

October Hill

M A G A Z I N E

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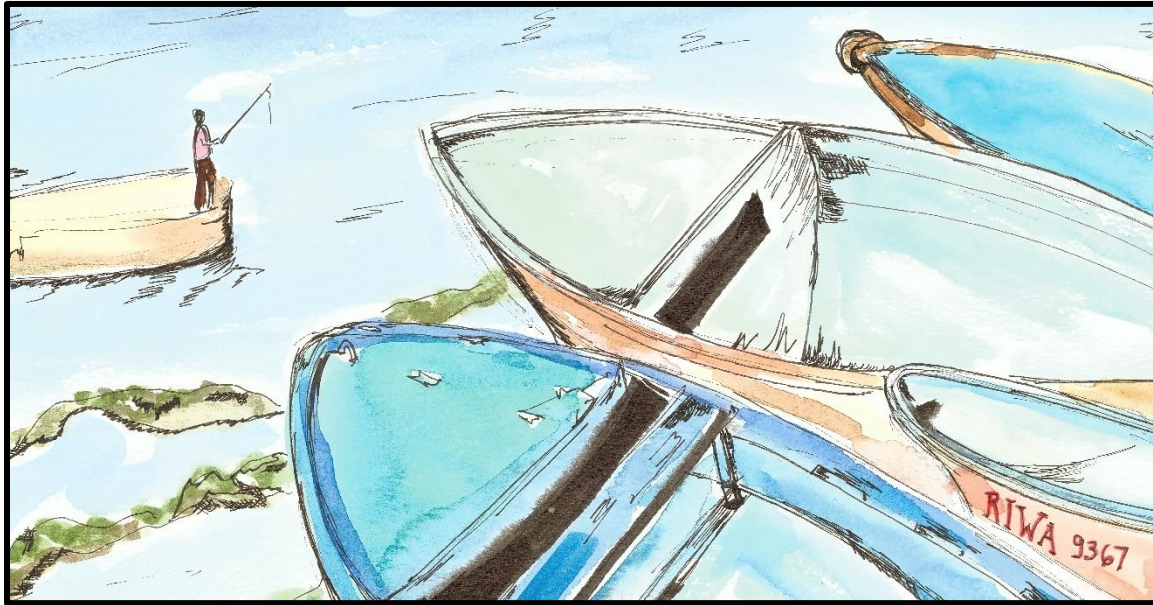
October Hill

MAGAZINE



Volume 3, Issue 2

Welcome to October Hill Magazine



By Reem Rashash-Shaaban

Good short stories and good poetry are very much alive. Even in our modern era, in which the average American now spends three-and-a-half hours a day on the Internet, social media, or text-messaging, people all over the world continue to honor their talents and ambitions as writers of fine literary works. And more and more people are reading them in magazines such as ours.

In our current Summer issue, we are thrilled to bring our readers new short stories from some wondrously creative writers, among them a writer born in Liguria, Italy, who lives in The Netherlands; another writer who lives in Hamburg, Germany; and another who lives in Canada. In our recent Contest issue, we published the poetry of one of our top prize winners, who lives and writes in Australia. Writing talent is truly international in origin and nature. As editors, we are extremely pleased that such talented writers – whether American, European, or from the Far East – have chosen *October Hill Magazine* as a home for their fine works.

It also brings us great satisfaction to be able to serve as a platform for so many talented first-time authors, whether they are recent university graduates or those who have fallen in love with creative writing as a new career. Their new works continue to validate our purpose as a magazine, not only as a place for quality written works, but as a vehicle for delivering the most creative new works to our many readers.

Richard Merli *Editorial Director*

Samantha Morley *Managing Editor*



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Interested in joining our team? Send an email with your resume to OctoberHillMag@gmail.com

Cover image by Reem Rashash-Shaaban. Reem Rashash-Shaaban is a poet, writer, and photographer. After spending thirty-three years teaching at the American University of Beirut, she decided to go back to her passion: art. Reem uses her original photographs to reconstruct a new view of life and cities and mixes collage, pastel, ink and paint in her effort to keep the culture, thoughts and traditions of people alive.

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Fiction



By Reem Rashash-Shaaban

Sand

By Marino Magliani

From his house, you couldn't see the sea. You had to cross a romantic bridge, then walk up the dirt path until you got to the point where nothing grew except the grass between the stones.

In books about places like this, places with stone terracing, cliffs, and deconsecrated churches, the writers always said that you could tell where the sea was based on the light. But he had never been able to find the sea by light alone. He had spent a long time trying, from every height, from every angle, and at every time of day. A sea was like a hill cut straight off, without trees or houses. At its core, though, was something else. Something that repeated itself, like the grassy fields that farmers burned yearly so they would grow back anew. Every once in a while, he felt the obligation, more than the pleasure, of going to the sea and wading into his ankles, then to his knees, and then further until the water caressed his throat and saw deep within him.

In those moments, he would descend the hills, walk on the sand, and wait for the waves and the night, with his hands on his hips, the way it was done in Liguria. But it was the waves and the nights that awaited him, and his anticipation quickly became a sort of disquiet. The feeling never came from the sea itself, but always from those books: it was the sum of everything the authors spoke of. It was that romantic fixation on intuiting things by the light. As if one ray of sun on the leaves of a palm could be enough to understand whether the water that day would be meek, dreamy, or furious.

Every time he looked upon the hill where he was born, he used to convince himself that you had to look far and wide for the sea: a sea-desert, a place to be conquered, somewhere to leave your mark the way the writers did. But later, when he came upon the Dutch dunes of IJmuiden, and its landscape dotted with bunkers from which troops could scrutinize the horizon, he understood that the books had gotten it right this time. You couldn't just leave a place behind, and in the end, the

only thing you might be able to count on was that you could return. That much was allowed, yes; it seemed to be something you began to do from the very moment you left. And for all that, again, he had the books to blame, not that which he saw before and behind him on this new beach, cold and grey. It was that those old words, the words of a south, were the same for the things of the north: for the sand that was still called sand even this far away, and for all the rest, all the grey and wind-weathered things. And so, in the end, it depended on him, he thought, on the new words that were waiting to be spoken.

He remembered reading that a long time ago, a tormented painter had escaped from this fog, and that only after having known the light of Provence was he able to imagine the shapes and colors and waves of the north.

His childhood waves had been grassy ones, green until June and then yellow, until they were ready to be cut through with a scythe. There were waves of wild meadows flowing into lichenous cliffs, where you could harvest the best hay in the valley. He would sit in the shade of a wild plum tree and look out at the shore: a line of bent-over men, always a little bent over, and their silent movements.

If he strained his eyes—even now, as he waited for the waves of the North Sea—he could make out the sighs of the men as they straightened their backs and spit on their scythes to sharpen them on their whetstones.

At midday, they would join him to share their tomatoes on bread. Then he would go to the spring with an older boy and the two of them would fill all the workers' bottles with ice-cold water. When he returned, the farmers would be sitting in the shade, eyes half-closed. The sweat from their brows would drip down to the bandanas around their necks.

They would wipe the backs of their hands across their lips and drink from the bottles.

A few crows would fly above them, but so high up that the farmers only saw them in the moment that their heads tilted back to take a sip.

Even then, the far-away diamond sea, of a useless and dangerous color and light, mattered to someone. Even if only at dawn or in the evening, it was important to make sure Corsica was still out there.

A sea is a place for locals as much as for tourists, an old man told him on a day shortly before his death. You had to deserve the sea. But that wasn't true. In that afternoon hour, the sea blended into the sky, and it was only the old man who spoke of dangers and of dreams, of tourists and of deserving. The other farmers spent their break in silence, and they probably wished the old man would be quiet.

If you listen to him, you'll end up like him, one of the farmers told him one day, making the others laugh. *You'll go looking for answers like the crickets do up here, with their nonstop chirping from morning to night.*

Looking for answers was as tiring a job as the harvest was. What was left to discover? Could you stare up at the sky and simply talk about it, or was it like sharpening something with a whetstone? In the end, the thing and the stone eat away at each other.

Now, with the North Sea before him, he talked too much, just like that old man. Although he hardly ever spoke *with* anyone.

Far below, ships passed on their way toward the Atlantic. The trick was to wait without thinking. Without using up other words. The farmers used to be able to do it. Their desires were ruled by waves of thirst. In the evening, in the trembling murmur of sunset, the animals cut through the meadow's silence as the moon's sharp beams cut the night. He used to fall asleep tense, scared by the croaks and wheezing. Crickets, frogs, and nightingales were deep within the darkness.

Alone on the bank of the North Sea stretched the small town of Zandvoort. In front of the houses, there was a jetty made up of green, mossy rocks and cubes of cement that cut off the area and filled it with echoes and crashing waves.

He wanted to know what a jetty would be if there were no land or sea. As usual, he waited for the words, but the lilt of the waves ate away at his patience.

One day, he noticed there was no land left behind the jetty anymore. There is only a dune carved out by the wind, he wrote, with all of the sand of this world either trapped in the vegetation or gone to form other dunes.

On the bright-leaved shrubs perched flocks of starlings, and in the muddy puddles sat the gulls, and the grass never yellowed as it did in Liguria. Could he look around and write what he saw, or could he make it up?

At night, the acacias welcomed crows to their branches, and after a while the puddles were crowded with birds.

And day after day, it was as if the sand lent a feeling of the north to that sea and to his pages. You might be able to make up the whole thing if it weren't for the sand. A vivid image came to him. As a young man in Liguria, around fifteen years old, he would sometimes help the bricklayers. He would hand them stones, planks, and tools, and he would make the mortar. A flatbed truck would come to deposit mountains of sand, and in the morning, he and another worker would turn on the cement mixer and throw in two buckets of water, half a bag of cement, and eighteen shovelfuls of sand. One day he asked the truck driver where all that sand came from and learned it was from a quarry.

Why did the company pay for sand when the sea gave it away in immense quantities?

The worker explained that the sand from the sea didn't work because the salt it contained would, in time, corrode the steel in the reinforced concrete, and the whole thing would crumble. It was a distant memory.

