splendid  
                 feather. Bloomed  
lichen in the dry spots and when Earth tired, she taught the tapestry  
to grow on its own: first to float, blowing spores across the water,  
then gave it mycelium to grip to. A carpet to crawl on. Connective tissue.

### Warren Island, Maine

From the shore the ocean is manageable. Tonight it's a pool of glass, a window pane in an old barn that's thicker at the bottom. Some of the surrounding land is lit with tiny houses

and some is as dark as where you are sitting: on a flat rock without your headlamp, seagulls floating by to remind you you're not alone. Eventually they vanish. The tide creeps in.

The clouds have leaked their pink into the sky. You think you could have been the ocean in another life: land's grand mother, dragging heirlooms down to her china cabinet. Drift

wood, people, plastic bottles for garden decorations. When the tide is low, back bent, you sift through rockweed, overturning stones and under them, a wriggling, hardshelled

life. Yours. What's left above is a white moon and three pinpricks in the dark. We both know you are probably not standing in a pool of snails off a tiny island in Maine, but try

to imagine it. What's the harm? At best, the world is unkind and expanding. A fallen seed becomes flotsam. Make a sieve with your fingers to catch it and I'll reach forward with mine.

### Love Poem

All summer I dust the dough with flour and roll it out the length of the table, place the parcel of butter in the center

and stretch the sheet over the top and pinch, the top over the bottom and pinch, the left and right over each other

over the butter and pinch, flour it, roll it out again. I repeat this process three times. Each dough in the coldest

room in the bakery at 5:30 in the morning, and a shiver shakes me each time I open the walk-in cooler.

Its cold breath jets down my neck to keep the summer from creeping in and through the wall

the bubblegum pop and steam from the americano maker and all morning I stay at my station until I need

to refill my flour, the bin is parked smack in the center of the pastry room and I'm in and out quick, frozen butter

softening at my bench. When I dip my hand in the bin the flour tugs it, tucks it into the oven's warmth and unthaws

my fingers and I linger like I'm reaching for a book and brushing her soft arm, the way hands might linger, the way eyes.

## The First Sign

Folding laundry in the house  
in Leland, I caught myself  
in a daydream.

In draped towels on the rail, I saw burnt orange  
hair. Freckles on my mother's linen couche. Emerald  
eyes in the marble countertop. Laughing.  
I wondered for a moment if I had un-  
covered, after long frustrated search, the giggling  
sleepover ideal of my "type," before snapping  
out of my delusion. I watched helplessly  
the skyscraper of shirts, pants, and underwear  
teeter, slump sadly to the counter, and lay wrinkled  
in their horizontal stack.

While the first year of middle school  
came with the shrilly demanded focus  
on sticky pink lip gloss and attracting an Axe-  
doused mate for future procreation, I tucked  
away the daydream  
for safekeeping. I remembered her eyes  
on nights I kept to myself, her hands in my  
hands, dancing around the question until  
we fell to the floor, exhausted.



## A Different Kind of Magic

Daniel Madaj

*"(Some) . . . would relate the brain and body to a radio or TV set, meaning that our brains and bodies filter and broadcast consciousness that exists outside the TV. The TV does not have the program actually inside it; it has to connect to a signal to show the program. The internet is not located inside your computer; you connect to a Wi-Fi signal to access it. Similarly, a non materialist view of consciousness is that subjective conscious experience . . . does not depend on the brain and in fact does not arise from the organ of the brain. The brain is a receiver, not the ultimate creator of consciousness." — Shamini Jain, Healing Ourselves: Biofield Science and the Future of Health*

### 1. The Saturn Return

It was an unexpected start to 12th grade, in Estes Park, Colorado: a new student, a guy, and with an unusual "outer space" name like her's. There was a desk open next to her, and as he sat down, his face was a bit red be-

cause many in the class were hooting about his strange name, Rigel. She leaned over and smiled. "I have a space name, too," she said. "Tethys."

"One of the moons of Saturn," Rigel said.

"It was around the time of my mom's 'Saturn return,'" Tethys said

She started to explain, but Rigel held a hand partway up. "Yep," he said. "Astrological cycle."

They didn't have any other classes together and she didn't see him in the lunchroom, so when this first school day was over she headed homeward, first stopping dutifully at Henderson's Butcher Shop for "bits and pieces" for her ongoing magical homework (eye of newt, that sort of thing). Her folks insisted that the old ways still held useful power.

Her backpack was heavy with books. It might have been smarter to have stopped home first to drop them off. Of course, a simple spell would lighten the load, but she was trained not to waste magic. Both parents insisted every spell used up a finite amount; she hadn't noticed any such thing, but maybe when you get old . . .

Her parents had been gone a while, but she nevertheless continued her magical studies. Has it already been three months since they went off to celebrate their anniversary? Where had they gone? That word, "missing," was growing in strength.

During their absence, magical attacks on the family manse had been increasing; so far, she'd been a match for them.

She took out the folded, insulated sack for this week's wares, gathered things from Mr. Henderson, and turned to leave. A flash of light caught her eye: in the narrow alley across the street, between the hardware store and laundromat, two young men were tussling. One of them was that new boy, Rigel!

Rigel was carrying a brown paper bag that looks like it contained liquor. He looks different: wavy, like he's mani-

festing some sort of disguise, but it's not magic, or at least not any magic she's familiar with. He sees her, too. Startled, distracted, his disguise momentarily sputters, and just then Bill, the bruiser idiot son of the party store owner, gives Rigel a mighty punch to the face! He must have seen Rigel in the store and been suspicious.

Before Bill can throw a second punch, Tethys is out the butcher shop door and rushing toward them. There must have been a palpable nimbus to her fury because Bill stops and turns. He shrinks back. Everyone knows there's something spooky and weird about her, but he's never seen her look this scary. She stares at a spot somewhere behind his head, and then, next Bill knows, the alley is filling with large, slithery snakes! He hates snakes more than anything. Without a glance elsewhere, he races down the alley and away.

The snakes vanish, except that they were never really there, only there in Bill's mind.

"I'm so sorry!" she says to Rigel, touching the swollen reddish spot on his left cheek. "I didn't mean to distract you . . ."

She then gives him a curious look. "But . . . what were you doing?"

Rigel tries to grin, then groans. "A simple computer program. It energizes the pixels of my energy field, which makes me seem larger. A pretty good defense, usually." He rubs his face. "And you?"

"A bit of magic," she says. "I usually keep it hidden. I just needed to touch that place in stupid Bill's mind where he keeps his terrors . . ." To

show him, she briefly "reaches" into his mind. He likes the warm precision of her, at least until white-hot panic starts to pulse! "Ow!"

The intrusion evaporates. She gives a little smile. "Like that." They walk and talk, so sweet and easy that they've arrived at Tethys' house without realizing. Only . . . there's no house, just a vacant field!

She's amused by his confusion.

"Magic, remember?" She snaps her fingers, and a community of fantastical mansions appear! She leans in, kisses him quickly on his other cheek, and says "See you tomorrow!" She snaps again, and the empty field returns. The mansions, and Tethys, are gone.

"See you . . . tomorrow," he says, and floats home, propelled by a different kind of magic.

## 2. The Good Man and the Bad Man

Yes, Old Simon was old, but he's older than you think he is. Even he doesn't remember how old. But even Old Simon is just the most recent in a long line of trustees of this "Estes Park magical conglomeration." For a while he has been musing that he has overstayed, and that among other things he needs to find a worthy successor.

Meanwhile, Nostradamus and his large clan have disappeared in a blast of combustion that not only vaporized the family but scoured the landscape as well. Surely it was an accident? Typical magical safeguards protected the neighbors. No sooner did Simon turn his attention to looking for a replacement, but there was young Dolph, all full of praise and what seemed like humility, and what

seemed like admiration!

Not only did Simon invite Dolph to join the community, he talked about the possibility of Dolph becoming its trustee. After all, Dolph was much younger than any of the other magicians, and his youth would have several advantages . . .

Simon also decided to tell Dolph about "the animator," which was behind his youthful appearance. When Simon was young, he was kindly to an aging old magician, who gifted him with this special spell, along with a long litany of instructions and cautions. Simon didn't pay much attention, because he was young and cocky, but also because the spell didn't seem like anything he'd ever use.