On the last day of a beautiful season, he made his way from the Dutch neighborhood where he now lived, past the dunes, and then toward the breakwater. He took off his shoes and socks. He walked until he could feel the sand beneath his feet, rough and furrowed like an old man's forehead. Crabs scurried after the water, and there were tiny carcasses dried out in the sun. The flux of the tides laid bare every form of life. Jellyfish had solidified and turned blue and dried-out starfish were reduced to crumbs. Seagulls flew low above the sand, cried out, and sank their beaks into their stranded food. He remembered that the waves of the Ligurian Sea gave no sign of their provenance. Born in secret depths, they made it beyond the breakwater and culminated in exhausted swells. Here they died out sooner, in a place where the high tide had created a mound of sand and shells; all that reached his feet now was the echo of the waves' deaths. The water that had barely managed to wash over his feet didn't have the spirit to be a true wave.

He found himself wondering again about the sand, as he had all those years ago. But there was nothing in it to understand: it was only an exercise, a way to find new words, and nothing more. Maybe if there was some way to exchange the man who now lived on this sand for the youth he had once been. *He* would have figured things out. He had even succeeded in imagining what the sea's sand could be good for, since it wasn't good for building houses, churches, prisons, or bridges.

It had gotten him to the North Sea.

And as for him, what was he good for?

Good for nothing...was that really what he thought of himself? Not useless, exactly. He was capable, but capable of doing something that didn't seem to matter very much. He was the man who waited for words, and then wrote them down to prove that he had done so. *The words you tell yourself*

now are free. They are this rain. These fat Dutch cats behind sliding glass doors, this grass... The secret, the mystery in the eyes of those farmers.

Time passed, and the words that remained barely merited the alcohol it took to preserve them. They stank like crustaceans rotting in the sun and picked clean by gulls. Beyond that, nothing happened anymore, and if he wasn't writing, he would spend the day walking to the beach. He would watch the waves pretend to make an effort, and then pick up his shoes and socks and walk into the grassy dunes.

Now he felt a slight breeze, a salty spray in the air. After a bit, he turned his back to the water's edge and strained his ears as he had the first time he was here. Now as then, he could hear the sound of the sea, though it had ceased to be the sea itself.

It didn't work with the Ligurian Sea. She made no noise, and he could only remember her in images.

Can you see them?

One day, as he followed the path of scattered and broken shells away from the beach, walking between the shrubs and houses with the wind nipping at his back, he realized that it was late. But late for what?

He saw the trees uprooted by the wind, and all those trenches blown bare like the naked gums in an old man's mouth. He saw that the houses' foundations lay directly on the sand, along with the flowers, the greenery, and the children who played and grew in the sand. And all that which rolled down to the sea rolled because of that sand, and none of this bothered him anymore. He couldn't write it anymore, but that didn't bother him either. Maybe - was there anything else left? - he could always write that he could not write. Do it and redo it and hear it from others, from Walser and from

Melville, just as the sand always heard from other seas. He had learned that on the very day he left, as you begin your return to a valley at the very moment you leave.

Even when it wasn't the season, he often went back up to that empty place because everything led him back to that wall, he thought, to the first wet sand he ever saw, and to that jetty that was neither land nor sea.

As he approached the row of buildings on his way home one evening, he saw the bulldozers. They had already removed a brick floor and unearthed a section of rusted pipes. He could see yellow compacted sand and spindly roots. He watched small antennaed animals use their internal compasses to make their way back to the sea.

The children had poured the sand all over the sidewalk.


In the foyer of his building, he felt sand crunch under his soles, and in the elevator the greasy grains filled the grooves in the metal floor. Before entering his apartment, he wiped his shoes thoroughly on the doormat. Once inside, he took them off and then went to shake his socks over the trash can.

He got in the shower. The bathroom floor quickly got sandy, too. The water ran over his body and took with it the sand and the soap and everything else that was not of him. He took care to wash between his fingers. As he dried himself, he stood before the glass door that faced out toward the dunes. He couldn't see the water from there, hidden as it was by the other buildings and by the dunes and trees. Every so often, though, he could sense the sea exhaling as a gust of sea spray hit the glass. Then all was still again for a few moments.

Without enthusiasm, but as if to free himself from the idea of something he had no choice but to remember, he went to the bookcase in search of the writings of a Ligurian writer who had spent ages pondering about light. He ended up with a different poem, "Archaeologist of my days I exhume," but he well knew how books liked to play tricks on their readers.

He got dressed and slid the glass door open. He went out onto the balcony.

From the door, he could see the lighthouse's beacon sweeping over the dunes. The fog had descended, and approaching ships signaled their arrival with distant sounds, like animals out to graze.

It wasn't too cold out. That was the thing. That night, it still wasn't too cold. 

Marino Magliani is a narrator and a translator. He was born in Liguria and lives in the Netherlands. He writes novels, short stories, and scripts. His works have been translated into several languages. His short story *Sabbia (Sand)* won the prestigious "Grenzen-Frontiere" prize. It has been translated into Polish and German.

Nine Years, Three Months, and Twenty-Two Days

By Sarah Kimber

For fear of startling him, I am careful not to visit him when he is younger than fourteen. He doesn't seem to notice when I am a year or two younger than the age that I am in his timeline, and I am careful not to sound any alarms. I choose phrases that I might've spoken a year or so ago. Future conversations are always more difficult, and I try to avoid them. You see, he does not know that I have come to him, travelling through time as though it is a highway between us. He does not know that I am nineteen when I talk him out of sitting shotgun to a drunk driver on the night of Junior Prom. He does not know that the version of me watching him graduate university is sixteen, blurry as I am in the crowd, unaware that he's actually looking out at twenty-year-old me. He has known me in so many stages of my strange life without ever really knowing me at all. I myself cannot fully understand the mystery of my travels.

Tonight is two years, seven months, and four days ago. I watch him pace back and forth, back and forth. He is hesitating outside of a doorway that opens out to a stairwell that he will take three flights up to a burgundy door labeled 4D. This will be the first night that he cheats on me. Twenty-one-year-old me will be asleep in her floral grey bedding, pristine before the red wine flows and stains in one month and thirteen days from this moment, in the old apartment across town and on the other side of the valley. Twenty-three-year-old me is obscured in the canopy of the dark, pressed against the red brick wall that lines this other girl's street. I watch him gaze down at his phone once more, longer than necessary given the black screen; he is contemplative. Then, in a flash, he presses it to his ear, and somewhere, approximately eight blocks west and three blocks north, my younger self sleeps through the sound of his attempted call. It's 1:37 a.m., and without another look, he places his phone back in his jean pocket and slips soundlessly behind that fateful door.

I watch with less emotion than I expect. The wound is old and proves to be well-healed. It begins to drizzle, seemingly out of nowhere, just as I recalled it would, and I bring out my plain black umbrella that so many people gazed at questioningly on the subway, given the sunny disposition of the spring day. As I open it, the light in apartment 4D's window goes out, and I think about the tearful conversation that will occur in one year and eight days from now. I picture how his skin will burn red, how his fingers will hopelessly reach for me, and how his eyes will puff and flow with regret. A regret that, no matter which version of myself stands before him, I will never fully trust the sincerity of. I have seen years' worth of lies steeped in those pale baby blues. I can't romanticize them. But sincere or not, in just over a year from this moment of standing outside of apartment 4D, he will grasp the hand of my younger self and he will ask for a mercy that I will spend the next half decade trying to muster.

First, however, I must watch it all unfold at the precipice with this night. I stand there, and I fight the rainwater that is driving the blood from my toes while I try not to count the seconds that he is there with her - touching, kissing, and caressing her for the first time; running his fingers through her long golden hair for the first time; and falling asleep between her sheets for the first time. Only for me, as I stand there cloaked in night, it is the second time, and I go through these emotions with a wisdom and maturity that neither he nor I possess at this moment, in his present.

It will be five hours before he reemerges from her building. Two years and thirty-two days from this night, when we are once again fighting a war between truth and lies, he will say that he never stayed the night, as if the weight of his betrayal rests in that single detail alone. Two years and thirty-two days from now, I will have to bite my tongue when the knowledge of this falsehood threatens to boil and scald from my lips and rip into his ears. Because when he steps into the early morning light, breaking the horizon of the city, he does not recognize his girl from the future, not

when in so many ways, he has not met her yet. From my hiding spot beneath this battered umbrella, I am both a ghost from his past and a whisper of his future. But not for long.

With a deft swiftness, I cast the umbrella into the street gutter. Six months from now, I will pass a homeless man on the street, cowered beneath the umbrella's slick, raven-wing protection. For now, I follow this boy who will grow into the man who I can't seem to walk away from, no matter what timeline I find him in. Keeping in line with his steps, we reach the bridge over the river that slices this city in two. He slows and then eventually stops, leaning against the railing as if he has suddenly become too heavy for his legs to carry. I wonder if his guilt has a quantifiable weight, and without meaning to, I am reaching for him as if I can share his burden. He turns at the feeling of my palm on his slumped shoulders, and suddenly I am aware that I have broken my rules. I have just been decidedly uncaring, and I expect his face to be brimming with questions that I won't be able to answer. But instead, there is a haunted look on his face, and he does not take note of the clothes on my body that, at this point in our relationship, should be unrecognizable to him. He does not realize that my hair is longer than what rests upon my twenty-one-year-old shoulders in his time. In this moment, he sees only me, and my age or time doesn't matter when my weak greeting of "hey" slips from between my lips, because suddenly I am in his arms and he is cradling me as if I will break apart if not held just so. I breathe in his scent, and this is why I've come. It does not matter that in nine years, three months, and twenty-two days, his hands will assume this same embrace with his tall blonde bride, because here and now, in this moment from nearly two and a half years ago, he smells of mint and Tide detergent, mixed with morning dew and brimming river water that are both mossy and fresh. This is the best smell in the world when it comes straight from the source at the crook of his neck.


He attempts to pull back from me. He starts with the words: "I need to tell you something." But I already know, and I have the benefit of nearly three years' efforts at forgiveness, while the girl

that is sleeping, so blissfully ignorant, the girl that is both me and not me yet, the girl that is two years, seven months, four days, and one river away, does not know. I need no reminding that the words he's about to speak are meant for her, and that she will desperately need to hear them, while I most certainly do not need to hear them again. So, I shush him softly, and I pull him closer, bringing that delirium-inducing scent back to me once more, and I whisper gently in his ear: "You'll tell me later." Because I know he will. One year and eight days later, he does.