But then a few months later he was smitten by a wonderful "older" woman, perhaps 35. He himself was barely into his 20s. While she was flattered by his attention, and seemed to enjoy their conversations, it became clear that their age discrepancy was too great: she couldn't take him seriously. He remembered the "animator," and after a while had conjured up an older version of himself, who wooed the woman, saying he was Simon's older brother and had heard so many wonderful stories . . .

It went well, very well, and then not so well. Among other things, she was 35 and he seemed to be 35, but he was actually in his early 20s, and the difference was too great.

Sad at the failure, this older Simon returned home . . . and was shocked to find the shell of his younger self lying in stasis in his bedroom! He had forgotten about that. It was relatively easy to switch bodies, but when he

zapped the older version it was like sticking his finger into an electrical socket. He blacked out, and when he woke, he felt odd, like a part of himself had been destroyed. He was correct.

He vowed never to use the “animator” again, but as he grew old, he disliked how everyone dismissed or under-estimated him because of his age, and so he created a younger version of himself, keeping the old one carefully in stasis in a back room. This worked well for a number of years, until that version also grew old, and so he repeated the process, again stowing the older version. He has accumulated quite a collection!

But as we all know, part of the purpose of human life is die and to move on, and Simon has been feeling that tug more and more strongly. It’s getting time to move along.

He had mentioned the animator before, to Tethys’ dad who reacted with the familiar indifference that Simon himself had originally felt. He figured the dad had squirreled it away in a desk somewhere, long forgotten.

But Dolph wasn’t paying attention. The annual “Wizard’s Night” was coming up in a few days at Tethys’ parents’ house, and Dolph had been musing about this opportunity to raid something of value while inside, but now he was thinking maybe he could steal something from the other wizards as well! Wouldn’t that be something? Then he could slip away, as always . . .

He decided to create a little “bundle” for each wizard. Being young, male, and self-centered, Dolph assumed the wizards would use the bundle to create a kind of sex friend . . . but it didn’t matter, it would just be a distraction to put them off guard.

Simon had mused that one day he’d get “an offer he couldn’t refuse,” and he would move on. But Dolph put something in Simon’s tea, and by the time Simon realized it, he was on the other side.

### 3. Don’t Speak!

Rigel assumed that Estes Park was home to the Estes Model Rocket Company, but no, it wasn’t, even though it was nearby. Nevertheless, it inspired Rigel and Tethys to go out and shoot off Estes rockets, in a nearby field, and Tethys would add little flourishes to their vapor trails, or explode them if they strayed too close to someone’s house. Once, she placed an image of the two of them for a moment in one of the rockets, which seemed quite romantic.

You might think the young couple would take early advantage of the relative privacy of their homes: with Tethys’ parents gone, there were only a few part-time servants, who kept to predictable routines, and in Rigel’s trailer his uncle was often obliviously drunk or passed out, bedroom door closed and locked. (She had suggested a magical replacement for the booze but so far it was having limited success: the black-outs and the headaches had become familiar friends!).

But one Saturday Tethys invited him over, giving him a casual tour of the first floor, with its vaulted-ceilinged great room, huge library, family room opening onto a deck with a heated outdoor pool. The upstairs tour was casual but electric, starting with Tethys’ bedroom.

The first thing Rigel noticed was the small stuffed teddy bear slumped

against the laptop on her desk. Didn’t it seem the bear had moved as the door opened, and that the laptop had been on? “Nice looking bear,” Rigel said, and to his complete surprise the bear replied, “T’anks!”

Tethys laughed, and explained that her dad had somehow given Ted a bit of “animation” when she was little, she guessed to make him more fun. She had always liked to play with Ted, and with a rabbit stuffy she called Pinky.

And there, of course, was Tethys’ bed. This was all very exciting but also alarming, and he said so: “Are you sure it’s okay for me to be here? Won’t your parents mind?”

She hotly blurted out that they’ve been gone for six months without a peep: who cares what they would mind? Rigel asked the obvious but painful question: are they missing?

She frowned. “I remember my dad saying he and mum were going taking a ‘timeless vacation’ to celebrate their anniversary. I assumed they’d be back in a few days, but . . .”

Rigel touched her shoulder. “Did you find any clues in their room?” She shook her head. “They keep it locked. Password-protected.” By now they were out in the hall. The parents’ room was up ahead.

Rigel cocked his head, gave a little smile, and asked, “Did they have a nickname for you, when you were very little?”

She made a face. “It started as ‘pumpkin,’ which was bad enough, but then it became ‘gourd.’” Rigel smiled. “PumpKin!” worked.

The bedroom was tidy: consistent with the parents planning to go on a trip. Rigel noticed a flyer lying on

the desk. The phrase “timeless resort” caught his eye . . . but then the flyer burst into flames and disappeared, leaving not even a speck of dust! He turned to ask Tethys about it, but what was there to talk about? Anyway, he was distracted because she came into his arms and pulled him down onto her parents’ bed . . .

Later, after they had caught their breath, Rigel sheepishly asked about birth control. She laughed, slugged him gently in the shoulder, (“Oh, so *now* you ask!”) but then said it’s not so hard to use magic to convince his “little swimmers” to go astray. She then turned expressionless, taking a moment to turn inward and do just that thing.

A few days later, Rigel agreed to show her his place, the tiny trailer, which, as he had quipped, took all of about 30 seconds. He noticed that Tethys was distracted, oddly tense, oddly distant. Of course he thought it was somehow his fault, but that was only partly correct: she was brooding about the upcoming “magicians’ ball,” held every fall at one of the magical manses. It was her parents’ turn, but because of their absence the turn had gone to the Nostradamus clan, and then to Dolph, when the Nostradamuses vaporized.

Tethys had put up a bit of a protest, saying she could very well fill in for her parents, but frankly she was glad to be free of the bother. This way, she only had to show up. But . . . would you show up with Rigel? If yes, she would be broadcasting their relationship throughout her entire world! If no, she would be saying the relationship wasn’t real . . . She didn’t want to decide!

So it was a relief and a bit of a surprise that their love-making was so wonderful. Relaxed, dreamy, she turned to Rigel and said how amazing it had been. She innocently asked, "How did you know to be so responsive?" He hesitated, and in that instant she knew: that damned computer! He had been practicing!

Never mind her own experiments and experiences, she felt betrayed and hurt. Truthfully, she now had an excuse! She got dressed and hurried from his bedroom. He tried to stop her, but she roared, "Don't speak!," and blasted him with a silencing spell.

She grabbed a small bottle of vodka on the way out. Her rage and sorrow and confusion were so great she singed the grass along the sidewalk and cooked the plants she had just recently bolstered.

#### 4. For Pinky!

Someone kept ringing the front doorbell, but every time Rigel went to the door, no one was there. Eventually, Rigel looked more carefully, and that's when he saw Ted, half-hidden in the flowers, right paw ready to blast a next zing of energy up at the buzzer.

"Finally!" Ted huffed. "Come on, we've got to hurry. Tethys is in trouble."

Rigel's silent astonishment turned to silent alarm. He held up a finger, raced into the trailer, and returned with a jacket and keys to his moped. "Oh," Ted said quietly to himself. "She zapped you with a silencer."

Rigel zipped Ted into the front of his coat, near his face, so Ted could explain what has happened, but it wasn't conducive to a lengthy story, so Ted was succinct, saying first that

he "woke up," and then that Tethys hadn't returned home after the ball, and it looked suspicious.

At a more relaxed time, Ted might say that it was Tethys' love that awakened him, after a jolt of energy from Simon's spell. As Ted's awareness grew, he realized that he could draw energy from the father's initial activation (but that this would likely signal an energy drain). A better, if slower solution, was to continue to absorb the energy of Tethys' love, in a kind of photosynthesis. Ted slowly got stronger, and then began to seek ways to overcome the limitations of his fingerless "pads" and small stature.

Ted and the others would eventually learn that Tethys chugged the vodka she'd snatched from Rigel's trailer ("Happy dagger," she muttered), as she stormed into Dolph's manse for her obligatory appearance at the annual party, which she had forgotten was that very night. The booze began to take effect just after the smirking Dolph handed her the "gift," so that by the time she opened the wrapping and the "gift" gave its invitation, she vomited out into it all her anger and frustration and gloom, as well as much of her internal fluids. What no one knew at the time was that her action triggered a responding action, and even as Tethys slumped to the floor, weakened by more than her vomiting, head a-spin, elsewhere in the manse Dolph also slumped to the floor, also weakened.

You might think of it mathematically: Tethys gave up 40 or 50 percent of herself, but Dolph gave up that but also at least 1 percent for each of the other "gifts," so he was unconscious

by the time he hit the floor. Meanwhile, "the Beast" emerged, a nasty amalgam of Tethys' negativity and anger, and Dolph's inherent nastiness!

When Ted realized she hadn't come home and was still at Dolph's manse, he knew something was wrong. He needed help. He sought out Rigel, paying for a Lyft to Rigel's trailer. (You know, "Pick up the stuffie by the front door, deposit him at the trailer's front door.")

When Ted and Rigel arrived at Dolph's manse (Ted easily "parting the curtain" into the magicians' complex), Ted directed them to a low basement window, almost obscured by undergrowth. "Magicians try not to waste energy," Ted whispered, "and I guessed that the spell protecting the house didn't go fully underground. We should be able to sneak in through this low window!"

Well, it was easy for Ted, but Rigel got stuck halfway through!

Meanwhile, they heard moaning and shrieking and crashing from upstairs, and Ted, pausing a moment to look up at Rigel, "raced" ahead.

When he saw the Beast, Ted stepped out into plain view. As the Beast turned, Ted blasted him with a magical bolt, crying out, "For Pinky!"

The Beast staggered back, more surprised than hurt. Tethys was too weak, too enmeshed, to stop or even slow him, and the Beast unleashed a mighty blast that surely should have vaporized the stuffed bear! It would have, except for the reactive appearance of a protective shield that Tethys' dad had installed, a counter force more than strong enough.

Triggered, the counter force

opened up a pathway for the dad and mom to escape from their "timeless" vacation trap . . .

#### 5. Resolution

The Beast was in a magical stasis, and Tethys and Dolph seemed comatose.

Ordinarily, Old Simon would have stepped in, both as coordinator of the community but also as authority of the "artifact," but he was dead. Professionally speaking, Simon would have been excited about these new developments: first, Ted's emergence (and with a different "fuel source"), and then the creation of the Beast, a new hybrid!

The main problem with Simon's absence was that no one knew much about the "artifact" or how to disengage it (to return Tethys (and Dolph) to normal). Tethys' dad had only vague memories of his long-ago talk with Simon, and Ted's experiences were internal, not external.

Meanwhile, they worried about the long-term impact on Tethys, but no one felt comfortable taking dramatic action, at least not without some idea of what they were trying to do.

A small committee of magicians, including Tethys' parents and Ted, plus Rigel, met to figure a solution. Ted, although not much of a talker, shared thoughts about the nature of consciousness, particularly the white human-male bias that it only or mainly occurs in white human males!

Tethys' mom mused that if reality was created by a god, then all of creation would be god-infused, and then any of this god's creation could develop consciousness: it didn't have



to be limited to human “breathers.”

The big break was unexpected: Tethys suddenly woke. It was because she was pregnant! She had been too preoccupied with her rage at Rigel to divert his swimmers. And now her fledgling fetus was exerting its own energy, breaking the stasis!

Eventually, the group figured out how to “dial back” Tethys’ and Dolph’s “involvement” until they were both close to “normal.” Still, Tethys seemed spacey and absent, and while her pregnancy was a factor, it was something she struggled with for the rest of her life. The Beast had been reduced to his minimum, perhaps 2 percent, but no one wanted to risk extermination.

Practically speaking, Rigel and Tethys moved into Dolph’s manse, with Rigel accepting caretaker duties for her (and their child). He also kept an eye on the Beast, and on Dolph, who on his best days could sit up

for an hour or two and watch old reruns on tv. Rigel’s uncle’s trailer was moved to the backyard, and the uncle became a pet project of the magical community: could they find a magical way to break alcohol’s “magic” hold?

The community eventually found another magician to take over Simon’s manse.

Ted? He wanted to search for Pinky. He felt certain she had absorbed some consciousness during their “early years,” and he had grown rather fond of her, over all these years.



*The earliest version of this story dates back to November 1978. Thanks again to Gail Berger (Witt) for Ted, circa 1969, and to Ann Merchberger (Dinan) for his sweater, circa 1970, and for Pinky. If I remember correctly, Pinky liked Ted more than he liked her.*



*The band Skinflip poses in front of the “Halfass” wall in the Halfway Inn: RCers (and Inn workers) Geoff Sanoff (left), Eric Lock, Jeff Timberlake, Chris Kubick and Jenna Didier.*

## Remembering the Halfway Inn

The RC’s website says that “the Halfway Inn did not survive the EQ renovations” of 2013, but in fact its demise began in Summer 2009, when the “food service component” of the Inn was moved to the first floor of EQ (East Quad). The remaining “lounge” was closed shortly thereafter. Student efforts to preserve the old space were unsuccessful.

The Inn opened in Winter 1970, when RC students moved from the north side of the building to the south side so that the north could be renovated. Renovations to the south side were concluding. The presence of the RC in East Quad was meant to be temporary, before its move to North Campus. When it was decided that the RC would stay in East Quad, renovations began. Among other changes to the renovated south side was the construction of a theater, now known

as the Keene.

East Quad was built in two phases: the north section opened in 1941 and was mainly used to house ROTC and other U-M military students. The south section opened in 1947. The first female “houses” opened in 1952.

There was a vote to name the Inn. Despite my own fondness for fifth-grade humor, I did not vote for “Halfway Inn.” (I guess I should be thankful that the naming of various menu items didn’t follow the “joke” of the name. You might imagine a few rude options!) The Inn was simultaneously referred to as “the Halfass.”

The early Inn had a pinball room, a juke box, and a small stage, which was used to launch the first proto-Peachy Cream production in 1973 (“Cabaret Halfway”), and hosted weekend concerts, coordinated by the East Quad Music Co-op.



Inn staff in the '70s (left).  
"Your Mama Works at the Halfway Inn" mug (by Gerry O'Brien) (above). Peter Anderson and Gail Lee Reisman, "Cabaret Halfway").



As RC alum Rebecca Hoppin Freeman (RC 1973) notes in the website article, "Since no construction design for the added volume had been considered, the few souls who occupied rooms on the first floor just above The Halfway were blasted out of their rooms one night a week. They made alternate sleeping arrangements wherever they could (a lounge, a friend's room) until a sound-deadening wall was finally installed."

While the Inn began with standard "snack bar" fare, it quickly developed specialties (like the hippie bagel, which had liverwurst and cream cheese, and the spanjo sandwich, which was a grilled cheese sandwich with cream cheese, alfalfa sprouts, and slices of apple).

RC alum Toni Guzzardo managed the Inn from 1980 to 1990, and notes that the Inn was the first food venue on campus to offer vegetarian and health food options, and the first to begin a recycling effort. RC alum Jane Rosenthal, who managed the Inn in 1978, recalls expanding breakfast options, attracting U-M tradespeople and others.

The Inn was open weekdays from 7 to midnight, with a later opening

time on weekends. (The current café advertises its "expanded hours" as 10 to 10 weekdays and 12 to 6 on weekends).

The RC did not run the Inn and did not support it financially. The Inn has always been run by U-M Dining, which at the beginning was a part of U-M Housing. Today, U-M Dining answers directly to the U-M Vice President of Student Affairs.

It is perhaps easy to see that the Inn was unusual, compared with other U-M Dining facilities. In the earlier days, dorm meal service was extremely separate: older alums may recall that if you wanted to eat a meal at another dorm, special arrangements had to be made. When U-M switched to its "meal plan" model, it allowed EQ students to use their "meal dollars" at the Inn instead of the cafeteria, when they chose to. This put the Inn into a competition with the cafeteria that probably added to tensions.