After, he goes home to shower and gets ready for the minimum wage job that he's too good for. I don't have a home here, not anymore. That old apartment of ours is sheltering twenty-one-year-old me from the harsh realities that lie in her near future. It is not meant for twenty-three-year-old me. So, I go to a quaint white chapel on a gorgeous June day nine years, three months, and twenty-two days from that dawn by the river. I am in the same soggy black clothes; I leave a water trail where I walk. The feeling is still gone from my toes despite the summer sun and warm celebratory atmosphere. His hands are at the small of her back, and I know exactly how she feels beneath them. He reaches up, twirling a strand of corn-silk hair between his fingertips. He closes his eyes softly. I don't think he even realizes that a small smile is settling upon his lips. The wet rubber of my shoe squeaks on the church's linoleum floor, and he looks up. His eyes are meeting mine and I can see the flash of memory, of guilt, and of a sleepy river in April, but mostly, I can see the recognition of the girl he once loved. And I smile at him. This is why I came, because in this moment I know once and for all that I would not change a thing. Not that night outside of apartment 4D that I have just revisited, or the seven hundred and sixty two days that followed. And I can go back six years, nine months, and nineteen days knowing that it is okay to love this man, because no matter how far into the future I dip, I always do. But this moment, in this chapel, nearly a decade down the road for me, is not about me and him. We don't belong to it. To him, I am not even really here. I

watch his eyes flutter, and he blinks hard as though I am a piece of dust caught in his eye. I am just a memory to him. I know it is time to go.

I fall back. I am twenty-three in both my timeline and his. We will break up in four hundred and eighty-seven days. He is already asleep in our bed. I throw my now damp clothes in the hamper and crawl between the sheets with him to feel his skin against mine. In a half-sleep, he puts his arm around me and kisses my hair. I know things that he does not know yet, and I know things that he will never know, but there in the darkness, I tell him everything in a whisper while he is shielded with dreams.

I don't know this yet, but eighteen years and fourteen hours from now, long after we have put an end to the deceiving and the fighting, we will meet again, and he will ask me if I want to hear a secret, at which point he will lean into me once more, tuck my hair behind my ear, only to replace it with his lips, and he will breathe so silently that I can't be sure that I really hear it: "I remember everything." And I will lose track of how many times I return to this moment in search of his meaning. 

Sarah Kimber is a manic daydreamer, probably off writing a poem somewhere. Living in Toronto because some kid named Drake once called it a cool place, she has a poetry collection entitled "La Vie En Rose (and other lies)." You can find more of her published works at sarahkimber.com.

Moonstruck Lily

By Bonnie Fraher

Violet's first sip of morning coffee scorched her tongue like a branding iron. She set the cup down on the kitchen counter and started rifling through the freezer for an ice cube. It was only six, but the day was already off to a bad start. She'd slept through three snooze alarms, spilled milk all over the kitchen floor, tripped over the laundry basket, and walked her smelly old dog around the block in the pouring spring rain. But fortunately, it was Friday, and she had the luxury of working from home.

She climbed the stairs to her second-floor office and sat down at her computer desk. Summoning her inner Zen, she lit a stick of incense and began writing out Easter cards to mail to her relatives back east. The window was cracked open a quarter of an inch—just enough to hear the glorious sound of pelting raindrops. Down at the street level, the front yard was a riot of yellow daffodils and pink magnolia trees with their petals downcast, all defenseless against the heavy downpour.

Violet opened her address book. The first card was for Rosie, the eldest of the five Metcalf sisters, all of whom were named after flowers by their barefoot hippie parents. The second born was Dahlia, then Violet, Iris, and finally Lily. At the mere thought of Lily, Violet sat back in her chair and sighed. At length, her eyes came to rest on the windowsill where a housefly had landed. It rubbed its agitated wings together, desperate to escape the confines of the room. Violet could certainly commiserate with the poor, flustered insect. Her own heartbeat was quickening, her chest tightening with angst over her younger sister's naive life choices. Lifting the screen to usher the fly out, she willed herself to remain calm. After all, Lily was a grown woman, entitled to live her life as she saw

fit, even if that meant occasional domestic abuse or financial swindling by a pathetic succession of fly-by-night lovers.

Tall and quite gorgeous, Lily was still in her early twenties. She had long brunette hair, sparkling green eyes, and a vast wasteland between her ears. Resentful of anyone who tried to offer advice, she didn't trust her own siblings, yet she repeatedly let herself get hoodwinked by men. Two years ago, she brought a grungy guy named Joe to the annual Metcalf family barbecue. Soon, there was a deafening whine of motorcycle engines. His entire gang had invaded the family get-together, parking on people's lawns and pissing on their prize azalea bushes. The neighbors were so irate that they called the police, and the party was effectively ruined. The following December, Lily invited her wintertime beau, Max, to Christmas dinner. Chestnuts were roasting in the open fireplace when he showed up plastered. He sucked down three glasses of eggnog, bumped into the Christmas tree, and accidentally knocked it into the blazing yule log, setting the house on fire. Lily never saw him again, but their aging hippie parents sold the damaged house "as is" and retired to a condo in Florida.

Now, Lily had a new boyfriend named Tyler. Violet had only met him once so far. He seemed aloof, maybe a bit lonely, but since he didn't reek of alcohol or motor oil, she figured she'd give him the benefit of the doubt. His birthday was at the end of April. As a surprise, Violet decided to mail him a birthday card from the box of generic greeting cards she'd picked up at Walgreen's. Perhaps this little token of familial sunshine would be a nice way to make him feel special. She gathered the cards in a pile, stamped and sealed them, but she still needed his zip code. So, she fired up the computer, brought up a search engine, and entered his address. Five clicks later, she found herself yelling, "Holy shit!" at the top of her lungs. The dog awoke from his slumber, yawned, and went back to sleep. Violet spent the next hour urgently researching what she'd found, careful not to jump to conclusions. A recent article entitled *The Jensen Murders: Revisited* had links to archived material from the *Hartford Courant*. When she had enough data, she called her sister.

“Lily!” she cried, her heart pounding, “You have to get away from Tyler! He’s a murderer and a druggie. He’s dangerous! You can come here to Kentucky if you want to. Just get as far away from him as you can!”

Lily laughed, “Kentucky? Why would I want to go *there*?”

“Now is not the time for jokes,” exclaimed Violet, panting for air. “Your life is at stake!”

“Jeez, Violet,” Lily said calmly, “don’t be so dramatic.”

Violet couldn’t believe her ears. “*I’m* being dramatic? You’re dating a criminal!”

Lily blew her off, saying, “Chill out, sister. I already know all about it.”

“What?” Violet was stunned. “You know about it? You know about him killing his mother and brother in cold blood? He tried to rob them! He stabbed them with a butcher knife, right next to the TV in their living room!”

Lily’s voice was matter-of-fact, as if she’d been long-prepared for the confrontation. “I know, I know, yada, yada, yada. He told me everything.”

“And you’re still with him? Are you nuts?” Violet was nearly hysterical.

“No, Sis,” said Lily. “I’m not nuts. Don’t be so judgmental. Ty didn’t kill his family. It was his cousin Alton who did it.”

“Cousin *Alton*? That’s not what I read.”

“Well, Alton was the real murderer, but he died a week later.”

Violet scoffed, “How convenient.”

“Don’t be snippy, Violet,” Lily chastised. “Tyler was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. The cops needed someone to take the rap, so he got all the blame. Besides, Ty says the judge was prejudiced against him because he didn’t like his haircut.”

“What? You can’t be serious.”

“That’s what he told me.”

“And you believe him?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” said Lily. “He’s always been sweet to me. Yesterday, he bought me an Easter basket full of jellybeans and Peeps. He’s always telling me I’m pretty. And he even helped a duckling cross the road the other day.”

“Well, I hope the duckling liked his haircut.”

“Don’t get nasty or I’ll hang up on you.”

Violet took a deep breath. “Listen to me, Lily. Was Tyler’s ‘cousin Alton’ sick? What did he die of?”

“Blunt force trauma to the head.”

“And nobody found that suspicious?”

“Not according to Tyler. He said that Alton was in a gang and that he had lots of enemies.”

Violet let out an exasperated sigh. “Lily, read the articles. There’s a huge amount of evidence: blood spatter on the walls, money taken from his mom’s account, the gory butcher knife found hidden under Tyler’s bed. His homicide trial lasted six months. He was convicted by a unanimous jury. He spent fifteen years in a federal prison!”

Lily said flippantly, “That’s the past—water under the bridge.”

“And you don’t feel threatened?”

“Nope. He said he didn’t do it, so what’s the big deal? Why don’t you focus on your own problems, Violet? Maybe you should stop wagging your big fat tongue and wash that stupid dog of yours.”

There was a long pause during which Violet unwrapped a milk chocolate rabbit, bit its head off, and chewed out loud. At length she insisted, “I’m running out of patience with you, Lily. Just go online and research it for yourself. Then you’ll see what I mean.”

“I don’t need to,” Lily replied. “I already told you—I believe him. He has no reason to lie. It’s not as if he’s trying to wheedle money out of me, although I did lend him twenty grand as a startup for the tech business he wants to open. You’re just jealous because I have a man who loves me when all you have is your long-lost Special Forces husband and your four-legged friend. And besides, even if Tyler *were* guilty—which he’s not—he’s already paid his dues. Fifteen years is long enough! Why should he be shunned for the rest of his life over something that happened decades ago?”

“Because it could happen again.”

“How could it happen again? His mother and brother are already dead.”

“Don’t get cute, Lily. I’m trying to warn you.”

“I don’t need your warning. Mind your own business.”

Violet said pointedly, “Well, maybe you won’t listen, but I still need to notify the rest of our family. They’re in danger.”

Lily let out a panicked cry, “Don’t do that! I don’t want people talking behind my back. If you’re going to spill the beans, at least have everyone talk to ME about it!”

“Lily,” Violet grumbled, “how did you live with this nasty secret for so long? Didn’t it eat away at you?” She watched the dog get up, turn around three times, and lie back down. Dogs are puzzling creatures, but they do provide comic relief, especially when one’s sister is dating a homicidal maniac.

Lily cleared her throat. “Why should it bother me? I always figured that, eventually, some busybody in the family would start snooping around. In fact, I’m surprised it took *this* long. But Tyler told me he’ll sit down and explain the truth to anyone who wants to know.”

“You mean anyone who’s willing to listen to his bullshit story.” Violet tossed the rest of the chocolate rabbit into the trash bin.

That remark pushed Lily's buttons. She yelled, "Keep your conspiracy theories to yourself, Violet. You can believe whatever you choose to believe, but I'm NOT stupid and I'm NOT crazy. I wouldn't stay with a man who wasn't one hundred percent good to me. And, as for any sins he may have committed, everyone deserves to be forgiven. Isn't that why Jesus died on the cross?"