For many years, the Inn manager was an RC student, an RC grad, or someone with familiarity with the RC. When U-M Dining began to hire managers without this sensitivity, the Inn didn't just lose that connectivity (which prompted, among other

things, "academic spaghetti meetings," German theater performances, and pinball tournaments). In the eyes of U-M Dining, the Inn was one of many snack bars. And wouldn't it be better to move the snack bar upstairs? And to make it more like all the other snack bars?

## Notes

The spanjo sandwich is mentioned in the online "urban dictionary" and reportedly made an appearance years ago in a Manhattan restaurant.

Other managers of the inn included Valerie Gifford, "Strike" Strikertz, and Judith Stone.

One of the more notorious con-

certs at the Inn was in 1989, when G.G. Allin, performing with his band Toilet Rockers, was charged with three counts of assault.

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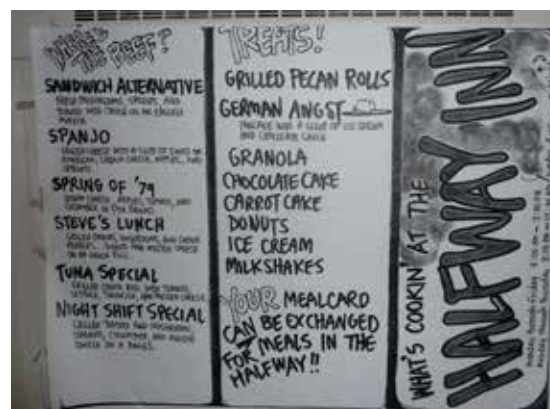
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— Dan

An old Inn menu (left). The RC website has a PDF of an old menu from the 1970s.







Muriel (left) and Carl Benzinger visit their son Chuck at U-M in the early 1950s. They stand outside East Quad's main entrance, on East University Avenue (left) near Willard Street. It is likely that Chuck is wearing his U-M Marching Band uniform.

## Chuck Benzinger and the Benzinger Library

The Charles H. Benzinger Memorial Library was formally dedicated on May 22, 1955 and opened in May 1956. The Library was part of U-M's formal library system until the early 2000s, when it was decommissioned and became a "community learning center." It continues as an informal library and meeting space in East Quad. The library moved from the basement to the main floor in the 1970s (into space that had been affectionately called "the airport lounge"). Following building renova-

tion (2013), a smaller version of the library opened, south of the main entrance on East University Avenue near Willard Street.

The library is named for Charles Harry Benzinger, who was treasurer of the East Quad Council that called for the creation in the East Quad basement of a library, a council meeting room, a snack bar (the precursor of the Halfway Inn), sound-proofing of music practice rooms, renovation of the Camera Club's darkroom, and three rooms to serve

as headquarters for student radio station WCBN (Campus Broadcasting Network), which began broadcasting in 1952. Chuck Benzinger provided the project plan and much of the inspiration. Funding for the project came from private donors but also from East

Quad student funds, apparently the rationale behind the project being called "Operation Ransom."

Chuck was a pre-med student at U-M. He earned his BS in Spring 1953. From Escanaba, Michigan, he died in a car accident in 1954 in Wells, near his home. Chuck played trombone in the U-M Concert Band and Symphonic Band, and was in the Michigan Marching Band. Chuck was president of his high school's National Honor Society, and received awards for instrumental music and debate. He had two brothers, Robert and Bill. His parents, Muriel and Carl, attended the library's dedication. — Dan

Right: Chuck Benzinger in 1953.  
Below: The present-day Benzinger Library.





(L-R): Burton Thuma, James Robertson, Lou Orlin, Marc Ross.



John Mersereau, Jr., Elizabeth Douvan, Herb Eagle, Tom Weiskopf.



Charlie Bright, Angela Dillard, Jonathon Wells, Catherine Badgley.

## The RC's Directors

Dean **Burton Thuma** was appointed first RC director, but retired before the RC opened in 1967. Born in Michigan, he received his PhD (1950) from U-M. He died April 1, 1977, age 74.

Dean **James Robertson** (RC director 1967-73) was on the planning committee for the RC. Born in New York, he earned a degree in accounting from New York University (1937), then a Master of Arts degree in English (1938), and after service in World War II, a PhD at U-M (1950). At U-M he

served as a teaching fellow (English), Assistant Dean, and Professor of English. He retired from U-M in 1983, and died March 19, 2010, age 95. Robertson married "the only love of his life," Jean Belknap in 1941. They had three children. Robertson loved teaching, reading, writing, travel, the University of Michigan, and his family. He wrote and published numerous articles about undergraduate education, two volumes of personal memoirs, and dozens of travelogues

entitled "Travels with Jean."

**Louis Orlin** (RC director 1973-74) was born in Bayonne, New Jersey and earned his BA (1949), MA, in Renaissance Literature (1951), and PhD, in Near Eastern Studies, Ancient Near Eastern History and Literature (1960) from U-M. He retired in 1989 and died September 17, 2016, age 91.

**Marc Ross** (RC director 1974-77) was born in Baltimore, and earned a BS from Queens College (1948) and a PhD in Physics (1952) from University of Wisconsin. He was Professor of Physics at Indiana University until 1963, then Professor of Physics at U-M until 2001. Ross married Joan Drakert in 1949. Ross was an adamant anti-Vietnam war activist. He loved hiking in the wilderness, good food and song, especially Mozart. He died on November 26, 2017.

**John Mersereau, Jr.** became director of the RC from 1977-85, after heading a committee to review the college. Mersereau began at U-M as an instructor in the Slavic Department (1956), and was promoted to assistant professor (1959), associate professor (1961), and professor (1963). He was director of the Slavic Language and Area Center (1961-67), chair of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures (1961-71, 1986-89), and acting director of the Center for Russian and Slavic Languages (1975-76). He retired in 1989. He said he had the best job in the world. Born 1925 in San Jose, California, he graduated from Los Gatos High School (1942) and earned a BA (1946) MA, Russian (1950), and PhD, Russian (1956) from the University of California at Berkeley. A Navy ROTC cadet during college, he served aboard the cruiser U.S.S. Phoenix during World

War II. He met and married Nanine 'Bimi' Landell in 1953; they had two children. Considered the foremost authority on the great Russian poet Lermontov, Mersereau wrote five books, four monographs and twenty five articles primarily about Russian Romantic authors. Several of his translations were with David Lapeza (RC 1972). He also penned the hilarious *How to Grill a Gourmet*, based on the true story of how he and several close friends started Ann Arbor's first authentic French Restaurant, La Seine, in 1965. Mersereau was an animal lover, loved to travel and had a wide variety of interests including reading, haute cuisine, haymaking, cooking, back packing, skiing, and flying, and was a member of the Commanderie De Bordeaux (an organization of lovers of Bordeaux wines) and Who's Who. He died in January 2009.

**Elizabeth Douvan** (RC director 1985-88) was born in South Bend and earned an AB (1946) from Vassar and PhD in social psychology (1951) from U-M. She was a study director at the Survey Research Center, and joined the psychology faculty in 1951 (associate professor, 1965; professor, 1968). She helped found the Program in Women's Studies in 1972. Douvan authored many works in the field of social psychology, spanning such diverse topics as adolescence, feminine psychology, mental health, marriage, and family life. The Adolescent Experience (1966) established her as a leading social scientist. Her 1981 books on mental health continue to be widely cited. She was named in Who's Who in America, Who's Who of American

Women, and American Women of Science. She was married for 55 years and had two children. She died June 15, 2002, age 76.

**Herbert Eagle** (RC director 1988-96) earned a PhD (1973) from U-M. Eagle is Chair of Slavic Language and Literature at U-M. He has focused his research on Russian and East European cinema, film theory, poetry, and controversial prose written under communism. He has published articles on Sergei Eisenstein, semiotics of cinema, and the work of East European filmmakers such as Menzel, Chytilova, Wajda, Polanski, Kieslowski, Pichul, Lungin, Gabor, Gothar, and Makavejev. His books include *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (1981) and the volume co-edited with Anna Lawton, *Words in Revolution: Russian Futurist Manifestos, 1912-1918* (republished 2006).

**Thomas Weisskopf** (RC director 1996-05) was born in Rochester, New York and grew up in the Boston area. He earned a BA (1961) in Economics from Harvard University and a PhD (1966) in Economics from MIT. He served as assistant professor of economics at Harvard (1968-72), and joined U-M as associate professor of economics in 1972. He directed the Academic Program in Aix-en-Provence, France in the 2006-7 academic year. He retired from U-M in June 2010. He is married and has three children.

**Charlie Bright** (RC director 2005-11) is a historian, trained in European military and geopolitical history, who has moved far afield in his teaching and research. His two books, on state-making and social movements and on prison history grew out of courses

he taught and research projects he led in the RC. Bright has also long been interested in theater and has taught several courses over the years in collaboration with faculty in the Drama Program — including one on theater and politics in interwar Germany that underwrote a series of productions of plays by Bertolt Brecht in the RC, and more recently in collaborations with Detroit area theater companies, doing oral histories of the city that are then transformed into plays or musicals.

**Angela Dillard** (RC director 2011-2014) is the Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican & African Studies, and part of the Social Theory & Practice program in the RC. She was born in Detroit and earned a BA (1988) in Justice, Morality and Constitutional Democracy from James Madison College, MSU, an MA (1991) in Political Theory from New School for Social Research, and an MA (1992) and PhD (1995) in American Culture from U-M. She joined the U-M faculty in 2006, served as Director of the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies (2011-11), and was LSA Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education (2015-19). She is the author of *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now?: Multicultural Conservatism in America*. She is a faculty advisor of the Detroit School of Urban Studies and Co-PI on the Egalitarian Metropolis project, jointly sponsored by LSA and the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning and funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation.

**Jonathan Wells** (RC director 2014-

19) received an MA in American History (1993) from University of Florida, and an MA (1993) and PhD (1998) in American History from U-M. He is the author of *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* and *A House Divided: The Civil War and Nineteenth-Century America*. He is Professor in the RC Arts and Ideas in the Humanities Program, in Afroamerican and African Studies, and History.

**Catherine Badgley** (RC director 2019- ) is Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and the Residential College. Her research focuses on the ecology and evolution of mammals, based on the fossil record and modern mammalian faunas. In addition, she studies sustainable food systems. She has published more than 50 scientific papers, one book for children, and several articles for the general public. She has participated in paleontological research expeditions in Pakistan, China, Kenya, and the western United States. She current-

ly leads field research in the Mojave Desert focusing on the ecological and evolutionary responses of mammals to a period of global warming that occurred in the geological past. In the Residential College, Catherine is head of the Science Program and for many years has been faculty advisor to the academic minor in Science, Technology, and Society.

On the several occasions where the RC had acting or interim directors, usually former directors filled in. But in Fall 1971, **Ellis Wunsch** served as acting director. Wunsch was a native Detroiter, a U-M alum (PhD, English, 1951), and



a U-M associate professor. He was a co-founder of Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City. Wunsch retired in 1980 and died in December 1991.

— Dan





Carmen Bugar at home in Stony Brook, New York, February 2023 (above), and at the Shakespeare Festival in Ontario (right), the summer before entering the RC (1992). in Stony Brook.



## Alumni Interview: Writing Then and Now: Carmen Bugar

**Carmen Bugar** (RC 1996) was born in Romania and emigrated to the United States in 1989. After U-M she earned an MA in creative writing from Lancaster University, and a MA and PhD (English Literature) from Oxford University, UK. Her poetry collections are: *Crossing the Carpathians* (2004), *The House of Straw* (2014), *Sulla Soglia Della Dimenticanza/ On the Side of Forgetting* (2015), *Releasing the Porcelain Birds* (2016), *Lilies from America: New and Selected Poems* (2019), *Time Being* (2022). Her memoir, *Burying the Typewriter* (2012) won the Bread Loaf Conference Prize for Nonfiction. She also wrote the monograph *Seamus Heaney and East*

*European Poetry in Translation: Poetics of Exile* (2014), and a book of essays on politics and poetics, *Poetry and the Language of Oppression* (2022). She is an adjunct professor at Stony Brook University in New York and lives on Long Island. Carmen was the 2018 Helen DeRoy Professor in Honors at U-M. She was made a George Orwell Prize Fellow in 2017.

**Why did you choose U-M and the RC? Did you intend to be a writer, and did you write in high school?**

After starting at a community college in Grand Rapids (we settled in

Grand Rapids because we were sponsored by a church there), I arrived at Michigan on a full-ride scholarship from the Women Alumnae Association, with an acceptance to the much-coveted Residential College.

I began writing poems as a child, when I would read them to my mother in the kitchen while she was cooking. I always wrote in the house with everyone talking around me and doing their work or play, and the whole experience felt very homey. From the very beginning, writing has been a part of domestic life, and life of the family has been part of the writing. When my father was taken to prison for his public protest against Ceausescu in 1983, I wrote poems to his pictures, which were framed along with ours around the house. He “came back” in my descriptions, and I articulated a sense of grief and loss for my mother and sister, too. This is how I knew that there was something special about the writing

**Are there any particular positives or negatives about your writing experience at the RC and at U-M? Did it change your focus, over time?**

Ann Arbor felt very European as a city compared to Grand Rapids, and I relished in meeting students from all over the world. ...I was active ... in the national poetry slam team, founded The Hermetics Poets’ Troupe in the RC, edited the RC’s student journal, with others, taught in a long-distance creative writing programs to children of military personnel posted overseas, and had my first stint teaching poetry at Community High School. I chaired the Guild House Writers’ Series and

organized benefit events for Amnesty International. But the Hatcher Graduate Library is where I found, on microfilm, transcripts of broadcasts from Radio Free Europe on my father’s imprisonment in Romania, and in a sense, I felt that I was part of something larger that included me, personally, and my family’s story. My writing blossomed as a result, and I won the Hopwood and the Cowden awards, and graduated summa cum laude in creative writing. This was a far cry from living under house arrest in Romania and being hunted on the streets just years before. I had a voice that was being heard.

**Any specific RC memories you’d like to mention? Was anyone particularly helpful or supportive re writing?**

I have very happy memories of sitting on a floor of my room in 252 Hinsdale with a group of friends writing poems, listening to Bob Dylan, and editing the RC magazine. The Brown Jug featured big in my time at RC too! Ken Mikolowski was instrumental in my writing and we have become friends over the years. Holy Spaulding, Kristin Johnson, Patrick Lawrence, and Kathy Churchill (who has remained a very close friend) were part of my RC group. The Arb walks were wonderful and we plastered the trees on the Diag with poems.

**How has your writing changed over the years?**

The poetry is moving toward a more lucid and detached place; this has to do with an evolving feel for the



English language and the sacrifices I have had to make when I decided to write in English -- sacrifices that led to lots of gains, interestingly helping me heal the rift I felt with my native Romanian. My poetry now is less direct, less of a cry out into the world but far more aware of the healing powers of lyric language. The direct expression of grief has turned into a meditation on language and freedom, on power and language.

My early poems speak directly from the heart of pain; my recent poems speak about that pain from a more reflective "what does it all mean" historical angle.

I write my way through upheaval for reasons that are not simply expressive. There is a sense of curiosity about the various paths that come into view once life presents certain obstacles. Different kinds of loss bring about feelings that have been entirely unknown before. The soul asks different questions, the mind constantly rearranges the weight of things to keep at even keel. Life is a bit like the changing face of the sea: if you're around long enough, you'll see the white caps recede into stillness, and the sky will be so perfectly mirrored in the water, the two will seem to change places. Writing is an opportunity for reorientation.

Most of my poetry follows the life of the family in the context of large events. In the earlier collections, there was a focus on my parents and siblings through political upheaval, but this new collection focuses on the microcosm of my own family in the time of pandemic. The poems capture this sharpened awareness that the silence of the world outside

brought about the noise of despair inside the house: a noise we either did not notice before, or which came to the surface because of the confusion and isolation. Memories of being under house arrest in Romania over 30 years ago surfaced as well, and I was explaining to my husband and the children the difference between this lockdown and the house arrest, trying to comfort them. For us, there was an opportunity in being safely huddled together with time for each other, finally, and I hoped to reinvigorate the marriage. But no encouragement brought comfort. The poems are in their own ways questions about what language can endure and what words can cure.