"What if he snaps?" Violet shrieked. "What if he murders you in your sleep?"

"Gotta go," said Lily. "I'm at work. The world doesn't stop turning just because *you* happen to be paranoid."

After hanging up, Violet started pacing back and forth in her office. Good thing she was self-employed, because not one iota of work was getting done. There was too much to ponder. Did Tyler deserve redemption, or was he a ticking time bomb? How apropos that this would happen at Easter, with all the emphasis on renewal and forgiveness. Was she being too harsh? Might Tyler actually be innocent? Thunder cracked. The lights flickered on and off. Was this a sign? She glanced out the window at the rain that fell in sheets on the pavement. Across the street, the wind rippled a red-and-white-striped patio umbrella. The *Lexington Herald-Leader* lay at the curb, drenched and sodden.

Doing her duty, Violet picked up the phone and dialed everyone in the family who needed to be warned about Tyler. Lily had knowingly exposed her loved ones to a violent felon without informing them, and they deserved better.

An hour later, the phone rang. It was Lily, and she was irate. "Violet, who do you think you are?"

"I'm your sister, that's who. I'm trying to protect you—it's a highly frustrating job."

"You have a lot of nerve, spreading lies about Tyler."

"Lies? Snap out of it, Lily. You need to get away from him. The sooner, the better!"

Lily's voice was shrill. "And you need to stop yakking behind my back."

“Well,” Violet said sharply, “here’s a revelation for you. If I hadn’t sounded the alarm to the family, I wouldn’t have a lot of new information that *isn’t* ‘water under the bridge.’ For instance, I wouldn’t know that you have a gigantic purple bruise on your leg from ‘falling in the shower.’ I wouldn’t know about the stitches on your lower lip that you got last month, or the fact that Tyler crashed your car when he was drunk. I wouldn’t know about the track marks on his arm, and I wouldn’t know that he tried to shake Mom and Dad down for money. —Oh, and there’s one more thing: he’s cheating on you.”


“Cheating on me?” Lily sounded crestfallen. “With that uppity blue-haired bitch from work?”

“Yes. That’s what I heard.”

“I knew it,” Lily fumed. “She’s been texting Ty and calling him a million times a day. He’s a low-down, rotten son-of-a-bitch! I’m never talking to him again for as long as I live!”

“So, let me get this straight,” said Violet. “You don’t mind that he murdered his family and stole from them and did all those other horrible things, but cheating is where you draw the line?”

“Shut up, Violet,” said Lily. “It doesn’t concern you.” Then she hung up.

Violet stood up and stretched, her triumphant smile broadening into a wide grin. Walking over to pet her wonderfully stinky dog, she started laughing out loud, not because anything was particularly funny, but because she’d finally found a way to take Lily’s blinders off. The apple cart was on its side, going over a cliff. Tyler was bad news, but having a cheating boyfriend was Lily’s Achilles heel. She’d be safe for now, at least until another unsavory character came along. Violet tore Tyler’s birthday card into shreds, opened the window on the gale, and sent every last bit flying into the storm. 

Bonnie Fraher is the author of a post-apocalyptic novel, *Chilled to the Bone*. Her short stories have appeared in *Wood Coin*, *Terror House*, *Verdad*, and the *Blue Moon Literary and Arts Review*. A former educator, she holds a Master's degree from Rutgers University and a B.A. from the University of California at Santa Cruz. Bonnie resides in Connecticut with her husband, two children, and their maddening collection of pets.

The Friday Oracle

By Corinna Feierabend

One week after our first and only talk, I lost my job. The workday had started off badly already, with a petty wrangling for the privilege of who can and cannot copy in the administrative copying room. Apparently not me, a language teacher at the conservatory, as a certain male colossus, whom I'd never seen before, let me know with an undisguised hostility. Yet, over the past five years, I had reproduced my teaching materials without any problems in this room. Now, this lout, who looked like he was about to leave his stale accountant's office for the first time in days, sent me to the public copier, which never worked in the mornings, at the other end of the building, just three minutes before the start of the class. Maybe he wants to feel something again and is looking for a fight, I thought. The information that my teaching contract should not be extended coalesced a few hours later in the hissing foam of this working day. To this day, I am convinced that my oracle was first proven true on that very Friday.

Daily horoscopes, making a wish, or the eyelash blown away with a wish – they're all the same depending on my needs and mood. I sometimes piece together items from a kit of beliefs and superstitions and make them my personal omens for particular situations or days. My favorite makeshift oracle was on Friday mornings for some years, when I took the subway to this job. I always got off at a stop where many students and teachers, as well as television, business and radio employees, left the train. Most of the time, at the station exit, there was a friendly gray-haired accordion player who probably came from Russia.


With time, I got used to him, and at some point, while still sitting in the train, I began to think: IF he's there AND he plays AND I have a Euro for him in his coat pocket, THEN it'll be a good working day. From then on, getting off the train every Friday became a moment of anticipation

because I was looking forward to the player and his music. Listening, I walked along the platform. Because of the wind from the trains leaving or coming in, I was disappointed until I reached the ground level and heard the delicate tones of his songs. But if, then ... I had no idea what he was playing, but the wistful sounds always touched me and made me strangely happy. And on a really good day, he even sang in a harsh, gentle voice in Russian to his tunes in a minor key, with a cigarette holder in the corner of his mouth. I loved this moment: emerging from the dark underground tomb to see the old, skinny musician sitting in the drafty corner, his green eyes shining in the morning light.

Many passersby like me have known him for a long time. In his instrument case were coins and individual cigarettes, sometimes a biscuit or a bun, and in the winter, mostly mandarins or a piece of sweets. Often, he talked to passersby while smoking and playing soft notes on the accordion. Sometimes, he would set it aside to help carry a pram up the stairs or to fool around with a child. If I passed him in such a moment, I didn't put a coin in the suitcase. I don't know why. Maybe because I'm performance oriented and I pay only when I get something in return for my money? Or was it because of my loyalty to my oracle?

Last winter, I didn't meet the old man for weeks. I was worried about him because he and his music were missing on Fridays, even though everything went smoothly on those days. When he was finally back at his regular place, I felt elated and said more than "Good morning - Have a nice day!" to him for the first time. With a rolling accent, he told me about his illness and the medications he had to take, but in the end, in order to get well, he desperately wanted to return to this place at the subway station, which meant freedom for him. Meekly, I remained silent, without telling him anything about my makeshift oracle, although it was already on the tip of my tongue. It suddenly appeared unseemly. His eyes gleamed happily as he talked about his "work," which he practiced here, humming softly on his green iridescent accordion. In that very moment, I was sure he was

playing just for me, so I put a Euro in his box. The rest of the day could not have been better. Everything went well.

The following week, the player was not sitting in his place at the subway exit. It was the last Friday that I got off there to go to work. Sometimes, I still remember the lost job that I had liked but did not miss. I still think often of the old man in front of the station playing his music, and the moments of uncertain auspices. 

Note: This submission was originally written in German. It was translated into English by Ida Spada.

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Corinna Feierabend, who lives in Hamburg, Germany, works as a freelance journalist and teaches German and German as a foreign language. She writes short stories, poetry and book reviews for a local bookstore. In 2017, a short story of hers was published in *Hamburger Ziegel*, a literary yearbook. Corinna holds an M.A. in French and German Literature.

Marlon, the Method, and Me

By Jonathan Gotsick

It was at the beginning of the summer, when Chauncey started calling himself the Ham Dog, that our relationship turned into a pile of double-dump dodgeball. I'd asked him a simple question, about where his favorite place in the shopping center to eat was, and he said, "The Ham Dog digs Chipotle." At first, I thought he was joking because the line came out so cool and all, but as he filled my thermos with mint French decaf, he didn't even crack a smile.

"The Ham Dog?" I said. "Really?"

Chauncey set my coffee on the counter and took the dollar I'd left there. "Does little Julester have a problem?" he said.

Little Julester? Yeah, right, as if being the shortest kid in fifth grade even bothered me. "Excuse me?" I said. "Who's the one with the problem?"

He tried to make some smart comment then, but I cut him off big time. "Your name is Chauncey Hampton, dude. You work at Barnes & Noble, in the *coffee bar*, and you're not even in college yet. You're not the Ham Dog. You're a dork."

Chauncey snorted a fake chuckle that made me want to jump over the counter and rip the Lenscrafters Specials right off his face. "The Julester's insults don't mean squat to the Ham Dog," he said. "She's gonna have to try harder next time."

"You wish," I said.

"*She* wishes," he said back.

The way he talked about me instead of *to* me, using the wrong pronouns or whatever, was a quirky Chauncey habit I thought was kind of cool at first, but after hearing it for an entire school year, it had become stale and annoying, like day-old hazelnut decaf. The Ham Dog thing was even

worse, and the whole situation just struck me as sad. Here was Chauncey, sixteen years old—a full five and a half years older than me—and yet I was the mature one out of the two of us. That might work for young lovers in Lexington, Kentucky, but once we were married, walking the red carpets of Hollywood as a dashing studio executive husband and an Oscar-winning wife, it was probably going to become an issue.

I grabbed my Frenchy refill and pocketed the nickel Chauncey had given me with my receipt. Usually, I put it in his tip jar (which was just a paper cup with the words *Change is Good* written on it by yours truly), but he was being such a two-ply dill-rod that I didn't want to reward him. He acted like he didn't notice my insult, checking his phone instead like he was Professor Important or something. But rather than play his childish mind games, I walked back to my corner table and dealt with things maturely. For two solid minutes, I tried to set Chauncey on fire with my eyes, staring at his face as if I had ultra-human laser-vision, trying to burn the Ham Dog right out of him. I zeroed in on his best feature—his perfectly symmetrical nostrils—and then on his worst—the rust-colored lip-hairs that he called a mustache—until I suddenly saw smoky vapors drifting out from under his hat. I started to have a combination aneurysm/heart attack/bowel movement, along with a real bad need for my Mom to show up and finally take me home. Then Chauncey moved sideways a little, and the vapors turned out to be steam from a coffeemaker instead of smoke from his skull. My symptoms cleared up instantly, and I was happy and relieved for both of us, especially Chauncey. Even though he'd been working my nerves, I didn't actually want to kill him. I just wanted him to feel the life-giving emotional heat of my complete and undivided attention.