#### **What was your experience as the Helen DeRoy Professor at U-M in 2018?**

The poet-teacher relationship can offer a view into literary language that shows the connection between the life of the mind and heart and the life of the poetic line. It makes poetry relevant and personal. The students deepened the joy I feel when I teach; they reassured me that poetry can be received abundantly when it connects to shared human experience. They also reconfirmed to me both the fragility and the strength of language as we are all trying to cope with today's realities and we are trying so hard to find the right words to explain how we feel.

#### **What are you working on now and do you have plans for the near (or far) future?**

I want to write on poetry, marriage, and motherhood, in order to reflect on the incredible gains my poetry has made as a result of being a mother and on the devastating career loss as a result of choosing to stay home with my children for the first years of their lives. There is a lot to talk about!

I would like to participate more deeply in the larger conversation about literature and compassion, about the importance of measured, lucid language in our politics and media, the need to offer our children the joy they so fully deserve.

I still have my memoir, *Life Without a Country*, and the book of poems, *FOG*, somewhere on the hard drive of the last crashed computer: I hope to resurrect these manuscripts and find a publisher.

#### **Have you written fiction or considered different genres from poetry and nonfiction?**

I write criticism as well, and I wrote a novel in prose, which became a novel in verse, which is still on the back burner. I love the idea of fiction but I am not very good at it, partly because I am stuck in the "what happens". One day I hope to write a very long novel that deals with EVERYTHING from food to God and marital infidelity.

#### **Any advice for young RC writers?**

Yes! Please don't forget that language is both powerful and dangerous.

*Much of this article is drawn from interviews by Martha Stuit (RC 2011) that appeared in the Ann Arbor District Library's Pulp online magazine (pulp.aadl.org).*

# From the Eblast: Alumni Writing News

Daniel Madaj

Since October 2021, we've sent out a monthly email message to announce forthcoming readings and publications by RCers. These are collected on the RC Writers website (under the "alumni" tab). Send an email (dmadaj@umich.edu) to be added to the list.

## RC Alum Publications and Things

**Peter Anderson** (RC 1972) was short-listed and placed third in the 2023 Raven Chapbooks Contest for his manuscript "Mutter and Other Prose Poems." Prose poems appeared or are forthcoming in *Frigg Literary Review*, *SORTES*, and the *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*. Peter and his wife Melody attended the Caravan Farm Theatre National Playwrights Retreat, May 19-28 at the Caravan farm in Armstrong BC. Two of 10 artists "looking for time and place to focus on conceiving and/or writing an upcoming project," both Peter and Melody have worked on many Caravan productions over the years, including at least a dozen of Peter's plays.

**Jeanette Bradley** (RC 1994) published a nonfiction picture book poetry anthology, *No World Too Big: Young People Fighting Global Climate Change* (Charlesbridge). Jeanette co-edited and illustrated the book as well as authoring a poem included in the anthology.

**Carmen Bugan** (RC 1996) published poems in *Literary Matters* and

*The Irish Times*. Carmen recorded conversations on Soundcloud and Youtube. A review of her recent book of essays appeared in *The Manhattan Review*.

**Caitlin Cowan** (RC 2008) was chosen for Poets & Writers' inaugural poetry cohort, "Get the Word Out," a publicity incubator for debut authors. Caitlin's book, *Happy Everything*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press in 2024. She published three poems in *Softblow*, an online journal.

**Allison Epstein** (RC 2014) will publish her third novel, *Our Rotten Hearts*, an historical reimagining of *Oliver Twist*, in February 2025. Her second novel, *Let the Dead Bury the Dead*, is due out October 17. All three of her novels are published by Doubleday.

**Cameron Finch** (RC 2016) or- chestrated Ann Arbor's inaugural PoetTreeTown event, as part of April Poetry Month. Select local poems were displayed on local downtown business windows, including several by RC alums Kathryn Orwig, Robin Lily Goldberg, Haley Winkle, Theo Poling, Ross Singleton (a translation of a Ukrainian poem), Claire Denson, Bailey Burke, and Cameron. Cameron was also interviewed in *Tiny Molecules*, which recently published two works. Work has also been published in *Gender Queer Literature*.

**Matt Forbeck** (RC 1989) published *Minecraft Legends: Return of the Pig-*

*lins* (Penguin Random House). With help from his son Marty, Matt wrote and designed the recent Marvel Multiverse Role-Playing Game.

**Barry Garelick** (RC 1971) published stories in *CafeLit*, *The Globe Review*, *Fiction on the Web*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*. Barry, and co-author JR Wilson, were interviewed by Anna Stokke on her podcast, talking about their book *Traditional Math: An Effective Strategy that Teachers Feel Guilty Using*.

**John Hagen** (RC 1972) has been asked to speak about software use for creative writing at a writing symposium for the Eastern Upper Peninsula being planned for June 22, 2024 at the Hessel School House in Hessel, MI. John gave a similar talk at the Upper Peninsula Publishers and Authors Association (UPPAA) conference last year (and published an article about using writing software in last year's alumni journal). John published a story in *U. P. Reader* #7, an annual anthology of the best writing from Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

**Clare Higgins** (RC 2017) wrote the fifth episode of the third season of *The Witcher* (Netflix). Clare wrote an episode of the second season, and worked as script coordinator on *Devil in Ohio*, a 2022 tv mini series on Netflix. She previously served as writers' assistant and writer's production assistant on *Bridgerton*, *Charmed*, and *The Umbrella Academy*.

**Laura Kasischke** (RC 1984) and **Matthew Rohrer** (RC 1992) have poems in *The Best American Poetry 2022*.

**Irena Barbara Nagler** (RC 1977) published an article in Ann Arbor's

*Crazy Wisdom Journal*. Among other things, Irena talks about her times in East Quad and her friendship with one-time RCer Nisi Shawl, author of *Everfair* and other books.

**Nick Petrie** (RC 1990) will publish the eighth book in his Peter Ash series, *The Price You Pay*, on February 5, 2024. All the books are published by G.P. Putnam's Sons.

**Cydney K. Seigerman** (RC 2013) gave the annual Robertson Lecture in East Quad's Keene Theater. Cydney is an NSF graduate research fellow and research scholar in Brazil, and is a PhD candidate in the Integrative Conservation and Anthropology program at U Georgia.

**Ian Ross Singleton** (RC 2005) was interviewed on the *Haight Ashbury Literary Review* podcast and in the journal *Punctured Lines*. He reviewed Bojan Lewis' *Sinking Bell* in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. Ian the new nonfiction editor of *Asymptote Journal of Translation*.

**Jacob Wheeler** (RC 2000) published *Angel of the Garbage Dump: How Hanley Denning Changed the World, One Child at a Time*.

We held the second annual **RC Alumni Journal Reading** on Tuesday, March 14, at 7 pm (ET) on Zoom. Hosted by Laura Thomas, the event featured brief readings by 9 writers from the Fall 2022 journal, plus a special visit from Carole LaMantia!

## Michigan and Regional Resources

Continuing our discussion of Michigan and regional resources, John Hagen (RC 1972) noted that the Library of Michigan maintains

a “Michigan Materials” collection and any author living in Michigan is invited to submit two copies of their work for the collection. There is no restriction re subject matter. Submission details and the “gift policy” form are on the Library of Michigan website ([michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan](http://michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan)). John notes to be sure to fill out the form completely and make sure Mindy is clearly listed as the addressee on the shipment. John adds that “for self-published authors, this might be the only chance to get your work listed on [www.WorldCat.org](http://www.WorldCat.org), which digests the “card catalogs” of all significant libraries large and small around the world.”

We mentioned Michigan Radio’s **Michigan Reads** program, featuring books with Michigan connections. The June 2023 discussion (of *Chevy in the Hole* by Kelsey Ronan) was hosted by Beenish Ahmed (RC 2009), WUOM’s criminal justice reporter.

As part of a celebration of **Independent Bookstore Day**, MI Book Hop invited Michiganders to play a form of bingo by filling in spaces by visiting stores and completing other bookish activities. Three regions were available (southeast, southwest, and mid-Michigan). More info at [MiBookHop.com](http://MiBookHop.com).