Emotional heat—life-giving and otherwise—was pretty much my specialty at the time. For two straight weeks, I'd worked on it at Junior Talent Drama Camp, and I'd gotten to the point where I could make some of the eight and nine-year-olds burst out in tears just by staring at them. This tended to get me in trouble with dork counselors like Judith and Fat Chad, who would send me off

to organize props while they comforted the weaklings, but I really didn't care. Their credits were mostly college shows and lame one-acts, whereas my primary counselor, Ursula Reneé, had done a regional commercial for Mountain Dew Red, and said I had star power oozing out my wazoo.

Ursula Reneé was the one who taught me about Method acting, and for that, I'll owe her forever. It's this whole magical system—one my lame drama teacher at Fayette Elementary never heard of, apparently—that gives actors the ability to turn themselves into their characters by thinking really, really hard about what makes them and their characters feel the same. Like if I played a character that liked to eat bugs, I could imagine I was eating s'mores instead, and since I really do love s'mores, the audience would see somebody who loves eating bugs! I wouldn't be acting at all!

Before Ursula Reneé taught me about the Method, I'd been acting on sheer brilliance alone, like Kristy McNichol or Sir Lawrence Olivier. And I'd never even heard of Marlon Brando, who was one of the first guys to make the Method popular back in the days of black-and-white. He's dead now, but Ursula Reneé said that when Marlon Brando was alive, he changed acting forever because he didn't even seem like he was acting. He was just open and sensitive, doing his thing, alive on the stage or the screen.

The more I thought about it, the more I knew that Ursula Reneé was right. I had more talent in my little finger than Fat Chad had in his whole big butt, but I wasn't really acting; I was just playing pretend. Going to Junior Talent Drama Camp was cool, Ursula Reneé said at the end of Week 1, but how far did I want to go with my acting? Did I have any kind of plan?

I thought about it a lot between Week 1 and Week 2, and the plan I came up with was simple: learn as much as I can from Ursula Reneé during camp; throw in some fencing, horseback riding, and cigarette smoking lessons as needed; and then elope in the West with Chauncey at the end of the summer. We would get married in Utah (where the laws about child brides are supposedly super-progressive), and then move to a mansion in Los Angeles with a panoramic view of the whole sparkly

city. Chauncey would stay busy working on his abs and growing his hair blonde, and I'd make five movies a year for the rest of my life, and basically tell Meryl Streep to go wait in the car.

I decided not to share the plan with Chauncey until Junior Talent Drama Camp was over. I wanted to take him out so he could buy me dinner and have the news sound like a scene from a movie, *Chauncey's Payday Surprise*. Every day for the next week, while I waited for my Mom, I sipped my French decaf and doodled pictures of Chauncey's head sticking out of my suitcase. I felt sort of bad about keeping his future a secret from him, but somehow, Chauncey seemed tragically cuter in his ignorance, like a puppy on its way to be neutered, so I knew I was doing the right thing. Finally, when Chauncey's shift was almost over on Friday afternoon, the time had arrived. Camp was done. Ursula Renéé and I were officially best friends on Facebook. The Ham Dog's favorite restaurant was Chipotle. He'd buy us burritos and I'd unveil his new life.

I was getting ready to make my approach, to be in the moment but still remember what to say, when Penny J. Sears walked into the store, and my Method antennae—which I hardly even knew I had—went totally ballistic and bananas. Everything about her was big and stupid and sassy and dumb: her butt-crack cleavage and white V-neck shirt, and her straight blonde hair and black tote-bag purse. Chauncey saw her just like I did. His eyeballs stayed pinned on her as she cruised past the book displays and went into Music & Video. She disappeared behind a rack of DVDs, and Chauncey finally served the customer, some gross old drooling guy who had eyeballed Penny, waiting in line.

The Method is what made me get up and follow Penny. I've thought about it ever since, and I'm sure that it's true. I had an impulse and I acted on it. I was open to every moment, just like Marlon Brando. I didn't need to steer the action because the action was steering me. I stopped behind a magazine rack across from Music & Video and slowly looked around. Penny was browsing through videos, casually reading their descriptions and then putting them back, sort of plucking at the plastic

as if she was picking a scab. And then—one zillion percent sly—she slipped a video in her purse and started walking away. No sirens went off, no clerk flagged her down. She was cooler than cool, and she even tossed a wave to Chauncey's eyeballs as she walked out the door.

By now, I totally felt like I was acting in a movie. Cat and mouse, cloak and dagger, me and Penny J. Boobs. She walked past Old Navy and Shoe Land and a bunch of other stores, and I trailed along after her, keeping my distance so she wouldn't know I was there. I made sure I breathed because, according to Ursula Reneé, a lot of people stop breathing when they're acting, and while somehow it doesn't kill them or make them pass out, it clogs them up emotionally so they don't have full access to their instrument. They end up like guitar players without hands, just banging away with their stumps, thumping out horrible out-of-tune twangs (Ursula Reneé didn't say that last part, but I'm sure she'd agree).

When Penny breezed into the Sephora makeup store, so much Method stuff was boiling in my head that it almost exploded. I had an objective: follow Penny. I had a complication: don't get caught. And I had an activity: browse through makeup. This last one would have interested Ursula Reneé. She'd have told me to really, actually look for something, for real. Once, when I did a scene from *The Flags of Betsy Ross*, she kept asking me if I was *really* sewing the flag, or if I was just acting like I was.

I don't usually wear makeup unless I'm on stage, but I've seen some of the stuff my Mom buys, so I knew exactly what I'd look for: *Natural At Night Sexy & Sultry Neutral Eye Shadow*. I started looking for it while trying to keep an eye on Penny at the same time, and man, was it hard! My attention was all over the place, and I was forgetting to breathe. I totally understood why Marlon Brando got fat and went baldish.

Finally, I found the stupid eye shadow, touched it just to make it official, and drifted back toward Penny in the lipstick aisle. She looked like any other shopper in the whole stupid store. *Do*

it, I was thinking to myself. *You know you want to*. And bam! Sure enough, just as I had thought it, she did it again. Didn't look up, didn't look down, didn't do anything at all, except slip a three-pack of lipstick into her purse and keep moving down the aisle without a care in the world. Afterward, she even tried on some eye shadow samples. Some poor, stupid employee girl applied it for free.

On the sidewalk outside, I hung back and kept trailing after Penny left Sephora. It seemed like she was headed all the way to the other end of the shopping center, but I really didn't have any way of knowing. I was anticipating instead of being in the moment, trying to push the scene in some predetermined direction instead of letting it run its course. Penny walked past Target and the Hallmark Store, and then she went into the sporting goods store that Chauncey said sucked possum nuggets. I stopped. I wasn't tired, but for some reason, I didn't go in.

Waiting outside the sporting goods store was harder than I thought it would be, even though there was more Method work to be done. I could relate to the environment and the situation and how I felt, but otherwise, it was just me standing behind a big brick pillar, peeking around at the entrance of a store. A few people walked in the store and a few people walked out, but they were basically extras without any lines, human props to make the scene look more real.

Penny was inside the store for what seemed like forever, but I could only think of one thing the whole time. Chauncey watched this girl's every movement when she came bouncing around, but what did he possibly see?

I was still behind the pillar when Penny walked out. I don't remember any impulse that made me step out onto the sidewalk, but that's what I did, and that's where I froze. It was like stepping onstage from behind a heavy black curtain, making my entrance two acts too soon.

Penny snapped her purse shut and took a step forward. "Can I help you?" she asked.

I knew that she didn't want to help me. That's what she was saying, but it wasn't what she meant. She walked up close to me and looked down into my eyes. Her eye shadow was the color of egg yolks. "Can. I. Help. You."

I stood there like a prop or a piece of the scenery. No lines. No words. No escape.

"You're that little girl from Barnes & Noble, aren't you?"

Somehow, thank goodness, I managed a nod.

"Have you been following me?" she said, tucking her purse up on her shoulder.

I nodded again. It was all I could do.

"What did you see?"

I shrugged.

Penny made a face like she smelled something nasty. "Chauncey told me you were weird. He was totally right."

When she turned to leave, I somehow managed to speak. It seemed like if I didn't, I might never again. "What's in your purse?" I said.

Penny stopped and moved closer, her attention completely on me. "Someday, you'll have your own purse, and then maybe you'll know."

"I want to see," I said. "I want to see, or else I'll tell all those stores."

"No—"

"I'll tell them to check their store cameras. And you'll be the star."

Penny stared at me, but I stayed right where I was. She took her purse off her shoulder and gave it to me. "If it's such a big deal, see for yourself."

I'd pawed through my Mom's purse dozens of times, and Penny's was pretty much the same. But I didn't want to see her stupid pocketbook or makeup or tampons or phone. I wanted to see what she'd stolen.

First, I found the lipstick. Out of all the stuff in Sephora... "Why lipstick?" I said.

Penny didn't want to be there at all. I was a waste of her time. She had places to go and people to see. The way she crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the wall said all that and way more. "Why not?" she answered. "Now, if you don't mind, I need to fucking go."

"You got other stuff."

"Oh, my God!" she huffed. She leaned down and stuck her hand in her purse. "This is for Chauncey," she snapped, pulling out a hacky-sack bag and throwing it to me. "He said he wanted red, but that's the best I could do."

I held the woven bag in my hand. It had weight but was light. Green, yellow, and black.

"And this is for my friend who you don't even know," Penny said, pulling out a DVD and putting it in my hand. "If you want to put in an order so we can forget this whole thing, I can probably hook you up, but only just once." She picked up her purse and put it back over her shoulder.

I looked at the DVD, and there was Marlon Brando on the cover. A chiseled, classic face. A piercing Method stare.

"What's your friend's name?" I said.

"You don't know her."

"What's her name?"

"As if it's any of your business. It's Ursula Renéé."

I handed the DVD back to Penny. "I'll give the hacky-sack to Chauncey. Tell Ursula Renéé some little girl said hello."

~

Chauncey was eating a sandwich from the food counter when I got back to the coffee bar and went to my table. His shift had ended, and he was sitting there with my backpack and my sketch pad

and my cold Frenchy refill, though a dozen other tables were completely free. "Where the heck did you go?" he said, chewing his food.

"Shopping."

"The Julester goes shopping? For what?"

From out of my Sephora bag, I pulled my purchase, a package of *Natural At Night Sexy & Sultry Neutral Eye Shadow*.


"Who's that for?"

"Me. And maybe my Mom. And *this* is for you." I took the hacky-sack out of the Sephora bag and set it on the table. "I wanted to get red, but this is the best I could do."

Chauncey looked at me like I had just become a magician, like I'd tricked him with some newly learned sleight of hand. "What's this for?"

"You're welcome, Ham Dog. I hope it's worth every penny."

By the time my Mom picked me up, I'd purchased a few more things at Barnes & Noble. I was never a big shopper, but it was a little bit like acting, I decided. It helped if I knew what I wanted when I shopped, but it was better if I stayed in the moment, open to any impulses that might arise.

Later that night, I wrote thank you cards to Judith and Fat Chad, and then I unwrapped my brand-new DVD. I watched *On the Waterfront* in the dark by myself, and at the end, when he staggered into that waterfront warehouse, bloodied and beaten but still standing, Marlon Brando became my new best friend. I decided that someday I'd win an Oscar, too. All the hard work and doubt and wondering would be worth it, even if I had to walk the red carpet alone. 

Jonathan Gotsick is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh's MFA program. His work has appeared in *The Drum Literary Magazine*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *The Adirondack Review*, and elsewhere.

The Cloths of Heaven

By Mark Mulholland

Delayed with pleasantries and exchanges, two suited university professors make a slow exit from the *Treading Softly –The Way Forward Symposium*. The bells strike the quarter hour as they push through a cooling drizzle. They arrive to a busy lunchtime campus cafeteria, load sustenance onto two plastic trays, and take aim for a vacant table by the far wall. On the short walk from counter to table, they pass the ecumenical assemblage of the regional religious. They nod a brief recognition to the collars and robes.

“I have it to tell you,” the beige suit says, when seated, “but what he said was that if the evidence eventually proved an earlier existence, he would admit to such but still not believe it.”

“Hah,” the grey suit says before closing his mouth around a loaded fork.

“What can we do with minds such as this?” the beige suit continues. “Faith poisons everything. It makes a damned fool of a scholar.”

“The dark heart of non-reason,” the grey suit says, nodding. “You can mend ignorance with education. You can reform malintent with treatment. You can even fix crazy with medicine. But you cannot fix stupid.”

“Toxic, it is,” beige says. “This grip to the hidden hand, this hapless subjugation below the magical sky-lord.”

“And the dumb beat goes on,” grey says. “The Imam said that when you die, you wake up. Bit bloody late, I’d say. Hell is the truth learnt too late.”

“Hence the mess,” beige says, digging his fork hard into his food. “Really. The plausibility of it...it’s evil and nothing but. Their dogma inhibits enquiry. It’s shameful.”

“Ah, yes,” grey agrees. “To define is to limit. Curiosity is God.”

“Hallelujah to that,” beige jumps in, and they both laugh.

“But it’s their assault that galls me most,” beige continues after a brief quiet moment of eating. “They attack to defend. Their hammer blows anaesthetic that sedates the flock.”

“True indeed,” grey agrees. “Nothing impedes reason like the absence of an enquiring mind. Myth, ritual, and ceremony are the conjurer’s allure. They lead only to confinement.”

The beige suit puts his knife and fork down and wipes his mouth with a paper napkin. And then, looking at his colleague, he speaks.

“Here’s my opinion,” Preacher who talks but doesn’t listen said.

“Well, thanks for sharing, Pastor,” I said, “but here is evolved logic and reason and evidence.

“And here again is my opinion,” Preacher who talks but doesn’t listen replied. “It’s laughable and infuriating all at once.”

“Isn’t that it in a nut-squeeze,” grey says. “You begin with enquiry, you go everywhere. You begin with belief, you go nowhere.”

“The audacious nonsense of it,” beige says, glancing across to the long table. “That they consider they alone hold the key, and that we, shorn of constraint, cannot be filled with the wonder of the stars and the magnitude of space and the beauty and complexity of life and love. Obnoxious.”

“The blue and the dim and the dark cloths,” grey recants.

“Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades?” beige says. “That’s what the Pastor accused. Or loosen the belt of Orion? Seriously, I mean, but what?”

“Hah,” the grey suit jumps in. “Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion.”

“Desperate and unfathomable,” beige continues. “The lofty pomposity of it. They’ve held civilisation back for too long.”

“But we, being poor, have only our dreams,” grey says. “We have spread our dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on our dreams.”

“Unforgivable,” beige agrees again.

“Bewilderment is not beyond the great and the good,” grey says, prodding a fork forward. “Newton believed himself to be exploring the glory of God’s mind. Go figure that.”


Beige goes to say something but doesn’t.

“We were guppy-lipped fish once,” grey continues, “sucking our world in and pushing it out through wispy gills. Perhaps some of us are more evolved and attuned to grasp the freedom of ground and air.”

“Oh yes,” beige jumps in again. “Padre Antonio over there, he swims with the fishes.” And once more, they both laugh.

“We should order something from the menu and send it over,” grey suggests. “A token of our appreciation. On the house, of course. The dish of the day, perhaps.”

“What’s that, then?” beige asks.

“Primordial soup,” grey spurts, and they both sit back and release a loud laugh. 

Mark Mulholland, through no fault of his own, was born and raised in Ireland. However, when fifteen, as luck would have it, he underwent a stroke of genius and left schooling to linger around a second-hand bookstore where he explored books by their cover or title or by some indefinable inclination. The whole world was to be found in that bookstore, he says, and everything a boy needed to learn could be learned there. He has been educated in this way ever since. Mark is the author of the acclaimed novel *A Mad and Wonderful Thing*. His short fiction has been published in the USA, the UK, Australia, France, Ireland, and India.

Visuals



The following pieces are created by Mario Loprete and were featured at the Dadada Museum, the first-ever museum on a beach. Mario is the first artist to be featured at the Dadada Museum. Per the museum curator Lara Caccia, Mario's "concrete sculptures" are an irreverent approach to the maritime environment. Through the 'concrete sculptures', it will be possible to make a new illuminating vision of the use of cement, which becomes a 'friend' of the territory and no longer a treacherous enemy."

Enjoy.

Note: The captions of the art are in Spanish and are not translated for this issue.

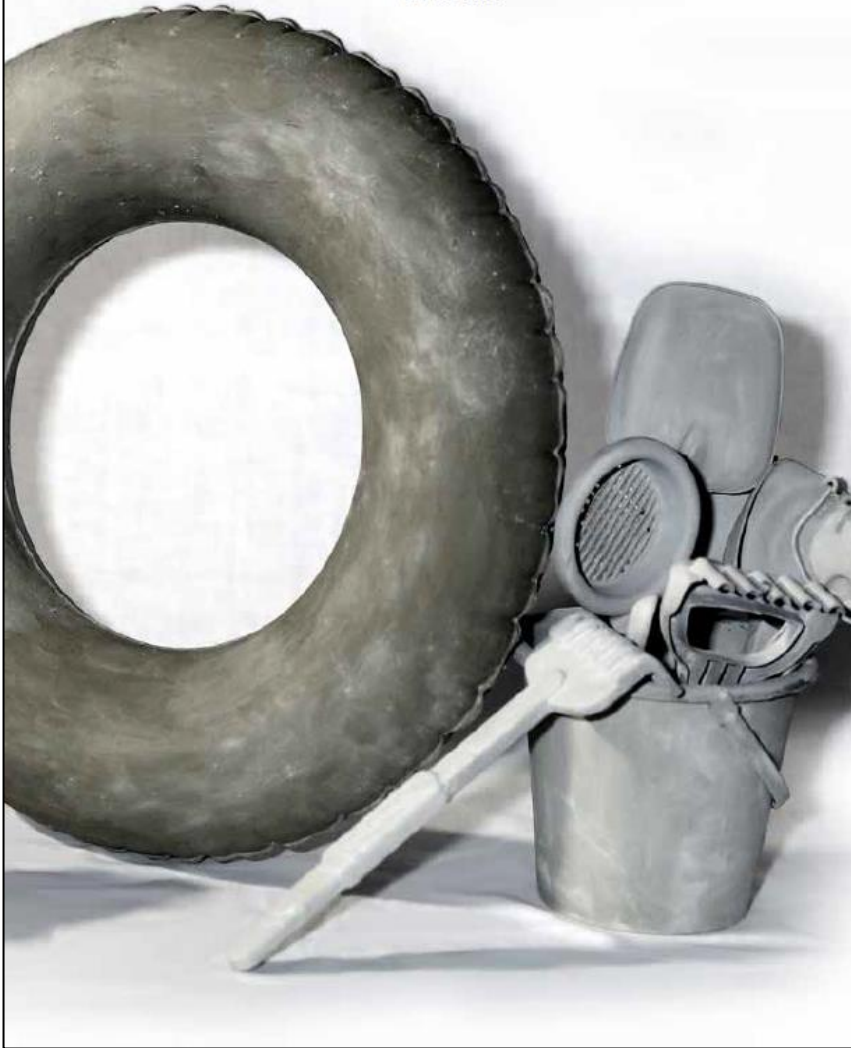
"Set da viaggio, trolley + espadrillas", Concrete Artwork,
cemento su materiali vari, abbandonati dal turista che ha
deciso di non tornare più a casa, estate 2016



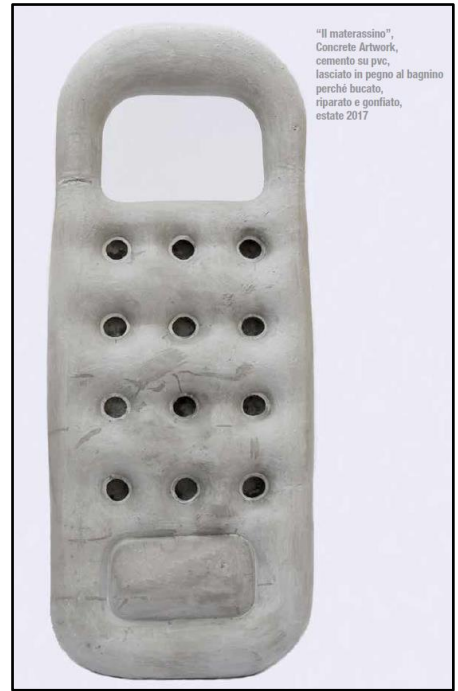
"Havajanas, bracciali & co", Concrete Artwork,
cemento su plastica e materiali vari,
ritrovamenti in spiaggia dopo la mareggiata di ottobre 2014



"Ciambella, secchiello e palette" Concrete Artwork, cemento su plastica e pvc, lasciati sotto l'ombrellone dal turista distratto, estate 2015.