The **Ann Arbor District Library** hosted its 31st annual state-wide teen writing contest, “It’s All Write!” in three categories: Grades 6-8, 9-19, and 11-12, Kids in grades 3-5 could enter AADL’s “Write On!” short story contest. The AADL’s Fifth Avenue Press published five books this year, all by folks with Ann Arbor connections. More info at [pulp.aadl.org](http://pulp.aadl.org). Also at *Pulp* are interviews and articles

about Michigan writers, with some RC and U-M connections.

The **Bear River Writing Conference** at Walloon Lake was held in August. More info at [Isa.umich.edu/bearriver](http://Isa.umich.edu/bearriver)

The **Detroit Writing Author Series** began its 2023 series with a book talk and signing by Dr. M. Roy Wilson at the historic Detroit Whitney mansion. Wilson is president of Wayne State (since 2013), and published a memoir, *The Plum Tree Blossoms Even in Winter*, in 2022 (WSU Press). For more information, contact [detroitwritingroom.com](mailto:detroitwritingroom.com)

The **U-M Press** offers free access to U-M alums to hundreds of titles from its scholarly publishing department: <https://bit.ly/3R5r2XT>

The **Ann Arbor Community Bookfest** (formerly the Kerrytown Bookfest) was held September 10 at the downtown Ann Arbor library. Events included talks by authors Sonali Dev, Stephen Mack Jones, and J. Ryan Stradel, a poetry reading, and this year’s release of books by the library’s Fifth Avenue Press.

### RC Things

**Logan Corey** (RC 2013) recently began a new position as Senior Recruiting Coordinator at the U-M Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Logan had worked at the RC for over 9 years, and as its Director of Admissions, Recruitment, and MLC Administration since July 2016.

Long-time RC teacher **Zelda Gamson** is publishing an ebook, *Don’t Play Like A Girl: A Midcentury Woman Leaps into Life*. After 17 years at U-M, Zee moved to U Mass in Boston,

where she founded the Higher Education Doctoral Program and was the founding director of the New England Resource Center for Higher Ed. She retired in 1999.

The RC’s **Kate Mendeloff** has died, aged 69. Kate moved to Ann Arbor in 1990 and taught drama in the RC. Experimentation with plays in unique places (like the RC courtyard) led to “Shakespeare in the Arb,” starting in 2000.

**Carl Cohen** died on August 26, age 92. Carl was professor of philosophy and U-M, and retired in 2017 after 62 years at U-M. He was one of the planners and founding members of the RC. He published ten books and many essays. He liked to travel (he took a train through the Canadian Rockies and a boat down the Danube River when 91), was a lifelong member of the US Chess Federation. He loved dogs (alums may remember Hamish, who came to class with him for 16 years), and his obituary notes that “three faithful friends” are today mourning his passing.

**Nandi Comer** (RC 2001) has been named Michigan’s Poet Laureate, only the second poet laureate in the state’s history! Nandi is the author of *American Family: A Syndrome* (Finishing Line Press) and *Tapping Out* (Triquarterly). She directs the Allied Media Project Seeds Program and is the co-director of Detroit Lit.

We are in the early stages of developing an **RC Writers Bookclub**. Perhaps quarterly we’ll read a book by an RC alum, then gather via Zoom to discuss, and perhaps watch a brief reading by the book’s author, who

might also respond to questions submitted earlier!

### RC Alumni Bios

This year we began including brief bios of RC writing alums (or RC alums who have written or performed). You can read these bios on the RC Writers website (under “Alums”). This year we wrote about:

David Greene (1972), Richard Leyfeldt (1972), Pam Seamon (Guest) (1972), Scott T. Cummings (1974), Christine Gloss (1974), Richard B. Sale III (1974), David Bell (1976), J. Max Robins (1976), Emily Barrett Tennyson (1978), Karen Ruelle (1979).

Nancy Gildart (1980), Tony J. Hoffman (1980), Phillip B. Harper (1981), Martha E. Topol (1981), Bonnie J. Emanuel (1983), Jeff Scott (1983), Larry Dean (1984), Elizabeth Inglehart (1987), Eric Weltman (1989).

Sara M. Haimowitz (1990), Matthew Kirchbaum (199), Nicholas Petrie (1990), David Zinn (1990), Jill B. Robbins (1991), Martin Sweeney (1991), Courtney H. Loveman (1992), Jennifer McKee (1993), Kyle K. Norris (1997), Kimberly A. Owczarski (1997), Holly Jo Sparks (1997), Megan Rubin-er Zinn (1999).

Eric S. Anderson (2000), Emily Linn (2000), Roy J. Harnish (2001), Staci Perryman-Clark (2004), Haley Pier-son-Cox (2005), Jeremy Stoll (2005), Caitlin Brown (2006), Krista Lanphier (2006), Andy Linn (2006), Emily C. Haan (2007), Olga Semenova (2008).

Elise Kristine Aikman (2012), Erin A. Kirkland (2014), Rachel Leah Gerson (2015).

# Contributors

## Program News

### Faculty publications and news.

Christopher Matthews teaches a class on “literary monsters,” which meets in the Winter term but also has an off-campus component: in London! In the spring, students “deepen their understanding of the cultural and geographic origins and histories of British literary monsters such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Mr. Hyde*. ”

A new edition of Aisha Sabatini Sloan’s *Dreaming of Ramadi in Detroit* is forthcoming in 2024 from Graywolf Press. Aisha’s essay, *In Borealis*, won the 2022 Lambda Literary Award in Bisexual Nonfiction and won the 2022 Jean Córdova Prize for Lesbian/Queer Nonfiction.

When Copper Canyon Press published Laura’s 2021 collection of poems, *Lightning Falls In Love*, it also re-issued her collection *Where Now: New and Selected Poems*.

Former RC writing instructor **Ken Mikolowski** published three short poems in *Olney Magazine*.

2023 marked the tenth year of the RC **Emerging Writer Awards** (funded by a writing alum), awarded to graduating writers “who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not previously received a writing award recognizing their writing achievements”:

2023: Thomas Griffith & Chelsea Padilla  
2022: Elizabeth Schriener & Marlon Rajan  
2021: Kaleb Brown & Andrew Warrick  
2020: Zofia Ferkel  
2019: Heather Young & Mariam Reda  
2018: Emily Miiller  
2017: Ashley Bishel & Lauren Theisen  
2016: Alexander Miller & Sydney Morgan-Green  
2015: Angeline Dimambro & Vicky Szczepkowski  
2014: Allison Epstein

**Peter Anderson** (RC 1972) is a poet, performer and playwright living in Vancouver, Canada. Prose poems appeared or are forthcoming in *Frigg Literary Review*, *SORTES*, *Unbroken*, and elsewhere. Peter was short-listed and placed third in the 2023 Raven Chapbooks Contest. His plays are available online at the Canadian Play Outlet ([canadianplayoutlet.com](http://canadianplayoutlet.com)).

**Bailey Burke** (RC 2023) is doing a year of service as a campus ministry disciple at U-M, through St. Mary Student Parish in Ann Arbor. She plans to pursue a career in editing and publishing or higher education. She worked as a blog post writer for the U-M Office of Admissions this spring, worked as an office assistant for the U-M Center for the Study of Complex Systems, and as a marketing intern at Ave Maria Press. She published two non-fiction pieces in this year’s *RC Review*.

**Carmen Bugar** (RC 1996) was born in Romania and emigrated to the United States in 1989. After U-M she earned an MA in creative writing from Lancaster University, and a MA and PhD (English Literature) from Oxford University, UK. Her poetry collections are: *Crossing the Carpathians* (2004), *The House of Straw* (2014), *Sulla Soglia Della Dimenticanza/ On the Side of Forgetting* (2015), *Releasing the Porcelain Birds* (2016), *Lilies from America: New and Selected Poems* (2019), *Time Being* (2022). Her memoir, *Burying the Typewriter* (2012) won the Bread Loaf Conference Prize for Nonfiction. She

also wrote the monograph *Seamus Heaney and East European Poetry in Translation: Poetics of Exile* (2014), and a book of essays on politics and poetics, *Poetry and the Language of Oppression* (2022). She is an adjunct professor at Stony Brook University in New York and lives on Long Island. Carmen was the 2018 Helen DeRoy Professor in Honors at U-M. She was made a George Orwell Prize Fellow in 2017.