"Il materassino", Concrete Artwork, cemento su pvc, lasciato in pegno al bagnino perché bucato, riparato e gonfiato, estate 2017



"Con le pinne, ciambella ed occhiali", Concrete Artwork, cemento su pvc e gomma, restituiti dalla mareggiata di settembre 2015



"Lettino e ombrellone. Daily set", Concrete Art installation, cemento su materiali vari, chiesti in prestito alla signora dell'ombrellone nr. 64, mai più restituiti (ora la Signora frequenta un altro lido)

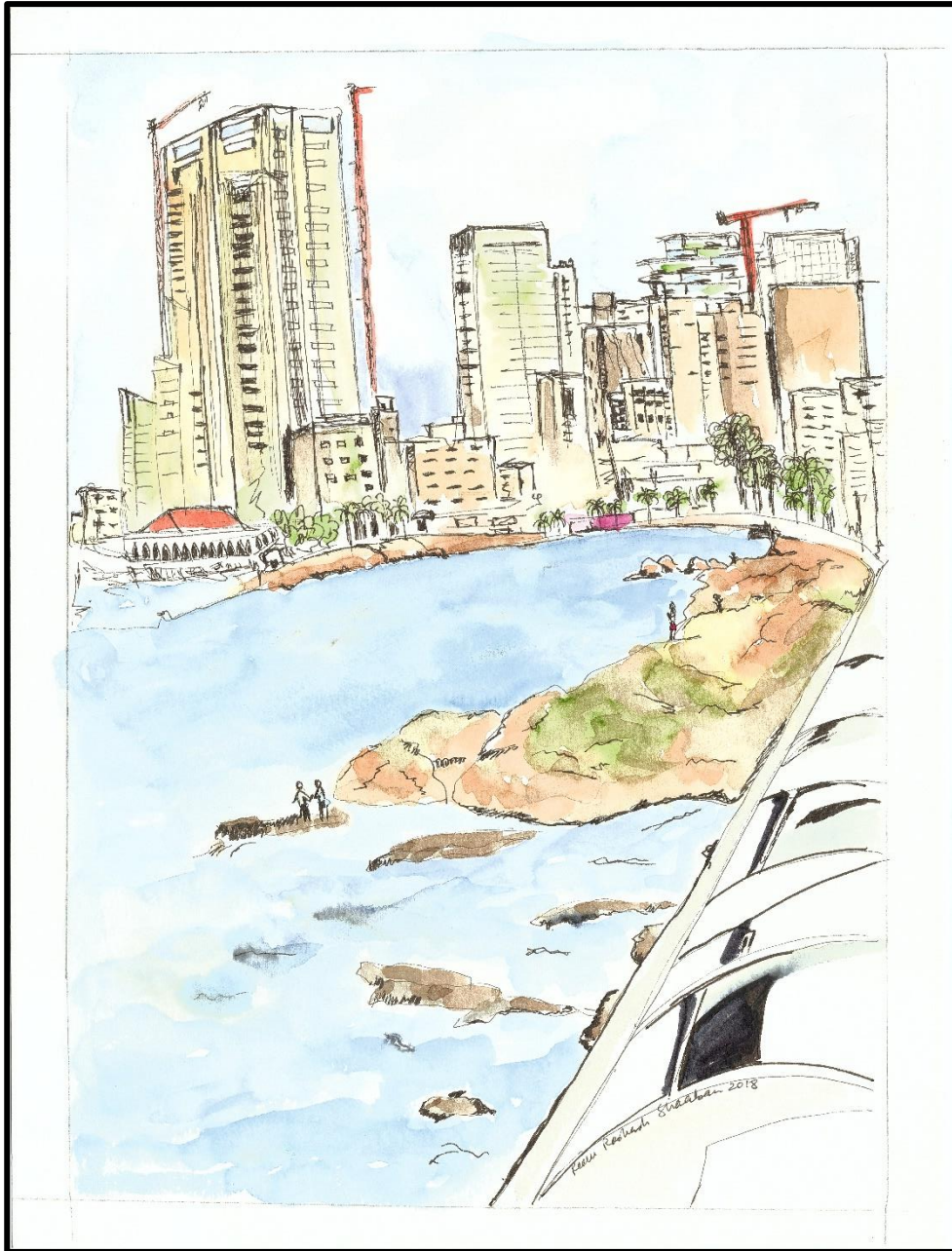


"Le formine di Andrea", Concrete Artwork, cemento su plastica, giochi per bambini abbandonati da Marco che non è più bambino, estate 2012.



GHIACCIOLO D'ARTISTA, 2018
Multipli d'arte in serie limitata, numerati, firmati e certificati dall'artista.
Unica opera in vendita presso Dadadada Beach Museum.

Poetry



By Reem Rashash-Shaaban


Mothering Three

By John Grey

She has instilled in her children
the value of their surroundings,
the trees, grass, wildlife,
the audacity of spring,
the wavering line between summer and fall,
the necessity of winter
despite the chill that bleeds the eyes
like onions.

She's taught them with song
as much as words,
or the laughter of her skirts and aprons,
her washed face, brushed-up hair,
a motherliness,
never compromised,
and that deeper tenure
that knows instinctively
when to let go.


She has inspired them
to look up at the night sky
and love it,
take to the stars
as if they're more siblings,
the moon
like there are such
unexplained quirks in all of them
for which it should be held responsible.

When the youngest is asleep,
she sits with the eldest,
answers questions on Canis Major,
the deer herd,
their father, three years in the grave.
No difference in tone,
not even when voiceless.
Less a conversation
than a common purpose. 

John Grey is an Australian poet and US resident. Recently published in *That, Muse, Poetry East* and *North Dakota Quarterly* with work upcoming in *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Hawaii Review* and the *Dunes Review*.

Inland

By Dick Bentley

Doubling daily
 the symmetry shifts.
The surge flows up the beach
 into the waterway,
then the stream runs out
 into the bay.
Daily the birds
 rise and settle,
the gulls ascend
 on a swift wind.
Half asleep, I dream—
 of water birds
 who used to cruise in the saltgrass
If time were like the tide,
we would surge into the future
 then rush back into the past
Doubling daily our dreams.


Dick Bentley's books, *Post-Freudian Dreaming*, *A General Theory of Desire*, and *All Rise* are available on Amazon. He won the Paris Writers/Paris Review's International Fiction Award and has published over 280 works of fiction, poetry, and memoir in the US, the UK, France, Canada, and Brazil. He served on the Board of the Modern Poetry Association and has taught at the University of Massachusetts. Check his website, www.dickbentley.com.

Smoke that Thunders

By Duncan Richardson


At the top of Victoria Falls
a short path leads through the scrub
rustling with baboons and their shadows
to the very brink
where water rushes in a thick
fleshy blue-green surge.

There I heard a Siren voice
“Come on, jump in.
That pounding you hear is just
the pulse within the womb.”

If not for the silence of hunching rocks
mid-stream resisting
I might’ve stepped out
letting my bones become driftwood.
Flowing with *Mosi wa Tunya**
could’ve been worth all
my lost uncertain years.

The cliffs zigzagged back
through acacia scrub
to *Homo Habilis*
and I heard echoes
of other stony promises
long dissolved.

Returning to the kiosk
I shadowed a mongoose
mocking
capering in my path
 killer of snakes
 eater of rivers.


**Ndebele name for the falls, "Smoke that Thunders" *

Duncan Richardson is a writer of fiction, history, poetry and radio drama. He teaches English as a Second Language part-time in Brisbane, Australia.

Three Muses Have I

By Stephen Mead

every one a suicide,
& Anne Sexton there for charity,
insanity her grace, she making the 4th,
the muse I have yet to paint.
Virginia., Mishima., Sylvia:
left to right, the way I tell time,
counterclockwise, on this canvas----
3 muses, 3 faces, & their methods
of dying depicted only to uphold
their passion for craft, and for living...

Listen, if you too are blessed
with such intensity, drive, visions,
then let your hands be your eyes
wide awake with this brush
to see past the suicide
which claimed each of them,
& Anne, the Sexton for their Mosque,
their England, their Japan...
Let this poem I canvassed them on
be the hope to find any means
& persist on 

Stephen Mead is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the health insurance. Check out Poetry on the Line, Stephen Mead.

The Courthouse Bell

By Claire Emery

A self-proclaimed keeper
Perched on the Courthouse bell
Chimes the time through the thunderstorms
In the middle of the Lorax forest

And when the clock strikes ten p.m.
She kicks the bell with her steel heel
And sways with the chimes
Kisses the rain
And watches the people below startle

She startles the cowboy in the trench coat
Leaving the Birdcage
Trudging up a slippery rain wet hill
Murmuring his cowboy poems

She startles the old woman sipping her prickly pear lemonade
Rocking on her pastel painted porch
Watching the thunder clouds
from her Pleasant Street

She startles the heroin addict
Drinking with the other Lyzzards at the bar
Unaware it is even storming
Avoiding anything hard in life
The self-proclaimed keeper
Perches on the bell and talks to the rain

And startles the everyday folks
And laughs along with the chimes
Happy.

-Prescott, AZ 

Claire Emery is a poet from the mountains of Northern Arizona. She moved to a small town from Houston, Texas and has created a piece of work that describes a sleepy little mountain town. From the observational standpoint of a hermit residing on top of the courthouse bell - the center of the town - she reflects on the out-of-place hodgepodge of people who call this place home.

When I am Old Enough to Live

By Donna Dallas

It's Sunday September 23rd

6:10am

my life oozes from me

I noticed I've shrunk like an old

gypsy woman I try to straighten an impossible

feat the bones have curved and warped

themselves to fit the skin that life pulls elasticity from

wrings it out into air

deflated

I walk to the waters' edge

stare defiantly

into the sun

a fly buzzes

near my ear may it also suck more life more health more juice

defeated

still I touch the sand

want so much of a want I lost comprehension of what want even is

I let the sand sprinkle from my palm

these tiny granules.....and

I say there go the years here go the hours the milliseconds.....

slip fast a day takes forever a year happens in a blink

let the water soothe my knees and I say these

knees have withstood mountains they

have locked steady through the wake of

childbirth to push then to hold then to carry


the weight of those children.....

hardened through moans and gasps these knees will disappear as they sink deeper into

the sand and I think my death is going to take me by complete

surprise


envelope me

I think it's always been hovering and it's a lie what
they say -- that the youth is wasted on the young
youth is wasted through years and years over
songs over deaths over oceans through bones through
INRI from a spec to a mist as I
sink waste deep 

Donna Dallas studied Creative Writing and Philosophy at NYU's Gallatin School and was lucky enough to study under William Packard, founder and editor of the New York Quarterly. She recently found her work forthcoming in *34th Parallel*, *Sick Lit Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Beautiful Losers*, *Chiron Review*, *Red Fez* and *Bewildering Stories* among many other publications.

Five Past Midnight at the Cape

By Melissa Durante

“We could go to the beach
before we go home.”
We could
so we did.
Kicking off sandy sneakers
running through freshly smoothed sand;
wide tracts
like a dusty freeway
all lanes
quiet in the dark.
I ran straight to the water’s edge—
stars growing brighter
clearer
with each step.
Looking out over the bobbing horizon
In shades of black.
Feet grounded in the damp fringes of the town
flirting with the sea foam
reaching out
feeling on the edge of the world. 

Melissa Durante studied Creative Writing and Literature at The University of Michigan. She currently is a Contributing Writer for *Happenings Magazine*. Her work has been accepted for publication in *Junk Drawer Magazine* and The University of Michigan’s *RC Alumni Journal*. Melissa is a part of the team behind *The Electric Rail*.

Elders

(A *Tawddgyrch Cadwynog*)

By Elizabeth Spencer Spragins


When sunsets burn
These rocks of red,
A thunderhead
Warns those who yearn

For war's return
Of braves who bled:
We are not dead,
But taciturn.

Once men, now stone,
We guard our band,
Our sacred land,
Where hot winds hone

Our sun-baked bone.
Now singer's hand
Pours painted sand
In patterns known

To heal decay.
His chants bestow
The balanced flow
Of breath in clay.

When dark meets day
The shamans show
Young Navajo
The Blessingway.
~The Valley of the Gods, Utah 

The Blessingway is a complex Navajo ceremony intended to restore spiritual harmony.

The Valley of the Gods, an area sacred to the Navajo of Utah, contains numerous sandstone formations that tower over the landscape. According to legend, many of these red rock “sentinels” are Navajo warriors frozen in time.


Elizabeth Spencer Spragins is a poet who taught in community colleges for more than a decade. Her tanka and bardic verse in the Celtic style have been published in Europe, Asia, and North America. She is the author of *The Language of Bones: American Journeys Through Bardic Verse* (Kelsay Books).

The Eventual Poem

By D.S. Maolalai

the best ones come
when your fingers
just shuffle. I've known people
who kept notebooks
like wriggling fishes
packed with these little
turns of phrase,
or who break off in conversation
to tap them
in a phone.

but then
the eventual poem
always seems
to be about getting
that line out - twisting
like a cat
through a fence crack
to reach at
baby birds. you sit down
at the dinner table, tired
after work,
laptop going
and wine open,
and let your hands
go walking. mostly

it's just more
of this stuff. tired
jerkish self-
satisfiedisms
all about the state
of modern
poetry. but sometimes
god talks. trees blossom
and wood burns. 


D.S. Maolalai has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, "Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden" (*Encircle Press*, 2016) and "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" (*Turas Press*, 2019)

Everywhere She Goes

By Douglas Finlay

she floats above ancient oceans,
distant now as the first galaxies.
but where could she be ...
in mind and prudence,
with love pursuing her all around?
listen as her heart is still: it leaves
behind the reasons for things
she already knows.

she has a dream and dreams it;
the logic will hold her up for
a few moments, permitting her the embrace
of stars and the views upon the landscapes
of those first lovers who never turned ...

she will return then she says, as she always does,
but once more into the grasp
of a love with no demands 

Douglas Finlay, an award-winning journalist, who discovered poetry at an early age, names his wife among his many muses.


Night Trains

By Cameron Morse

Trains chatter over the arch above Nine Dragon Road.
Lili whispers her father began to see
children before he died, the fourth time he fell ill.
They led him by the hand.

Trains blow through the night, wooing
like mansion ghosts above the People's Benefit
apartments. Trying to stab ma
with a knife, he shattered the coffee table.

Little children tried to lead him away.
The next day, I catch our year-old peeling back
the plastic covering and whisk him
off to the bedroom. I wake up and there's a shadow

on the balcony, darkening the window curtains,
a darkness leaning in and out, tree
shade gathering in the form
of a child. Roosters howl in the morning mist. 

Cameron Morse lives with his wife, Lili, and son, Theodore, in Blue Springs, Missouri. He was diagnosed with a glioblastoma in 2014. With a 14.6 month life expectancy, he entered the Creative Writing program at the University of Missouri, Kansas City and, in 2018, graduated with an MFA. His poems have been published in numerous magazines, including *New Letters*, *Bridge Eight*, and *South Dakota Review*. His first collection, [*Fall Risk*](#), won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His second, [*Father Me Again*](#), is available from Spartan Press and chapbook *Coming Home with Cancer* is forthcoming in Blue Lyra Press's Delphi Poetry Series.


Fathers and Sons

(For Kenneth Rexroth)

By Benjamin Carson

In the summer of nineteen ninety-nine
I read Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.
That fall my father had a stroke, and
in the spring, he died. In the hours
before he took his last breath, I went
in search of a poem on dying by Yeats.
I never did find it. It may not even exist.
I returned to my father's bedside in time
for the death rattle, dying's own kind of
poem, I guess; and then he went his way,
and I went mine.

Last night I had a dream; my father was
drunk, unshaven, and trying to hit me.
All of my dreams about him are like this:
a kind and gentle, habitually sober man in
life, in my sleep is always angry, and I the
object of his wrath. He tells me I am not
serious, that I am a fool. He pushes me,
his undershirt wet with sweat, and his hair
a mop of rage. In these dreams I hate my
father, a man I know now I never really
knew, a man I never hated but am not
sure I ever loved.

This morning my son told me he'd had
a dream: I was chasing him through a field
of wheat. He could feel me fast on his heels,
my breath on his neck, and he, for a moment,
thought I was laughing, but when I caught him,
he said my eyes were filled with liquid. He said
he pushed the hair away from my eyes and saw
his own reflection—a boy, as small as a bird, held
firmly in two large hands against a backdrop of land
and sky, and he knew that I loved him, and that he
was safe, though he knew not from what or for how
long. 

E Benjamin Carson, a college professor, lives on the South Shore of Massachusetts with his dog Dora. His creative works have appeared in over a dozen publications, including *Gyroscope*, *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, *Cactus Heart*, *I am not a silent poet*, *Not Your Mother's Breast Milk*, and *The Poetry Porch*.

Basement Monsters


By Robin Ray

I begged you for transparency, all I got was evil
corporate roar. You forgot there's no carrying
handle on my back.

Pride tastes better with chorizo you once said
with a tongue used to tracing feathers in the snow.

Our bedroom had become a library. I told the
audiologist you were always within earshot, but
there, slipped through the floorboards, my words.

I went to the basement with a wheelbarrow to
gather them all up and nearly drowned in phrases.
Yours were the straws I reached for. They petered
out like soliloquys in the fissures of my hands.

I'd rather swim upstream with salmon than return
to my house. My front door looks funny covered
in fur, soft as eider down, tempting me to step
through to emptiness. 

Robin Ray is the author of *Wetland and Other Stories* (All Things That Matter Press, 2013), *Obey the Darkness: Horror Stories*, the novels *Murder in Rock & Roll Heaven* and *Commoner the Vagabond*, and one book of non-fiction, *You Can't Sleep Here: A Clown's Guide to Surviving Homelessness*.


Lost and Found

By Duane Anderson

I am surprised what I sometimes find
on my walks through the neighborhood,
miniature drones, shopping carts,
discarded shoes, forgotten coats,

pennies, dimes, quarters, dollar bills, and yes,
even counterfeit one hundred-dollar bills.
Today, it was an arrow laying on the sidewalk.
I looked around and didn't see any

other arrows or a bow nearby, and William Tell,
Robin Hood, or Green Arrow were not in sight,
so those were good signs that I may be safe because
in some neighborhoods one hears of gun shots

being fired, and here, silent arrows fly through
the air. I only hope that their only destination
is the bullseye on a target, and not in a heart,
unless that arrow is shot by Cupid? 

Duane currently lives in La Vista, Nebraska and volunteers with the American Red Cross as a Donor Ambassador on their blood drives. He has had poems published in *Poetry Quarterly*, *Fine Lines*, *The Sea Letter*, *Cholla Needles*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine* and several other publications.

Perfume

By James Fagan

You handed me
a freshly plucked
lotus flower from
your bouquet.

The petals spread,
its perfume
drew me closer,
and radiated a violet

delicacy
from its tips
to the base. In
the center,

gold anemones flexed
like peasants
bowing down.


I needed to know

if a bite would give me
more than just
its appearance or scent.

I let it pollinate

inside of me, melting
away the toxins.

I almost asked for
one more but

a red-eyed beggar came
and got on his knees.
His saliva dripped
that same scent. 

James Fagan had the honor of having one of his poems published in the University of Hartford's alumni magazine and three of his poems published in the University of Hartford's literary magazine. In his spare time, he engages in writing, running, photography, hiking, and going for leisurely walks on the beach at any time of the day.


Dream #2

By Milt Montague

chasing those elusive dreams
just beyond my grasp
shining brightly
promising,

promising
just ahead of me
to reach my goal at last

if only ...
if only I could
stretch out more
run just a little faster
or even jump a little higher

I might just reach them to attain the ultimate 


Milton (Milt) Montague discovered writing at 88. Now at 94, he has almost 200 published poems. A native New Yorker, Milt uses his experiences in raising three daughters, surviving the Great Depression and World War II, and leading several businesses as inspiration for his craft.

The Love of My Life

By Milton Ehrlich

is young and tender as a sweet peach tree.
With a lovely face and high cheek bones
there's a glint of jade that sparkles her eyes.

She has a scent of lavender from her garden,
grown with her long slender fingers and toes
that resemble rare precious stones.

Her hour glass figure beneath thick black hair
billows like dark clouds. Surrounded
by flocks of birds—she smiles the smile
of a messenger from heaven. 

Milton P. Ehrlich, Ph.D. is a 87 year old psychologist and Korean War veteran who has published many of his poems in periodicals such as the *Toronto Quarterly*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Mobius*, *The Chiron Review*, *Descant*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *London Grip*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Christian Science Monitor* and the *New York Times*.