**Caitlin Cowan** (RC 2008) has a full-length collection of poetry forthcoming from Cornerstone Press (2024). Her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *The Rumpus*, *New Ohio Review*, *Pleiades*, *Missouri Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *The Account*, and elsewhere. She serves as the Chair of Creative Writing at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp and writes the weekly poetry & pop culture blog PopPoetry. You can find her at [caitlincowan.com](http://caitlincowan.com).

**Fez Fessenden** (RC 2022) is an ecopoet from Northern Michigan who writes about bodies and the environment, with a particular fondness for decomposition and pleasure. Fez graduated with highest honors for a senior thesis, “Body Farm,” a book of poetry exploring wilderness and human connection, from which this issue’s contributions are drawn.. Fez continues toward an MFA in poetry from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

**Cameron Finch** (RC 2016) is a reader, writer, editor, and creative, living among their beloved trees in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Cam's writing and interviews have appeared in various journals including *The Adroit Journal*, *The Common*, *CRAFT*, *Electric Literature*, *Fiction Writers Review*, *Lambda Literary*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *The Rumpus*. Cam is the Book Publicity Director at Atmosphere Press, an editor for *Tiny Molecules*, and the organizer of the poetry-in- public initiative, PoetTreeTown. Visit the word garden at ccfinch.com.

**Barry Garelick** (RC 1971) retired from teaching math in middle school. He taught math as a second career after having retired from US EPA. He remains deeply involved in math education advocacy. He has written articles on math education for *The Atlantic*, *Education Next*, and *Non-partisan Education Review*, and has published several books: *Out on Good Behavior: Teaching Math While Looking Over Your Shoulder* (January 2021) and *Traditional Math: An Effective Strategy That Teachers Feel Guilty Using* (November 2022) were published by John Catt, LLC.. Barry and his wife live in Morro Bay, California.

**Jacqueline Giessler** (RC 2023) graduated with a double major in Economics and Creative Writing and Literature. She worked as a Student Assistant for the Lloyd Scholars for Writing and the Arts program and later as a Writing Consultant for the Sweetland Center for Writing. She won a Nelson Award in 2022 to fund a summer internship at the Poetics Lab in Alpena, MI, where she published two poems in its 2022 Community Chapbook. Jacqueline loves to travel

and spend time with her friends, and hopes to live in many cool places and meet many cool people in the future.

**John Hagen** (RC 1972) retired in 2015 after a career in economic development. He and his wife Joy divide their time between homes near Tampa Bay and Saugatuck, Michigan. *Sea Stacks*, a collection of interrelated stories, was published in December 2020.

**Michael Koenigsknecht** entered the RC in 1968. In 1970 he worked in Alaska for a summer, matriculated into the Latin Department of University College London, and traveled in Europe. After this break from the intensity of the R.C. he returned and graduated in 1972. After working for a year at Ypsilanti State Mental Hospital, he went to N.Y.U. Law School. He then was a trial lawyer in Chicago, primarily for large, international corporations, for 34 years. Since retiring from the law he has focused on the arts: writing fiction and nonfiction; working onstage in non-singing roles at the Lyric Opera of Chicago; and, supporting other writers and opera companies. He is married with two children and three grandchildren.)

Michael is a member, and past president, of the Chicago Literary Club, which for nearly 150 years has been a voluntary association of men and women interested in writing pieces of nonfiction, fiction, poetry, or plays. The club gathers on Monday evenings between October and May, listening to one member reading or short play each meeting. For more information, visit [chilit.org](http://chilit.org) or email Michael at [mjk@mjka.com](mailto:mjk@mjka.com).

**Daniel Madaj** (RC 1973/82) worked for U-M for more than 40 years,

including brief stints in the RC and in East Quad. He was editor of Ann Arbor's *Old West Side News* for eight years (2000-2008), and has recently collaborated with John Tropman and Carolyn Gier on *Fixing Broken Meetings* (Cognella, 2023) and *Policy Leadership and Idea Management* (Cognella, forthcoming).

**Paul Meyer** (RC 1974) took a few theater classes at U-M and continued his romance with theater in 1974-75 as a member of Peachy Cream Productions, which staged a half-dozen or so original musical/variety shows around Ann Arbor. He continued his creative expression throughout his medical career, with poetry and songwriting, as well as writing about medical and health issues for several publications. Paul's medical education was at MSU (1986-89) and he practiced family and holistic medicine, then worked primarily in the areas of addiction and psychiatric medicine for most of the decade prior to retiring in 2021.

**Kathryn Orwig** (RC 2017) is a Summer Hopwood Award winner, poet, and a film and TV writer. Kathryn's won or placed highly in multiple screenwriting competitions (Top 5% Nicholl's, Page Awards, July 2021 Roadmap Writers Diversity Initiative winner etc.). *Exhale* was 1 of 7 Honorable Mentions in the ISA Diversity Initiative 2023, Top 10 (Second Place) Finalist in the Emerging Screenwriters Action and Adventure Competition 2022, and a Second Rounder in the ISA Fast Track Fellowship 2023. Kathryn acted as a final-round judge at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth in 2019, and wrote

20 scripts for a media company to turn into an animated TV Web Series. Her short script *Iguana Dog* (which was published in 2021's *RC Alumni Journal*) was one of four grand prize winners in the Roadmap Writers 2021 Shorts Competition. Kathryn's work is included in *Bring Your Words: A Writers' Community Anthology* (Fifth Avenue Press, 2021). More about Kathryn at her website: [www.kathrynorwig.com](http://www.kathrynorwig.com).

**Theo Poling** (RC 2022) has published work in the *Huron River Review*, *Political World*, *Palaver Arts Mag*, *RC Review*, *Blueprint Magazine*, *Arts, Ink. Magazine*, and on Kindle Marketplace, and has produced a short film while earning a BFA at U Southern California in Writing for Screen and Television. Theo is starting work on a Master's at Stanford, this fall.

**Marty Sherman** (RC 1974) lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife Linda Wallen. Linda and one of their three children are also RC grads. Among other things, Marty has worked as a truck driver, a wine salesman, and a clown at Ringling Bros./Barnum and Bailey Circus. He makes wine at Tendril Wine Cellars in Oregon's Willamette Valley. NeWest published *Elephant Hook*, a collection of stories, in 1992. Ask him about sweet potatoes.

**Andrea Wong** (RC 2023) is currently staying in Ann Arbor while figuring out her future plans. She was managing and senior editor at the *Michigan Journal of Asian Studies*, a Sweetland Center writing consultant, a staff reporter at *The Michigan Daily*, and has writing and editorial experiences in small companies worldwide.

## Endnotes

Among the many pleasures of working on this journal was a fabulous lunch with Vicky Davinich (who worked in the RC office in the mid '70s) and Carole LaMantia, long-serving icon in the administrative offices. Among other things, we talked about the Halfway Inn. Then, I had the pleasure of meeting Toni Guzzardo, who managed the Inn for its last years and continues to work for U-M Dining. (And then I walked the two miles home in an in-my-face snowstorm!)

This past June, I adopted Maverick, a 4-year-old golden-doodle mix (although he may actually be an Aussie-doodle), and he has been delightful. To the right are pictures of him resting and hard at work. (He is quite candid about his desire for more stories and poems in the journal about dogs chasing, and catching, chipmunks and mice). Every day on our walks he continues his ambitious project to "collect" every burr from the bushes behind Eberwhite Elementary in Ann Arbor. There may be over 10 million, but we're making steady progress!

I've read and enjoyed several alumni books since last issue: *Out on Good Behavior* by Barry Garelick,



*Two Big Differences* by Ian Ross Singleton, *Burying the Typewriter* by Carmen Bugar, and *Mind of Winter*, by Laura Kasischke. I also read several poems from *The Tortilla of Heaven*, a collection by Richard Sale, but this book is by our Richard's dad.

Dan

My email is [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu).