

THE
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REVIEW

ISSUE FIVE



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Issue Five | March 2020

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Wellies,

Our letter this time is very short: be wonderful to each other. Love each other. Reach out to one another, and when all this is over, hold each other just a little bit closer.

Sezincote | Barney Ashton-Bullock

I've measured my days in summer fêtes that fade,
Annual tombolas, a Stromboli of remembrance;
The cheese, the wine, the bracelets we won,
As in another life, my Cotswolds one.

Apple-bobbing, mirth filled miscreants,
A tour of the grand house; *"No heels on the parquet!
No fingers on the paintings!
And stay, if you will, on the carpet protectors!
And the banquettes are antiques and not for lounging,
Though the velveteen sheen does seem inviting!"*

*"The historic collection of monogrammed decanters are over there to view
With the family crested canteens of cutlery,
And much elbow grease needed to clean that lot, fuck you!"*

The Orangery where we ate homemade cake and drank wan tea,
Where the maitre'd overheard my hashed plea
That I thought it best you marry me.

You, flustered that our fête-won, wax encased prize cheese,
Of which there were three in a Fine Fare presentation box,
Might soon get hot, were we not
To wend our way back to the train;
It was, thus, you'd skirt mention of my heart's intention
And I knew we'd not see Sezincote again.

Sezincote is a Raj inspired country house in the Cotswolds. I inadvertently discovered it on a country walk with a much missed boyfriend some years back and revelled in the retro nature of the pleasures offered by the collection of stalls and activities at its bi-annual fete that just happened to be on that day. We enjoyed a tour of the house by a wonderfully self-important and condescending tour guide, all against a backdrop of knowing that my relationship with the man I was with, was failing. I also wanted to imbue the verse with the feel of 19th Century light verse by adding touches of poetic rhyming metre in places.

Village | Barney Ashton-Bullock

These dew dashed Ballard Downs at dusk,
Their flannelette filtered translucency,
Their ethereally gust thwacked sparsity,
Their muted refractions of wheat-sheaves asway,
Grainy as y'like in the drawn light;
We, mere pinpoints a-prance,
Free-styling in the flashlights
'Midst their giddy levity...

Our scruff of signature left in the stomped crops trample.

We vortices of loneliness
Eschew the coital co-substantiates
Of a GPS iPhone app engineering freelove
Betwixt such brittle strangers...

Who melt for lust and pour for sex.

The top road through which we, as e'er, shuffling exeunt
To the 09.07 market day bus;
The rusting hoops of stanchions of the withered
Wreck of shelter in which 'first time' memories were made...

Cigs, ket, stout, cide, hash, snog, blow, laid, vom, chuck.

On that trusty bus immemorial, now, only e'er on a Thursday,
Sometimes, silently, without word or intimation,
Through the wandng wonk of cattle pong that sands the breeze,
A youngster won't return
And an aged farmer's wife in well versed, mock concern
Will glintily gliss 'er tamps o'goss...
*"Dreckly, all spuddlins hath ped off thru d'dimpsey of a yoretide eve
Dey'll match an' hatch as t'were e'er thus; cordin' t'dis eye, 'tis ne'er a goodbye!"*

As, in absentia, all flaxen fledglings were wont t'do
As, in perpetu, all sylvan nestlings e'er 'av and must...
"Afore the byre's been tromped to mere dander dust."

Under a Mountain Sky | Ferdison Cayetano

This is what it means for a girl to die in the Andes.

First she is chosen. Her selection is a great honor, say the priests, say the nobles, say her parents, through their tears. She is fed, clothed, worshipped like royalty. Villagers prostrate themselves at the feet of her procession as it leaves the capital and climbs upwards, ever upwards, and on an ice-white point overlooking the world attendants chant as she is wreathed in silver and macaw feathers and gold—while her blood steams in the thinning air. A famine ravages the land. Her death will once again draw the favor of the gods to the Children of the Sun.

Below her, nations rise and fall. Snow envelops, winds race, stone formations erode and are built again. Slowly but surely, the mountain encases her. Embraces her.

These days the Children of the Sun no longer answer to that name. Their gods—terrible, imperious gods, gods of sun and moon and mountain—are asleep, or scattered to the winds. But the girl remains.

Hers is a solitary existence. But it is never lonely. For she belongs to the mountain, now, and the mountain belongs to her; and how could a mountain be lonely?

Time passes. Whether it passes in seconds or centuries is of no concern to her. She will weather the passage of time.

She always has.

Listen: the snow crunches. She notices her visitors. Two ragged men, barely into their adulthood, have made their way to the summit. She has never seen their style of dress before. They are seeking help, she learns, for they are the strongest of the survivors who huddle together in the wreckage of a machine that fell out of the sky and crashed into her mountain.

Their ascent was three days of grim horror. They are weak from hunger, from thirst, from sheer altitude, and up there, the snow piles up to your waist. Up there, the only constant is the storm. On the second night howling winds threatened to sweep them off the mountainside entirely.

They will call it a miracle, when these men find their way out of the mountains. A miracle in the Andes. But they cannot stop now. If they stop, they die, and the others will die alongside them

On the mountaintop, the sun has just begun to rise.

A vivid kaleidoscope of color unfurls across the sky. The jagged landscape is awash with gold. For the girl this is a common sight; the men, however, are stunned.

She cannot understand their speech, but she sees the trembling of their fingers, the tears in their eyes, the strange peace welling in their souls, and she understands what they are saying to each other now

“Can you imagine how beautiful this would be,” says one, “if we were not dead men?” He takes the hand of the other.

The men continue onwards, down the mountain, towards their miracle. The skies are clear and blue.

Crop Markings | Lisa McCabe

Historic heat, drought for a month,
barley stunted beneath an indifferent sun,
begs for water in the Vale of Glamorgan,
the croplands of Monmouth.

While a plane in the cloudless sky not far
above performs its aerial reconnaissance,
trains its eye upon the evidence,
traces like a lover's vein or scar

greening geometrics in a yellow
field—Iron-age village, Roman fort or tower,
dowsing roots pillage the hollows
of ditches and moats furrowed beneath hoof and plow.

A thousand years they lay buried, ruin upon ruin,
now divined and logged by the spotter's lens,
civilizations morphed to an archaeologist's boon.
What happens next? It all depends

on what we choose, if in fact a choice remains—
ice retreats, grasslands flame, seas erode beyond defence,
we confront our end in these antediluvian lanes;
late is the season for repair or recompense.

Oracular, fleeting, they rise if only now to say
if we don't quit this soon, we'll become like them;
both conquered and conqueror bent to pray
for the rain to stop or to fall again.

To Barbara, with love. | D.S. Maolalaí

I like buying books
more than reading them.
once a week - sometimes
2 or 3 times—
I'll end up
in some store somewhere,
leafing through pages
like a lazy amateur
improvising on the keys of a piano.
if a novel has a good first line
or a couple of poems do,
as well (of course) as staying lower case,
I'll take them—
what the hell? I like
books about musicians too;
about their lives
and their friendships
and how they died tragically,
and histories of cities
if they are done
in good prose.
Algren's Chicago
did all 4 at once.
I practically tapdanced.

and best again
are second hand bookshops,
where you get stuff
with handwritten epigraphs
scratched in faded
blue ink from '95:

*"To Barbara,
with love
— your Tom."*

sad to see them, sure,
but not so sad. I read it at home
propped up on my pillows,

getting something Barbara
probably never got.
and anyway, such grand presumption;
to dare to buy a book
for someone else.

I buy 3 or 4 books a week
for me only,
and read 1
if I'm lucky.
I flick through them,
wandering my room
like a caged animal,
like a nervous dealer
playing a new pack of cards.
the trick with books
is to read enough to get an idea
and then put the book down
and have the idea by yourself.

sit leaning
in a chair
and blow out candles all night.

poor Tom. poor Barbara.

I wonder how long things had been worked out
when she decided she'd had it
and she didn't want
Chicago anymore.

I'm So Tired of Killing | Connie Woodring

The ghosts of behemoths graze and stalk in my dark soul.
I have killed woolly mammoths, saber-tooth tigers, bears both brown and white.
I have hunted buffalo and humpback whales to near extinction.
I have hunted a bird to extinction, but I can't remember its name.
I hunted raccoons with my faithful blue tick named "Drummer."
That is, until a treed raccoon put its tiny hands over its eyes and waited to die.

I no longer kill for food, sport or greed.
I leave that to others who are just like I used to be.
Now I amble through supermarket aisles, no warrior here.
I think of becoming a vegetarian or sacrificing myself.
Those behemoths taunt me, "It's easy to kill us, why not just kill yourself? You're made of meat."

I hear about elephants and rhinos being hunted to near extinction for aphrodisiacs and profit.
I hear about human-made climate-changing wildfires killing billions of animals in their wake.
I dream of killing poachers (especially those who killed gorillas to sell their hands for ashtrays), fossil fuel company executives and Amazon jungle rubber tree workers who hunted indigenous people for recreation.

My dark soul is inhabited now by creatures I kill out of fear, disgust, frustration.
Large (not small) spiders, centipedes, flies, stinkbugs, cockroaches, ants, wasps (if they get too aggressive) and the dreaded spotted lantern fly are now my prey.
My weapons are small but still lethal—swatters, my feet, a newspaper or an aerosol spray.
I have to stay in practice just in case....

The Room on the Ledge | Rosaleen Lynch

The door led nowhere. Except to a story that grew from the top floor of a restored Regency hotel with a Room 19 but no supporting building beneath it. We paused on the landing to catch our breath. We were in London, not in Escher-world, so where did the door go? We considered premises:

- a. Nowhere
- b. To a room on a ledge
- c. It was a facade

The nowhere theory held weight only if we thought nowhere was somewhere and if it wasn't, it was a facade. The room on a ledge sounded romantic, so balance swung in its favour. A facade, though clever was shallow. Like the preserved historic street fronts, propped up by scaffolding and girders, hiding demolition for redevelopment. Or building sites with garden mural hoardings. Or whole blocks of derelict flats wrapped in plastic painted windows. Facades, for the judge-a-book-by-it's-cover generation.

We took turns at the keyhole. All we saw was sky. Below, eighteen other rooms climbed in a spiral pattern, sprocketing off and up the stairs. Room 19 was an extra cog which could not exist.

You think it was an attic don't you? Option 'd'. Could be if it was higher than the others. It wasn't. And the top floor had space for three rooms, not four. We can regenerate skin but not limbs. Evolution's only progressed so far.

You'd have asked at reception or tried to read the check-in book. Easy to say when you weren't there. We can all be the heroes of other people's stories.

Did you know the developers put us up in the hotel while they moved us out of our home? No? So, will you let us keep our room on the ledge? Or will you try to sell us a cupboard with a painted sky?

Qu'ele Trencher Fer Come Fust | Hibah Shabkhez

The legends tell us nothing was ever
Simple for those in Camelot

But we read them as stick-men only, for
Valiant deeds and evils o'erthrown
For choices as clean-cut as drawing or
Not drawing a sword from a stone

For Excaliburs to save us from thought
And pain, henceforth and forever

Anon's Battle Song | Hibah Shabkhez

We are the faces of anon
Huddled and grey and unfree:

We flee before the flood
We flee before the flame
When our scythes have farmed blood
We go back home in shame

We are the hands that go on
Planting in each field a tree.

First Word | Mehreen Ahmed

People say that the wheel of fortune revolves in two directions. That it slips backwards and sometimes moves forwards. After about three decades, old Brown's fate was about to change today. And it happened mysteriously enough. There was no logic as to why or how things occurred; they just did, without any rhyme or reason. Circumstance lent itself favourably, leading to his success on this fateful, foggy winter of 1875.

A sound of fury distracted them; none other but the wind lashed across. The horses swerved a bit off course, but Brown's young apprentice Peter handled it skilfully. Brown took his wallet out of his shirt pocket and looked at a picture. This was the picture of a little girl in a polka dot frock. He put his wallet away. Peter had been here before. They were on their way to the Carpenter abode. After about an hour's ride, they could see their house. It sat on a vast land which was now in view. Their cart drew closer to the house; the horse trotted gently down the gravel path and stopped under the porch, at a pull of Peter's reins. With a sigh, they looked at one another. Peter and Brown disembarked

Someone flung the front door open. Lydia and Jim Carpenter came out and greeted them, but not Rose. Slow trepidation pumped in as their heart-rates went up.

"Hello, how's it going?" Jim beamed cordially.

"Good, pretty good," Peter managed a nervous smile.

"And how about you, Brown? Doing okay?"

"Yes, yes, not too bad."

Peter could smell the aromas of butter from here. Some drifted across in the winds to tickle his nostrils amiably.

"Is Rose not here?" Brown asked.

"Of course she is. She's toiling away in the kitchen cooking up a storm for you two."

"Oh, I thought it was just a meeting, no food involved," Peter interjected.

"Look, I don't know. I just carried out the instructions that Jim gave me," Lydia smiled.

"Well, typically, it would be lunch time by the time you got here. So, why not?" Jim said.

"Sure, sure, why not?" Brown mumbled.

As they all approached the door together, Peter saw Rose through the fly-screen. She was leaning over a hot stove in the sunlight filtered through the kitchen windows. Her green

eyes glimmering, and partly covered with golden curls hanging over her brows, she looked up sheepishly and smiled. Peter smiled back and shrugged. Rose held a hot plate of burned drumsticks in her hand.

“Oh dear. Don’t worry, just leave them out here,” Lydia remarked.

“I’ll eat them!” Peter offered graciously.

Rose laughed at that and then turned to Brown. They walked towards the next room. Peter lingered in her presence slightly before he joined them. They sat down in a bright floral sofa. Peter looked around and thought it was quite a charming room with many stuffed animals displayed on the mantel shelf. However, as he observed Brown, Peter found him absorbed in thoughts. These thoughts took old Brown back to little Rosie. As a toddler, her first word for food was ‘nun’ for ‘yum’ which had emerged when Brown had given her a piece of cheese to taste. From then onwards, everything from water to pudding was ‘nun’, ‘nun’ and yet, more ‘nun’ until she learnt, ‘yum’ a few months later. A smile coiled around the corners of his lips. It was quite obvious that his mind wasn’t on socialising this afternoon. Sitting on the far end, he felt edgy as he gripped the cushioned handle of the sofa. He wanted to get to business straightaway. He asked Jim Carpenter if he could take a walk with him on the farm. Lydia, guessed just as much and looked at Peter searchingly. Peter avoided making eye-contact. He continued to gaze at the animal posters on the walls. She sat quietly for a moment and then rose mumbling that she needed to help Rose in the kitchen. Peter nodded, feeling a tensed moment.

From this angle where Peter was sitting, he could see Rose tinkering with pots and pans and burnt drumsticks. She had her back towards him. Her wiry arms moved fast and her rounded hips swung inadvertently when she shifted her posture. Peter felt like being closer to her. He felt like touching those arms. He gazed at her until she turned around with a jolt and caught him dreaming. She suppressed a smile and waited for him to come over. Rose was accustomed to men drooling over her. But Peter did just the opposite. He got up from his chair hurriedly and walked out. Rose put down the metal pot on a wooden table placed beside the stove and ran after him feeling slighted. She always had the upper hand where her men were concerned. She was the one who turned them down, not the other way round.

Finding Peter was easy. He was sitting under a desolate apple tree. On this wintry morning, the apple tree looked as though the sunless Hades cast a colourless shadow on its skeletal branches. The ones reaching out like dendrites of the neural system. She stood calmly before him. Peter looked up.

“Why have you come?” she asked.

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know. I’m asking you.”

"If I said, I heard about you from Farmer Brown and wanted to meet you, would you believe me?"

"That would amuse me. It's flattering, but I'm also used to that but..."

"But what?"

"I don't know."

"As much as I want to Rose..."

"I don't understand. What is it then?"

"I don't know."

Both Rose and Peter remained quiet after that. They knew not what to do next. Peter glanced at Rose and smiled. A lock of her curls had tumbled over her forehead in the wind. Peter took a sharp breath and said,

"Gosh, Rose. You're pretty."

He put a hand out and tried to play with her curls on her forehead. He twirled them around his fingers. She did nothing to stop it. Rose extended her hand towards Peter; her long fingers touched the tip of his. Peter enclosed her fingers into his masculine idle palm.

"Do you ever think of getting married, Peter?"

"Hmm, interesting question."

Peter smiled at her small inquisitive face and caressed her rosy cheeks touching it with his index finger. He put a protective arm around Rose and thought of big ocean waves lapping on the shore.

"What're you thinking, Peter?"

"Nothing. How 'bout you Rose? Do you think about marriage?"

"Yeah, I think about it but I'm afraid of long-term commitment?"

"Afraid? Why?"

"That's just how I'm."

Peter frowned lightly. And looking away, he saw Brown and Jim walking towards them down the gravel path. They both looked anxious and agitated. Grim face, stiff lips, deep frowns. Now that they were within view, Rose and Peter both stood up and waited for them. As they came closer, Peter saw Brown looking at Rose; extending an arm, he suddenly broke down. Hundred years of ice seemed to have melted down in a rivulet. Rose was flustered.

“What? What is it?” she stammered.

Words froze. Brown couldn't talk. Rose shied away from his open embrace; he sat down on the bench. A tired old man who lost so much and found her again never to let go again, but he felt she had fallen, and slipped in quick sand.

Jim asked Rose to come inside with him, but invited neither Brown nor Peter. Leaving them out, he took Rose by the shoulder and stalked inside. Rose's skirt swayed swiftly on the gravel path. It didn't occur to him that Rose was an adult now and she could choose a life she pleased.

Indeed, the picture in old Brown's wallet came handy; the picture of a small girl wearing a polka dot dress was the same dress Rose also had among her possessions when the Carpenters adopted her from the orphanage. In fact, that was her only belonging. This dress. Near match photographs were there in Jim's album too that posed a striking similarity to the little girl's picture in Brown's wallet wearing the same dress. There were no doubts in Brown's or Jim's mind that this was the same girl... Rose, Brown's little Rosie; no mistaken identity. Oh! Rosie was alive after all these years and well. Thirty years, those thirty long years, when Rose was abducted at five and sold to a stranger who bought her to the orphanage for care. Her mother, Emma, Emma must be contacted at once! It was now up to Peter to collect the broken pieces. For Brown was completely devastated and beyond anyone's note-worthy reproach or approval. Grief and joy; sympathy and admonitions were tied up in one huge confusing emotion.

Brown put a hand on Peter's arm and Peter slowly led him to the cart. This house of welcome seemed cold. Those doors now firmly locked. They returned to the buggy and Peter drove them out of the Carpenter's premises. The long journey back gave Brown sufficient time to settle down.

“Now that I've finally found her, I want Rosie to come home to live with us, Peter. I must write to Emma at once.”

“Tell me, please, how did it all happen?”

“How did it happen?”

“Yes, Farmer Brown, how did it happen?”

“Well, I took Jim for a walk as you already know.”

“Hmm.”

“Then after a bit of chat-chat about the weather and our farms generally, I broached the subject. I took my wallet out and simply showed him Rosie's picture. He didn't say anything for a very long time and then he said, 'who're you? How did you get hold of this picture in that dress?' I said, because this is my Rosie and I believe your Rose and my Rosie

are the same people.’ ‘I need to sit down,’ he said, ‘Oh God, give me some breathing space.’ So he sat down and I, beside him until he found his bearings back. ‘Yes, yes, we brought her home in that dress. She had grown out of that dress by then but it still fitted her, a tight fit that is; even after three years. Rose was eight at the time. They don’t feed them much in that orphanage you know?’ He said and I said, ‘I know, I know all about Badgerys’ Creek orphanage.’ ‘You do? Hey, you do, right?’ He said. ‘Then you must also know that Rose is ours now. No power in this world can take her from us. We adopted her legally from the orphanage.’ ‘Is that a threat?’ I asked. By now, I started to panic, trying to get Rosie back from him. ‘You do know that Rosie was stolen from us.’ I said. ‘Stolen? No, no I don’t. They never told us anything about her past,’ he said. ‘Well, one day when we are both a little calmer, I shall tell you all about it. For now let’s just go back to Rosie,’ I said. ‘Lydia, Lydia would still have that dress in the closet somewhere.’ He was panicking too, you see. ‘I don’t need to see it. I only want to know if this is my Rosie.’ Farmer Brown paused and Peter looked at him through the corner of his eyes. He nodded and kept nodding reinforcing his belief.

“I had only one thing on my mind, Peter. To find out for sure, if indeed that was my little girl.”

The evening had mellowed by now. Night falling gradually over the shadow of the distant mist. Peter had a strange thought that had nothing do with these worldly affairs. He thought what if every life on earth stopped giving birth. He envisaged a world where the old would die and ‘Time’ would still continue to rule but, a subjectless state—an empty planet; a ghastly, empty, blue planet, just like the red or the frozen, the dwarf or any of the other planets in the universe, without a speck of life. What sort of a world would that be? Seeing Peter engrossed in thoughts, Brown said nothing.

“Now that you’ve found Rose, are you any wiser?” asked Peter suddenly.

Brown was pensive for a while and then replied quietly.

“Well, I should’ve thought of the orphanage. I don’t know why I didn’t at the time. I relied on the police to find her and just happy in the thought that Rose’s body wasn’t found. To me, it meant she was alive. What more could I had asked for? What a fool, I have been!”

“Yeah, I just hope it’s not too late to bring Rose home.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Rose has a home. A safe house that has protected her all those years. Why would she leave it?

“Because, I’m her biological father.”

“And they raised her with all the love they could muster; a choice between infinite love and kinship? What’s it going to be?”

“Blood’s always thicker, no matter what happens.”

“Orphanage is not a safe-haven. You should’ve done better and looked for her there. The Carpenters saved Rose from their atrocities.”

Brown remained quiet.

“We need to get home. I am drained,” Brown said.

“So am I.”

Dusk had fallen over the gum-trees along the side-road. The horse rode through dirt and pebbles over the uneven tract. The drive was lonely and dark. Brown struck a match in the dark and bent over to light a small lantern, hanging by the carriage.

“Do you think Rose knows by now?” Brown asked twiddling his thumb somewhat.

“I really don’t know,” Peter said honestly.

Brown kept up his gaze as the horses darted down the dirt road. He speculated that Rosie must be thrilled to hear about the existence of her biological father.

“We must make another trip tomorrow to Emma’s parents’ house.”

“Is that where she is?”

“I’m pretty sure.”

“You don’t know that. You haven’t been in touch since she left you.”

“We’ll send a telegram before we go. I have their address somewhere.”

“Are your parents-in-law still alive?”

“Don’t know. Doesn’t seem like it. It has been a long thirty years, now.”

“When Emma left, you were still young. Why did you not take another wife?”

“Another wife? Emma’s the only one for me; my love of life.”

Peter felt foolish. Love was something he hadn’t factored in.

“How does one feel when in love?”

“You’ll know. You feel anything for Rose?”

"She's a beauty," Peter smiled.

"She looks like Emma when I first met her, an angel in the garden of Eden. I was smitten and I still am," Brown nodded.

They were home. Peter drove in through the gates of the farm and parked the cart up at the door. He jumped off as did Brown and both of them dismantled the horse and walked it inside the stable by the barn. Then they entered through the kitchen door, as the farm slept in silence. Through the kitchen, they plodded up the staircase; Brown in the lead and Peter right behind.

The next morning Brown woke up with smile on his face. Much work needed to be done today. First and foremost was to get in touch with Emma. He sat down to write a letter and found Emma's parents' address. His loyalty for Emma was unquestionable; he wrote several drafts and crunched them up in paper balls. At last he wrote:

Dear Emma,

I know it has been a long thirty years since you left me. You were angry with me because I couldn't find little Rosie. Well! I have news. Good news. I hope this will find you in good health. Oh! Emma, Emma Brown. Guess what? I found Rose. I found her for you, my darling little bird. She is well. She has grown into a beautiful, confident lady.

Yours forever,

Brown

PS. Please write back to me as soon as you receive this.

Brown sat with the note in his hand for a while thinking of mailing it in the afternoon post. In the unlikely event of Jim not passing on this vital information to Rose, it would have a harrowing effect in all families. To avoid this, something else needed to be planned. This time around, Brown must do it right. Then he thought of Peter. What if Peter could be persuaded into a relationship with Rose? Cupid's bow must cast a stiff bull's eye. He went downstairs to search for Peter. Peter was in the sty mixing fodder for the pigs. Bent deep over the hog trough, his arms stirred the corn and the soybean meal. He realised much later that Brown had entered.

"What's up?" he asked looking up at Brown.

"I'm sending a letter to Emma."

"Good."

By now Peter stood straight up.

“Something needs to be done. Rose must see her mum.”

“Of course she must.”

“I got a plan.”

“Well?”

“Marry Rose.”

“Are you crazy? She’ll never have me this way.”

“Why not? Can you think of another plan?”

“One day, I’ll start a business and you’ll be a part of it.”

“Sounds good. What about Rose?”

“Let me handle this. Now, you go inside and make yourself a nice cuppa. By the looks of it, you didn’t get any sleep last night, did ye’ now?”

Brown scratched his stubble slovenly and looked at Peter’s honest to goodness face.

“Trust me,” Peter whispered.

“I trust you, Peter, you’re the best thing that’s happened to me after Rose and Emma.”

Brown left after that and Peter sat down beside the wallowing pigs. The first thing that came to his mind was to make money. He had heard about the gold-rush and people’s mad punting over it in New South Wales. He decided to join them in search for gold before he proposed to marry Rose Brown. At the moment, she was Rose Carpenter but soon to be wedded to Peter Baxter, becoming Rose Baxter. *What’s in a name?*

The Impossible Decision | Rob McKinnon

Protracted years of drought
led to unsurmountable debts
that gnawed destructively
and decayed relationships.

Obsessive routines
of checking climate predictions
that never forecasted the treasured rain
needed to break the dread.

Repairs undone mounted
essential fodder almost depleted
livestock grew unbearably thinner
crops failed to progress,
patience broken.

Extended family history
of demanding toil and lengthy days
created generational pressure
on weary minds,
thoughts of leaving
seemed like a betrayal.

Government assistance
would only lead to more time
but not more hope
which had evaporated
like the sparse showers
on the scorched ground.

Breaking point reached
when the weighty burdens
became intolerable
and no change in the weather was likely.

A previous impossibly imagined decision
is made to leave the land.

The Stain of Scandal | Tim Dadswell

He noticed her among the other pedestrians on the pavement and doffed his cap.

Mabel Smith grinned at the driver of an empty cart pulled by two aged horses. In the main road leading into Dunechester, she found the familiar rhythmic sound of hooves pleasing.

Seagulls surfing salty thermals overhead, Mabel reached a dressmaker's and turned down a side street. At a hanging sign displaying a silhouetted teapot, she entered the shop beneath.

Mabel greeted her friend, Ivy Dawson. Bunches of keys hanging from their waistbands, they were dressed in black, ankle-length dresses with white collars. When Mabel placed her bonnet next to Ivy's, it became clear they sported similar chignons.

A plain wooden tray, loaded with their regular order, rested on a white linen tablecloth.

"Beautiful day, Ivy!"

"I suppose it is, for some."

"Thank you for sending that gentleman artist my way. He'll be staying at *Dovecote Villas* for three weeks."

"Good for you. Mind he doesn't drip paint on your carpet. I hate turning away customers. I wish I'd never set eyes on that pair from London."

"I know. Since it happened, I can't think of anything else."

"Neither can I. You'd think you'd be safe with a well-to-do young couple dressed in the latest fashions. Now I face long evenings, eating my meals in the kitchen, with only my embroidery for comfort. The builder reckons my dining room ceiling will be repaired by next week, so I'll be able to redecorate, but will my regulars ever come back? Who wants to stay where there's been a grisly murder? I've a good mind to write to Her Majesty for advice. As a widow herself, she'd understand my plight."

"Yes, you deserve better, Ivy, poor thing."

They sipped their teas and munched on freshly baked sugar-frosted biscuits. Every so often, Ivy shook her head and sniffed.

A group of people left together. Only one other patron remained, sitting behind Ivy.

"Got your money's worth?" cried Mabel.

Ivy turned around to see the subject of her friend's reproach. A gaunt man in a shabby suit sat at a table bearing an empty teacup and a notepad. A stubby pencil gripped between his tobacco-stained fingers, he stared like a salivating wolf.

"Sorry ladies, no harm intended. I believe the Duval murder happened at your place madam, *The Lapwings*?"

"Who're you?"

"Arthur Crabbe. I work for *The Echo*. Interesting case. Doesn't happen every day."

"I should hope not! If you've been earwiggling, then you'll know I don't need the likes of you to stoke the fire!"

"Easy, lady. I know what you must be feeling. But there's not much chance of this dying down. Now they've caught the girl, there'll be a trial. As you were there when she stabbed him, you'll be called to give evidence. Why don't you tell me what you know? Either way, I'll be writing about it for weeks."

Ivy turned to her friend. "Did you hear that Mabel? Will my torment never end? Have I been wicked enough to deserve this? I can't sleep with all the worry, not to mention the nightmares about blood pouring through my ceiling."

"Careful Ivy, he's writing it all down. You're lining his pockets."

Ivy turned back to Crabbe. "Listen, with my business suffering such grievous detriment, I deserve to make a few bob out of this. It wasn't the first time Duval brought a girl to *The Lapwings* you know. It's all there in my guest book. If I was to tell you all the details, then what?"

"Now you're talking. If you sign a contract with us, on account of your great distress, I'm sure my boss would see his way clear to paying you a little sum. We could run your daily diary of the trial. And if it's anything like the murder I covered last year, tour guides will soon be calling at your premises."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. The public are rivetted by murder cases."

"I never knew that. Whatever next! In that case, I'll pay a visit to your editor tomorrow."

While Crabbe scribbled more notes, Ivy left like a destitute duchess who has discovered a Rembrandt in her attic.

Mabel hurried after her like an attentive lady's maid. They paused in the street outside.

“I’m not sure about this, Ivy. Can you trust him?”

Ivy looked down at her shoes. “Don’t know.”

“Come and speak to my lawyer. Isn’t that what your Walter would have done? I’ll go with you.”

Ivy met her friend’s gaze. Her brow unknitted and her smile returned.

Once home, Mabel glowed at the thought of collecting another fee from her cousin Arthur. They made such a good team, she thought.

The next morning, she would take a bowl of pease pudding to a neighbour whose wife had been seen by no one for a month or more. Why?

Airman | Gale Acuff

After they bury me, anyway my
body, I'll be underground in a box
called a coffin and in some decent clothes
for a change with my eyes shut and my hands
folded, and looking, if I can look at all,
and seeing God, at first my soul will be
in Heaven and getting judged and then it goes
—or / do—to Hell or gets to hang in
Heaven but I'm not counting on that and
as for my body, and even the folks
called undertakers or morticians, they
work at the funeral home, the basement
I bet, not even they can keep me whole
forever and I wonder if I'll get
to experience my soul splitting my
body and drifting up to Heaven, but
at some churches they say nix, you've got to
wait until the Judgement Day and shoot up
to the sky to meet Jesus there, bungee
jumping-like but in reverse or may
-be like Commander Cody rocketing
skyward so I look forward to that and
to learn if I can get goose bumps and not
even have a body to feel 'em, now
that's what I call an afterlife. Meanwhile

every night, when I turn the light off and
slither into bed, or is it *crawl*, I
lie on my back and practice for the time
which might not even be what you'd call *time*
at all when I'll be dead and they'll undress
me and wash me and do all the other
things to me to fix me up for death, I
even cross my hands or is it wrists, good
thing that someone will do what I can't do
for myself, you don't get much more helpless
than dead I guess, unless you're a baby
maybe when you still have a newborn life
to lose, but sometimes I can't make it 'til

the dawn, I wake up thirsty or I need
to pee or both, I usually pee
first, I have a system, it's hard to be
-lieve that one day it will end and so will
I, at least as I know me. If I do.

One for the Money | Bruce McDougall

When Jack was assigned to Ottawa as the correspondent for a small-town newspaper with big ambitions, he rented a second-floor walk-up apartment for six hundred dollars a month. It was all he could afford. It had two rooms, two windows and a galley kitchen that accommodated a small refrigerator, a stove and a sink. The window in the front room, where he put his desk, faced a brick wall. The window in the back room, where he slept, overlooked a parking lot.

It took Jack about twenty minutes to walk to the National Press Building, where he shared an office with a woman from Winnipeg. Every morning after breakfast, he set out past the glass-clad condominium next door and, farther down the street, the iron gates of the embassy of Iraq, whose government, backed by the United States, had deployed chemical weapons that year in its war against Iran. Inside the gates, an armed guard sat in a concrete bunker, shielded by a pane of bullet-proof glass.

During the day, Jack interviewed politicians and civil servants, attended committee meetings and debates in the House of Commons and wrote articles for his newspaper. In the evenings, he retreated with a bottle of Scotch and a pack of cigarettes to his apartment, where he sat for several hours in a comfortable chair, reading journals and magazines and taking notes about rebellions in Africa, clandestine Western-sponsored military intrusions into Central America, skulduggery in the Middle East and the misappropriation of foreign aid in Indonesia, whose embassy was three blocks away. He thought it was important to stay informed about world affairs.

On weekends, he wandered around the city, visiting museums and exploring neighbourhoods where people with families seemed to lead conventional, well-ordered lives supported by steady paycheques from the government. Sometimes he jogged for a mile or two down the path that ran along the Rideau Canal to keep himself from falling into disrepair. At thirty-three, he still thought his future had just begun.

On Saturday nights, he read for a few hours and sometimes smoked a joint before heading to a movie theatre a few blocks away. In a city of bureaucrats, the midnight matinee felt mildly subversive. He felt at home with the audience of stoned-out hippies and late-night revellers who seemed to share his disaffection for government-imposed order, and the popcorn was fresh.

Even though he made little money and worked almost day and night, Jack loved his job. He'd spent the years since he'd left university floundering around with no direction and no motivation to do anything but carouse with his friends. He'd attended law school, twice, but could never convince himself that the rewards of a career as a lawyer would compensate sufficiently for warping his mind into the shape of a dollar sign. Now his friends had moved on with their lives, and he was alone, in Ottawa, where he knew no one.

Along the path that led him there, he'd followed no particular philosophy, but was guided by random biographical details of writers and poets he admired and by equally random snippets of their work: "Mushrooms," by Sylvia Plath. The essays of Montaigne. *Parade's End*, by Ford Madox Ford, a generous man. The epistles of Horace. An epithet from Samuel Johnson: "How small of all that human hearts endure/That part which laws or kings can cause or cure." They cluttered his mind like road signs on a highway after an earthquake.

Now, in Ottawa, he wondered about the incoherence of his ideas. Taken together, they formed no particular creed or set of beliefs. They slithered through his mind like eels, offering flashes of insight into one conundrum or another but always remaining elusive and ambiguous, never definitive. He could never have organized his thoughts into a manifesto or delivered a marketable solution to the challenges of life that would attract an audience or get him elected to Parliament. He appreciated the comfort and security that come from a sense of order. But he also knew that order was questionable and that life was tenuous. Even though they caused him anxious moments, he resisted the temptation to inform his uncertainties with dogma. If it made him uncomfortable to feel so unresolved in his thinking, he also knew that he'd rather nourish himself on scraps of wisdom leavened with skepticism than gorge himself on the over-cooked banalities of some fast-food ideology.

Now, as a reporter for a small newspaper, he put his heart and soul into bearing witness on behalf of a readership that could fit inside a hockey rink. But he was getting paid and doing no harm. What more could he ask?

After smoking a joint one Saturday night in February, Jack put on his coat and boots and plodded through a blizzard to the theatre to watch a movie of a Neil Young concert called "Rust Never Sleeps". He took heart from Neil Young's music and felt elevated by the adolescent fury and simplistic optimism of the songs. He was tired that night of thinking.

By the time he walked home again, hearing echoes in his mind of a song called "Keep on Rockin' in the Free World", the snow was up to his knees. The side streets were deserted. There were no cars moving. He hummed as he trod through the sparkling blanket of fresh white powder that twinkled under the streetlights. In a hushed city where everyone was asleep, it was easy to believe in a universal spirit of goodwill.

He'd just passed the iron gates of the Iraqi embassy when he saw a human shape in the snow. He moved closer and saw a woman in a fur coat, struggling to stand up. When she moved her feet, the soles of her fur-topped boots skidded out from under her, and she fell forward again into the snow.

Jack reached down and placed his hands under her arms. The fur of her coat felt soft. "You're okay," he said.

He hoisted the woman to her feet. Under her bulky clothing she felt as light as a bird. When he stepped away, the woman began to topple over again.

Jack held her upright. "Let me help you," he said. The fur of her hat matched her coat.

The woman pointed at the glass and steel condominium next to Jack's decaying brick apartment building. "I'm going there," she said.

A breeze blew fumes of alcohol past Jack's face. He realized that the woman was drunk. Jack felt relieved. Her condition made her seem more human.

"We're going in the same direction," he said.

He turned sideways and ploughed ahead, guiding her by the hand through the deep snow toward the front door of her building. He glanced toward the embassy's concrete guardhouse and imagined the man inside. Did he think the old woman in the fur coat was a suicide bomber? If Jack hadn't come along, would he have helped her or would he have exercised his diplomatic immunity, watching through his pane of opaque bullet-proof glass at two o'clock on a cold Sunday morning in February until she floundered for the last time and died face-down in the snow?

"There's no rush," he said. "We'll make it now."

He made it sound as if they'd just walked across Antarctica.

Unlike Jack's building, the woman's condominium had an outer door that opened into a vestibule lined with mailboxes and an inner door that required a key. They stood on a rubber mat while the woman fumbled in her purse. When she found her key, she couldn't fit it into the lock.

"Let me help," said Jack.

"Thank you," she said. She held on to his arm and watched him unlock the door.

"That's better," he said. He was about to say goodnight then and walk away, but he realized that, if he did, the woman would fall down. "Let's go to the elevator," he said.

They shuffled past a French provincial credenza under a gilt-framed mirror. Jack resisted the temptation to look at their reflection. The last thing he wanted to see was an image of himself being virtuous.

The elevator doors opened with a sound like distant thunder. Drunk and stoned, they stood side by side and ascended to the fifth floor.

“My husband was a diplomat,” the woman said.

“Lloyd George knew my father,” Jack said. The woman didn’t respond.

The elevator doors slid open.

“Here we are,” the woman said. She giggled. Jack felt as if they’d become buddies.

In the corridor, light fell discreetly from shaded sconces on the papered walls onto a royal blue carpet with patterns in gold of a fake regal crest. The woman wrapped her fur-clad arm more tightly around Jack’s and together they glided arm in arm like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers returning from a gay night on the town, until the woman stopped outside a white door displaying 516 in brass numerals. She handed her keys again to Jack. He wanted to warn her against allowing a stranger into her apartment, but they’d come this far. He didn’t want to alarm her now. When he opened the door, a gust of warm perfumed air poured into the hallway like scented gas from an oven. Jack followed the woman inside, where she seemed to revive under the bright lights of a chandelier. She straightened her back as if she’d inhaled a dose of smelling salts and unbuttoned her coat.

“Just a moment,” she said. She shuffled in her fur-topped snow boots down the hall.

Jack set the keys beside a vase on a polished walnut occasional table. He looked farther into the apartment and saw beige wall-to-wall broadloom, an upholstered couch, a matching upholstered chair, a coffee table, lamps and paintings and preposterous china figurines of ballet dancers and bullfighters.

The woman returned, still wearing her coat and hat and carrying her handbag. She extended her gloved right hand in which she held a five-dollar bill.

“So nice of you to help,” she said.

Jack put his hands in his pockets and looked down at the brown puddle that had formed around his feet. He raised his eyes. He felt like weeping, reluctant to insult the woman by refusing her payment but reluctant, as well, to abandon his righteous innocence.

Outside in the snow, he waved his hand at the Iraqi embassy, hoping to remind the guard at the gate of his humanity, but he knew it was an empty gesture and that sooner or later he would have to admit that he lived in a world whose most cherished values were the ones that could be measured in money.

On Visiting Passchendaele | Edward Ashworth

You may think that they watch over you—
ancestors, martyrs killed too young.
But there is no living they walk among.

Remembered solely where coins tinkle
In the funds of merchants whose eyes twinkle
With the promise for profit off the dead—
There lies their deathbed.

Fields of mud became prosperous towns
Where children's fairs and games
Make for better-sounding names
Than the ever-silent burial grounds
of Passchendaele.

You may believe in the power of marble stone
Or in the shadows of the spiritual unknown
But in leper lies the intolerable truth:
They are not there, and they have never been
Ever since war put an abrupt end to their youth.

There is no hope, or ghost of theirs to be seen
They are gone;
and this is it.

War Dance | Gary Thomson

Annihilation is the prize, as Ares gambols on the stage Hellenes call Plataea. He knows well this broad fertile plain, nourished with the blood of earlier battles amongst brawling Greek city-states.

The gold helmeted war god awaits this imminent clash of arms with uncustomary patience. A year past he paced the Aegean shoreline, shadowing the jagged horizon of Xerxes' retreating warships from their crushing defeat at Salamis island. Today he rejoices in the steadfast zeal of the king's general, Mardonius, to crush this rabble of Zeus-worshipping goat herders who cry freedom in the face of offered Persian greatness.

Ares strokes his cruel two handled whip. A reckoning of fire and massacre is at hand.

Waiting, battle hungry, he lauds the muster of fifty thousand Greek allies under Spartan command. The wily general Pausanias will deliver him many corpses, Persians mostly and his own Spartiates, pledged to fight to their death. The marching phalanxes' spearheads spark in sunlight, and Ares shivers in delight. Then chuckles at the hoplites' robust hymns of deliverance to their local deities.

Now, battle-frenzied, Ares soars to thrumming of untold Persian bowstrings, welcomes the darkness of arrow clouds, the hail of slaughter. Blood spattered, he capers alongside yowling Allied swordsmen as they hack at enemy arms and throats. Admires briefly the warriors' courage to confront bristling spearwalls. Screams of the wounded and dying quicken his step. During periodic lulls he savours the glut of Hades' chambers with souls of the dead.

But this evening he loses joy. He has overheard the oracle at his campfire interpret the meaning of tossed bones. "Tomorrow we will hear the harper's song," the prophet declares. Clean and strong, like Apollo's lyre. His paeon will sing the Allies' final victory over the barbarian invader.

A Walk in the Rain | Gareth Culshaw

There's gull rain outside and it weighs down leaves.
I put on my boots and take an afternoon walk.
A lapwing oars the fields sky as it comes in for spring.
Black blobs of Jackdaws speckle the low crop field.

A squirrel races through the branches tries to catch up
yesterday. Puddles gather around me. But I keep on
walking. This road leads somewhere, though
the cambers ache away my energy,

I keep on going. I hope to find the end.

Bookhaven | Robert Boucheron

Bookhaven is a town of readers. These book lovers love to curl up on a sofa with a fat novel on a rainy day, or lounge in a hammock with a slim volume of verse, or lie on a beach in the blazing sun with an in-depth analysis. They immerse themselves in the world of literature. They surrender to the spell of the printed word. They stop at nothing in pursuit of knowledge, and no subject is taboo.

Native-born citizens are proud to be called Bookworms. English is their first language, while French runs a close second. Bookworms are often bilingual, and the town is known to the francophone world as *Havre du Livre*. As in large cosmopolitan cities, you hear most any language in the street and see it in the shops, especially those that carry books, as most of them do. A drugstore has a twirling rack of paperbacks up front, a clothing boutique carries celebrity biographies and coffee table toppers, and a hardware store stocks books on construction, house plans, and interior design.

Bookstores and coffee shops, which are hard to tell apart, outnumber taverns, nightclubs, theaters, bowling lanes, rifle ranges, and miniature golf courses combined. The market for used and previously owned books, which they call “perused books,” is second to none. It appeals to tightwads, fixed incomes, shallow pockets, and poor dears unable to pay through the nose for new releases. Thank heaven for Bookhaven!

People read books on buses, on park benches, in cafes, and while standing in line, but that is only the half of it. They walk with an open book in hand, absorbed in the story. They read with concentration, and they make their way by peripheral vision. They read on bicycles with a book propped on the handlebars, as they weave through traffic and evade road hazards. They read while engaged in vigorous physical exercise, such as pumping iron or running five kilometers, and they read while standing perfectly still. They read tablets and telephone screens, prim literary journals and splashy periodicals, how-to guides and do-it-yourself manuals, philosophical tracts and inspirational pamphlets, abridged editions and corrected texts. They read large type, and they read the fine print.

Despite advice from clinical psychologists and ophthalmologists, people read in bed by the sickly glow of a table lamp, slumped in armchairs in poorly lit lobbies, and perched on stone bollards in the dead of night under the glare of a neon sign. A noted critic castigates constant reading as a pernicious habit, a threat to public health, a literal addiction, a metaphorical leech that fastens upon immobile readers and drains them of vitality. This same person, who is on the whole a disagreeable scold, says living vicariously as they do, so much in their heads, isolated from the world of affairs, Bookworms are extremely well informed for no particular reason. Regular folks say reading is the innocent pastime of young and old, a harmless pursuit, one that broadens the mind or allows it to escape the humdrum routine and the daily grind.

Escape is relevant. Located on a rocky island in the South Indian Ocean, more than three thousand kilometers from the dangling tips of Africa and India, much closer to Antarctica, Bookhaven is as remote as it gets. The town is a port of call for ships bound to and from that frozen continent, to take on fresh water and supplies. Like all subarctic settlements, it gives the impression of a scatter of shacks with corrugated sheet-metal roofs, few windows, bare yards, and large dogs. The upper town has a concourse for offices and shopping, residential lanes, and a windswept square surrounded by courts, the post office, a United Multiversalist chapel of ease, and the public library. The lower town is the old port, a cramped tangle of alleys, low dives, and seedy lodgings, where the air is sharp with the salty lyrics of sailor ballads, and walls are covered with learned graffiti.

Bookhaven has no gardens to speak of. Greenhouses and window boxes provide a spot of botany here and there, flowers and fresh herbs. The climate can support only moss, lichen, coarse sea grass, and an indigenous cabbage that warded off scurvy in crews on long voyages. A hardy breed of pony was introduced, and mice and rats escaped the holds of ships. Cats were persuaded to disembark and keep the rodents in check. The feral populations coexist today. Bookhaven is an outpost for scientific observations of the weather, astronomy, and oceanic currents, as well as icebergs, auroras, marine wildlife, and penguins.

The island, with associated islets and reefs, was discovered in 1772 by a Breton navigator who was not at all charmed by the cold, stony, treeless terrain. He claimed it for the King of France, and he marked it on his chart as *les Îles Désolées*, or the Sorry Islands. A sheltered anchorage spawned a way station for warships, as France pursued its imperial dream, also for fishing vessels and hunters of whales, walrus, and seals. The try pots, fish-drying racks, and empty casks metamorphosed into ramshackle huts and crude cabins. A jetty and wharf improved the harbor. In time more substantial dwellings, warehouses, and a chandler's shop appeared.

From France, the Old Regime exiled to this outlandish place those deemed too sensitive for the Bastille. After 1789, the tribunals of the Revolution continued to send political prisoners who for delicate reasons could not be sent to the guillotine. These aristocratic exiles, educated at the best schools, established a tone of culture and refinement, a social milieu quite unlike that of the rough-and-ready port. Versatile and voluble, they went in for amateur theatricals, musical evenings, and salon discussions. Society was secular, even skeptical.

The exiles were desperate for news and books. An early town ordinance required every ship that entered the harbor to surrender all printed matter, to be picked over by a committee of residents who volunteered their talent. Books and journals they considered to be informative or amusing were confiscated. This material in French, English, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, and Sinhalese became the nucleus of what is now the Bookhaven Collection, which includes rare titles from the 1600s and 1700s.

During this period, money was scarce, and books were so valuable and highly sought after, they were used as currency. A comedy of Moliere, for example, was traded for a pair of shoes, the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld could purchase a loaf of bread, and the *Lettres* of Madame de Sévigné were worth their weight in gold. This taste for the intellectual and the classic persists. Residents prefer literary fiction and thoughtful essays to potboilers, screeds, and mass-market trash. As a side note, the French spoken on the island today faithfully preserves the idiom and pronunciation of the eighteenth century, and is therefore pure and uncorrupted, while the French of Paris has declined, infected by foreign words and grammatical errors. The same linguistic phenomenon is observed in Quebec.

After the disasters of Napoleon and foreign policy blunders in the mid-1800s, France lost interest in her far-flung possession. A British frigate strayed into Bookhaven, the government condescended to take over the Sorry Islands, and English became the official language. An influx of black sheep, remittance men, and women of no importance flowed in, exiles from the rigid norms and hypocrisy of Victorian society. They brought with them an inferior cuisine based on mutton and pudding, a raffish sensibility, and the latest books from London.

Bookhaven today cultivates the image of an undiscovered paradise of print, an exotic travel destination for librarians and those who read, the vanguard of bibliotourism. Look up from the page to see an eerie landscape of eroded igneous rock, ancient lava flows that have weathered to weird shapes, with innumerable waterfalls, lakes, and coves. For those who like to hike, there are trails through unspoiled wilderness, a glacier of a few hundred square kilometers, and a brisk breeze.

The season of high summer is December, when the sun never sets but rides at midnight in the northern sky. A midwinter getaway to catch some rays, cast yourself headlong into print, and caulk gaps your personal library might be just the thing. June is abysmally dark and cold, when the sun never rises, a perfect time to stay indoors and tackle a long romantic novel or a multi-volume historical survey. The year oscillates between these extremes, and the average is ideal.

For lack of a runway long enough, there is no commercial airport. Travelers impatient with the monthly ferry from Madagascar must hitch a ride on a private jet, a military flight, or a scientific junket. But be advised. Once ensconced in Bookhaven, you may not want to leave.

In addition to all the bookstores, remainder bins, second-hand stalls, thrift shops, dealers, and flea market booths, Bookhaven offers a unique venue for writing retreats, publishing seminars, and manuscript consulting services. The early exiles wrote racy memoirs, vitriolic diatribes, and wistful fables. Today nearly everyone has a novel in progress, a fantasy trilogy, a sheaf of poems, or an exposé. In cafes and waiting rooms, they scribble in notebooks and type on small electronic devices. No one interrupts. They are too busy reading or writing themselves.

too late | Michael Estabrook

I'm back in the Northfield Avenue house
in the driveway
no one's here it's dark
but the doors are open
I go in the side door and call out
turn on lights stick
my head in Kerry's room
but of course he's not in there
at his desk or ironing
and the dining room is a clutter
living room too
there's a barbell in the kitchen
that's odd
the old dial phone still on the wall
by the hallway
no door leading upstairs
where's Kerry dammit
not the same
nothing's the same
without my brother Kerry
he took an alternate path in life
could've been happier
if he finished college, married Pam
but too late for that now
too late

Extinction | J.L. Lapinel

Frost tree tips huddle, shoulders touching
and tiny lights slip between sleeping branches while
nature's silken body reclines in icy sleep
Grittled paths swerve to catch feet of
ancient dirt, crawfish stone and mud
the haunting rocks of fern and dust
flat, fill hollow spores with slanted thoughts

The locusts and hillside are dense with forgetting
We grip the blood of earth to see what more
we can push between our fingers
Light follows us into damp and quiet places
Under rays of darkness that stick
Under our nails
and lead to doors that pound with that threat
of danger coming through feet of
wanton anger

The hollow echo of a pipe bounces
somewhere
Scraping and dragging along pavement
as a jet exhausts
through the sky
a needle sewing
through the clouds, trailing silt ashy signatures

That damp air pushes dead leaves
along the brown grass patchwork of mud and dead percussions
and in the streets of orange musk
bipeds lift their lashes to eat the memory of tomorrow
a myopic buffet
While a quiet whispers the forgetting
to eyes and lips and teeth that part to
callously remember the forgotten words and
understand them anew

Augur of Winter at Home | Keith Moul

Bones lie in mud; tendons strap their decay.
Live wings crowd gray skies with beats,
punishing crests of the dominant species.

The scrap for food occurs under trees
as rings accrete inside protective bark.
Cloudy-eyed insects burrow into leaf mold.

Curtain drains vein away under mounds.
Raindrops freshen shrubs like eyelashes
creating utter relief for a heated mind.

the Witch Cave | Aiden Heung

The tomato-field trembled as my grandma
sunk her hoe like a scalpel into the soil.
The upturned earth un-petaled
beside her feet, laying bare
the darkness that looked like fecundity.
The cut scent of the rain came wet
towards her and besmirched her hands.
Behind her, the peak towered majestically,
girdled with clouds that dissipated
in the bright sun. And a cave hid beneath.
It was the witch cave, she said.

那是巫婆洞

A place where sorrow was revved
into delight as the dead stayed
but as another form. She knew it well
the day she shoveled open the mountain slope
and buried my grandpa there, like a seed.

所以我爷爷在洞里面？ I asked.

She bent to pick up a fallen tomato;
her weight oppressing the air,
then came the susurrus of leaves.
That was how I remembered her,
a woman hunched over branches and the fruit
of life in her hands, red
like the lantern on our eaves.
I didn't know if she was crying.

Years later
we buried grandma in a different city;
we didn't know better,
we could've placed her in the cave,
But adults never believed children.

Now as I place the framed photo
of my grandparents on the wall,
the same mountain sun comes
almost twenty years late to my room,
so bright and dazzling

I have to close my eyes.

The Castragon | Patrick M. Hare

This chimerical creature is a precursor to other North American mythical fauna such as the hodag, the squonk, and the unserious jackalope. The castorine half of the creature is universally described as having furry hindquarters, webbed feet and the flattened, scaly tail that is almost as common a shorthand for beavers as a pair of overlarge incisors; unsurprisingly, descriptions of the draconic half are highly variable. As the majority of sources describe it as continuing the beaver's body shape and ending in a horse-like head with an elongated, saurian snout from which fire occasionally issues, the origins of the creature are assumed to be European rather than Asian (although following the Californian gold rush, descriptions of the creature bearing the more prolate body plan and wispy beard of the Chinese or Japanese dragon were common).

The earliest known mention of the creature comes from fur traders working in what would later become Minnesota. In a 1732 letter to his backers, the Englishman William Acker wrote to excuse the paltry number of furs he was sending to Fort Albany by complaining about his French guides avoiding "...a creature in this region they call a castragon, a small beast that as far as I can make out is half beaver and half dragon, but I do not credit it. They make good to tremble in fear, when I mention hunting it, but I think they are trying to deceive me and mean to return to these valleys when I am left and sell the pieces to the Muscovites instead." Whether the creature was known to the original inhabitants of the North American continent is unknown; no one thought to inquire of them, or if they did (for a number of Chipewyan were in Acker's party), their responses were not thought worth recording.

Sightings by Europeans piled up over the next century, primarily in the northeast, which perhaps argues for the creature's existence, given the area's paucity of large aquatic reptiles that could plausibly be the inspiration for the beast's front half. As with bigfoot a hundred years later, local variants became quite common. One example, the Schilferiga Boom Eater of eastern Pennsylvania, was said to haunt the foothills of the Appalachians. Virginia lay claim to the Woodgator, while Newfoundland boasted of its Cnoiertan, scourge of homesteaders and friend to those who needed a stand of trees cleared in a hurry. Perhaps the most remarkable was the Schenectady Russian Squirrel Hound, the origins of which name are lost to time, fortuitously one suspects, as the true and likely prosaic source of the name would surely disappoint.

With this plurality of regional variations came a host of behaviors and associations. Marsh lights were said to be flames venting from barely submerged castragons, a claim that intersected with other myths that said the lights marked buried treasure and fostered new permutations of the stories. While its reptilian relative was reputed to hoard gold, in many tales of the castragon this was transmuted into a penchant for the wood of the aspen. As one might expect, a fire-breathing animal making its home in a wooden lodge is not the most

harmonious of pairings; settlers would often tell of finding no evidence of a castragon save piles of charcoal next to a stream. Evidence, they would claim, of where it had accidentally burned its lodge down around itself. This unfortunate habit embedded itself in the popular imagination in an outsized manner, and for a time in the 1790's castragon charcoal enjoyed a period of immense popularity. Bushels of it fetched twenty times the normal rate for charcoal, due to its perceived beneficial qualities, thought to have been imparted when it was formed at temperatures only achievable by dragon fire. The fad made several fortunes, but predictably also led to a flood of fake castragon charcoal entering and subsequently collapsing the market, no doubt due in part to the challenge of authenticating charcoal originating from a mythical creature.

The beast was not merely a favorite of the common farmer and the market speculator. Thomas Jefferson included the castragon in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* as a minor datum in his attempted refutation of the Comte de Buffon's contention that the fauna of America were degenerate compared to those of Eurasia. As late as 1886, Mark Twain saw a stuffed one in a town museum in Normal, Illinois, writing to fellow author William Dean Howells that he was "...disappointed by the beast. Beastly it was, if a bit threadbare, and truth be told, I was more amazed that it looked to have worn a corset for many years. The creature's waist (where the beaver and dragon halves met) was a good handspan slimmer than the rest of the body. I would suggest it as an advertisement for a corsetier, but for the fact that it looks to have taken the extreme step of sewing its flesh together at that point to enhance its slenderness."

While the increase in population and urbanity in the east saw the decline of the castragon there, the confluence of wood and gold in which the creature played proved enticing to prospectors and as gold rushes drew men west, tales of the castragon accompanied them. Typical among such stories is the following, from a Deer Lake newspaper:

"I had found a lucky fool who was buyin' rounds for the house to celebrate his find, and, drinkin' my own sorrows a bit too heavily, woke up miles from nowhere with my head fit to split and sick as a pig. I walked all day, but it wasn't til evening came on and I started craving food and water again that I saw a puff of smoke risin' over the next ridge. Thinkin' I might finally be nearing a settlement, I climbed up and over the ridge, only to see not a stove pipe or a campsite, but a lone tall pine flash up in fire then fall over, leaving everything around it unburnt. 'Ah,' I thought to myself. 'That's a castragon's work.' Sure enough, I could see it standing on its hind legs and tail, its long arms almost touchin' the ground. It grabbed the still-smoldering fallen tree in its whiskey jaws and dragged it off to a pond, where it dropped it in the water to extinguish the flames, then shoved it up on its dam and pounded it into place with its tail. If I could kill this creature, I would not only have the gold it hoarded in its lodge,

but also it being there meant there was a rich seam nearby. Now the thing about castragons most folks don't know is that onions is poisonous to them, on account of them counteracting the castragon's fire. So before it got dark I found myself some wild onions, hollowed out a thick aspen branch (aspen is a particular favorite of castragons), and stuffed 'em inside. After dark, I snuck down to the lodge, which was glowin' from inside from the castragon's fiery exhalations. I stood the branch on its end and let it fall right on top of the lodge, then ran and hid. Sure enough, that got the castragon's attention, and I could see bubbles and smoke come out of the pond as the castragon crawled out and up onto its lodge. With steam pouring from its nose, it found the branch and took it back inside. All I had to do was wait. With the hunger and fatigue of my long day I must have dozed off, because a huge sneeze woke me up and I saw the lodge was all aflame. I musta picked a bit of wild garlic with the onions, on account of garlic makes castragons sneeze something fierce. As I sat there cursin' myself, the fire spread to the dam, which shortly gave way, drainin' the pond."

When the sun rose the next morning I could see that nothing remained of the lodge, it all havin' been washed away when the dam broke. But I marked a few trees with my knife, and after finding my way back to town late that night, I staked a claim to a few miles up and downstream of that place and sifted out all that castragon's gold, though I never found its seam."

Kate Mulvaney, Shrivening | Jack B. Bedell

Sometimes women from town tie up
to her dock with fish still fresh
from the water. Before they can tell her

what they need, she slices the fish
from jaw to tail, pulls its organs out
through the gash, and squeezes

its heart. There's usually enough blood
to draw crosses on all the women's
brows, enough twitch left

in the fish to last through her prayers.
Garfish are best for this, their blood
old and patient from waiting

in the deepest waters, its stain
thick enough to stay the night.

Kate Mulvaney Leaves Her Handprint in the Mud | Jack B. Bedell

Whenever she crosses the swamp,
she stops every quarter mile
to press her palm into the mud

at the base of palmettos. She knows
the swamp's dead will rise up
toward the warmth she leaves,

the fan of her fingers glowing
in their dark heaven. Whatever there is
to learn from these depths

she draws toward the surface,
prays for it to follow her home
and spill itself out of the nets

she casts in her dreams, all open-eyed
and mouthing the sharp air.

in a flung festoon | Rekha Valliappan

looking for the ornament-studded bride under
gilt edged vermilion-red, her skin heavy-hued
in age old crimson maroon -stained coy-blush;
polished aunties frilled in pomegranate-red, be-
decked in finest silks, - rush, brush, in heavy
stampede to chase the jasmine-curtained groom,
-mounted, he on princely white charger, pale as
the sweet-scented flowers half shy-shrouded -
drum-beat drowsed -charge to the wedding party;
bangles gold-gleaming, tinkle-, panting, clicking,
singing, screaming, profusely streaming, fine-
natured jeweled crowds, encircle the auspicious
roundabout - to gaze one small glimpse of the
glare-encrusted queen.

i spin with the rest, rich rites resurged, red satin
dancing, wild to the beat, fired with the festooned
glow of age-old flow enjoined in seasoned splendor;
for how can one diverge from the old channeled
road, take the unknown one not taken, blade
ancient rituals embowered in runnels of time?

Puja (prayer), rituals, feeding fire with oblations like ghee, grains has been an important part of my life. 'in a flung festoon' was written after contemplating these aspects through dozens of marriages of family and friends. Looking at the evolutionary interplay between Meera Nanda's bestseller The God Market (2011) where she tackles the growing resurgence of re-ritualization so to speak among urban, educated and largely middle classes in India and Axel Michaels's Homo Ritualis (2016) which explains the fascinating rites of passage traced to its original Sanskrit Vedic roots I was inspired by a where to now moment in the mysticism and ancient practices.

Way Station | Douglas Cole

When I came down into the eastern valley, I drove for a long time completely alone on the road. Everything was far away. Then I came upon a little roadside station. It appeared out of nowhere like something from the past, run-down with faded advertising painted on the slat walls. I could make out the word Durham and what looked like a bull's head. I pulled over and stopped. An old guy came out wearing overall grease pants and a baseball cap with an emblem worn away to obscurity. He stood there in the shade under the front door awning, squinting at me and wiping his hands with a black rag.

"What can I do you for?" he asked as I got out of my car.

"Hey, good morning. I'm just picking up a few supplies," I said, walking towards him. Why did I feel like an intruder? He certainly wasn't giving me a welcoming vibe. He nodded once, looked me up and down and then took a long hard look at my car. I had the feeling no one ever stopped here.

"Had many customers today?" I asked.

"Nope."

I glanced back at the road and thought that I may have made a mistake stopping there. If asked, he would certainly remember me. It was like he was studying me.

"You got a bathroom?" I asked.

"Round back." He pointed with his eyes.

I went around the side of the station and found a sloping hillside junkyard surrounded by a wood fence covered with hubcaps. The lot was filled with old car carcasses rusting in rows. They had shattered bloody windshields and smashed up fenders and side panels. Some were stacked on top of each other. And along the back slope was a clustered tower of oil drums and vehicle parts in barrels and wheels and engine blocks sitting on sawhorses. It was a glorious graveyard of the road.

The bathroom was an outhouse there by the corner of the station, and when I went inside it smelled like the foul depths of perdition. I breathed short, quick breaths through my teeth, taking in as little air as possible inside there. When I came out, I noticed a bumper lying tilted against a smashed car, and on that bumper a license plate dangled by one rusty bolt. I looked around, didn't see the old man, and kicked the license plate off. It was bent, and I stomped it flat and slipped it under my shirt behind my back.

I went up to the shop and pushed through the bell-ring of the door into an ancient mercantile store with stuffed fox and beaver pelts up on the wall and a big jar with amber liquid and a rattle snake floating in it. I half expected to see some old prospector emerge

from the pulpy fabric of the hot air. I wandered down the rows of shelves looking at faded magazines and canned foods and dried foods and racks of sunglasses, thinking, what do I need? I grabbed a few snacks from the food aisle, some peanuts and beef jerky and beer, and I put them on the counter. The old guy stood there working that dirty rag around his grease-black fingers, squinting at me like he knew something.

"How much I owe you?" I asked.

"Lemme see here," he said, and he rang it up. Then he looked at me with an odd expression and kind of worked his mouth like he was chewing on something and said, "What you done?"

"What's that?"

"I said what you done, ya takin my license plate like that? You're up to something."

"Nothing," I said. "I just wanted it for a souvenir."

"Ain't worth nothin."

"Then it's no loss."

"Take it. I don't care. Just seems like a strange thing to want for no reason."

"You ever do anything for no reason?"

He smiled a bit, but he didn't give me the impression he was on my side. He was figurin.' Then he said, "S'pose so."

"I'll pay you for it."

"Don't want your money. Like I said. It ain't worth nothin' to me."

"Well, then, thanks I suppose."

"Don't thank me. It's between you and God." I looked at him for a moment with an urge to explain, but what was I going to tell him? He was reading it just right. Then I wanted to ask him exactly which God he was talking about, but he turned away and went back into the shadows, which was a kind of answer, so I took my things and left.

Some Memories from My Time at Uni | Thomas Morgan

I remember sitting in a
classroom
all by myself watching
Catfish
on the big screen.

I remember going to the
library café after my
seminars
and shooting the shit with my
friend Ross.

I remember getting a
chicken parm from The
Deli
and taking it over to
Jubilee.

I remember having brunch with
the guys and the girls and then
walking along
the beach, throwing stones into
the sea.

All of this, I remember fondly.

But I'll never be able to get it back.

There is nothing crueller than the
passage
of time.

Orange Rocks | Joey Nicoletti

I'm not a superhero, but can I be
in charge, the master of my own narrative?

When I was a child, there was a day
when my mother was an enormous bruise, swelling

on a thigh of mid-July sky. She
told me she was leaving my father. We were

in a bookstore. "I won't suffer fools
in any form," she said to me. Swear to god

that you won't, too, Joefish." I agreed.
My mother nodded her head, then handed me

a comic: *Marvel Two in One*. The
Thing: Ben Grimm and Doc Savage punched through a wall

on the smooth cover. I remember
wanting to feel as powerful, as resolved

as they were, as my mother was
that afternoon. Alas. I could not control

the dynamics around me. I still
can't. But looking back, I can track my first sense

of concern; of worrying about
someone else's well-being to this book, and

I hear the orange rocks of my mother's
voice when I read Ben's dialogue, the mid-day

sun's yellow stammer, spitting
into parking lot potholes.

Father on the Alligator | James Miller

I am looking at photos of your time in California.
The war has ended. You're the youngest in the family portrait—
fourteen, fifteen? Bellyful with midcentury cornbread,
oversalted collards on the gut. And another:

on a dare your brother has sent you into the alligator's
sandy circle. Here you are, saddling its ribbed back,
your feet planted in the dust just behind his flailing foreclaws.
You won't smile for the camera, nor the crowd of kids

standing round the cast-iron railing. I am going to say
it is August 1946, but who knows? Let's assume your mother
whipped you off that rough beast and whupped you
on the boardwalk. But who took the picture?

There is humor in your knees, and your knees know it.
When you hopped across the gator's fence, they twinged
and chucked under-breath. All afternoon they have tried
to get you laughing: What are we doing here

in Steinbeck country, on this tepid coast? Is it not time
to learn a trade? Raise a brood in Arkansas, round Eureka
Springs, frozen Lake Lucerne? But you're heavy, too heavy
to lift. Sack-skin filled up with damp, quartz-glint sand.

Genesis | Emily Bell

And what am I going to make of myself?

Lay on hands and mould the mouldering earth

Not from a rib but from a tooth

Precious, hard, for biting

Collateral Damage | Ian C. Smith

Look, there I am when the war, a conflict half a world away that stole my uncles' lives, was over: a military reserve across the unsealed road from where we lived after emigrating to Australia, one hundred dense acres shielding derelict sheds patrolled by kangaroos, snakes, in the ticking heat of this bluish bush. I search for my missing pup I shall never see again, almost stepping on a coiled copperhead, smoking, calling his name. I am thirteen, deeply unhappy.

Years after the regret of my family's woeful ways in their promised Utopia, after a boyish idea of war's glamour fed by comics, movies, after first-hand knowledge of army life, I learned of that area's use during WW2—the housing and treatment of venereally infected soldiers. Locals believed propaganda about troop movement, training exercises, while the reality was a disease zone, army doctors' blunt indifference to the plight of shamefully wounded warriors whose beating hearts beat quieter, whose enlisted dreams had plummeted to menial tasks, porridge and penicillin, a caste quarantined.

They huddle sorry-arsed on a railway platform sharing *Turf* cigarettes, faces above khaki greatcoats, demeanour, old for their years. Then the train to the end of the line, the myth of medals blessed by sunlight shattered, destination vague, they venture wan jokes yearning for a vanishing point, invent future tales of explanation, watching back yards shunting by, no risk of being blown up now, yet their world askew, heading for the bush opposite where, years later, my little world warped, also askew.

I hope those soldiers left disappointment behind, got on with their lives, caught other trains, slow trains, fast trains, night trains, pursuing post-war happiness. In the year following my dog's disappearance I caught the train from that end-of-the-line station to the throbbing city, alone, into the rest of my life.

A eucalyptus breeze stirs those abandoned buildings, disturbs fretted cigarette smoke. Cardboard flaps forlornly against a shed. Sunlight reflects from a fingerprinted window as if trapped long ago. I whistle in vain for my dog, impatiently regret things are never again quite what they once were.

Song of Francis | Emily Pollock

Here one minute, gone
The next. Brief
candle. A short-matched
life—a garden of steel,
a city of dirt,
and one final bright flame.
Left with only words. Blue ink
fingers. What were you thinking?

Willow-tree heart, soft
over the water. These
are the threads
you leave. One last muddy letter
clasped in a baby's fist. Somewhere
you are in sunlight and bright
breeze, laughing, where only
the faerie-king lives, and

somewhere you are shining bright
and gold in the gaslight, but I do not
know where—one last
moment in the light, bright, brief, blazing,
then the curtain falls. (Gone.)

Song of Francis is inspired by the life and legacy of the young and little-known First World War poet, Francis Fowler Hogan. Frank, a native of the factory town of Pittsburgh, PA, USA, was only 21 when he was killed in the Argonne Forest in France on October 17, 1918. At the time, he was in his first year as a drama student at Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University.) He was also a promising poet, published in the chapbook Carnegie Tech War Verse as well as the magazine The New Republic. My poem is inspired by his poems and by a memorial poem written for him by his friend and fellow soldier Hervey Allen.

Sestina for a Hunter | Emily Pollock

Smear'd with your fingers, the blood
clings to the curves of your pretty mouth,
sweetness pulled from the meat of a rabbit
from the rich red veins of its beating heart;
you wash your face, hands cupped, in the stream
and form a prayer to the rabbit, a song.

Wind presses through the forest song—
like, a pulse of the world, a blood.
like veins, the life of the forest is the stream
which you greedily cut open and lift to your mouth.
The flesh of the world feeds your own small heart
cut open, hunting and seeking another rabbit.

In another leaf-soaked hollow you find the rabbit
and clutch it by its foot, your knife a song
of tendon and marrow until it reaches the heart.
Your hands cup its fragile body, the blood
running to the uncertain earth which opens like a mouth.
You kneel with its animal body watching the blood, a stream.

Autumn slips through the days you count by the leaves on the stream;
you carve charms from the bones of the rabbit
and let your furwrapped feet carry you to the water's mouth.
the stream spills from the rocks carving a song
that sounds like your veins full of blood,
rabbit-like. You press your cheek to the beating heart.

Tangled stony tree-roots cup handlike the heart
of the forest. You climb the tree, your feet hanging in the stream
of cold air wrapping around the bark. Lungs that feed your blood
gulp the aching breeze, your gaze of a rabbit
watching the leaves sing the chorus of a song.
The words you don't quite forget cling to your mouth.

The taste of rabbit blood and stream water cling to your mouth-
The veins that feed your body like the forest feeds your heart.
Rabbits do not sing but their bones play a song,

one that flows from your lips as a stream,
your own cold bones remember those of the rabbit,
your blood its blood, the earth's blood, the life-blood.

Your mouth tells your throat that it is a stream
of your body, your heart beats like the rabbit's
and your blood remembers its song.

Sestina for a Hunter was written as my practicing the sestina poem form.

Three Royal Consorts (a triptych of interconnected drabbles) | Maura Yzmore

“You have no idea how hard it is to live out a great romance.” – Wallis Simpson

I behold, propped on my forearm, his chest rising and falling. He is my husband, this man asleep beside me, and I love him all right. But he’s just a man, not the king he once was.

He liked being commanded, malleable and trembling, liked eating out of my hand. Liked eating me out.

I knew the court would never accept the twice-divorced me. So we had great, scandalous fun, but by the time they demanded I give him up, I’d had enough.

Then he abdicated, surprising everyone. Supposedly, for me.

Only I never asked for his grand gesture’s shackles.

Regina Gravida Mori

Since I fell pregnant, Queen Anne has appeared in my dreams.

I wouldn’t begrudge her wishing me ill, yet she gazes upon me with tenderness instead. Little Elizabeth sits at Anne’s feet when Henry appears—my Henry, a boisterous mountain—and embraces them both.

Tonight, Anne is in labor. She gives birth to a boy, although she never had one while she lived. Midwives whisk the child away, then guards take Anne outside. She wears my nightshirt, bloodied.

An axe glistens and Anne’s head rolls into the grass.

I wake up to my insides rupturing, making way for Henry’s heir.

Tiger Nut Sweets

I am Iah, the Moon. King's Daughter. Beloved King's Mother.

For my brother and husband—the now-dead man who was briefly King—I bore two children, my only true loves, both sweeter than tiger nut sweets.

You are Neferu, the Beauty. King's Daughter. And mine.

Tomorrow you marry your brother, our new King. At night, when he looks at you with the ember eyes of a stranger, your wedding dress sliding off like the cool waters of Nile, know that the moonlight on your skin is me sending you comfort, praying your daughter never has to become her brother's wife.

**to william carlos williams: take me from my skin, make me a river
rock again | K. Persinger**

there is a boy in my class who looks like he could
catch a bird out of the brush with his bare hands:
a gentleness i cannot mirror, though i long to;
i picked my patron saint out of spite & i fear that
this is the way of all loving

i have forgotten how to pray: this is not to say
that there is no divinity here between us,
in this; merely that i do not know what to do
with it.

God presses His fingers against my
closed eyelids with so much tenderness
that i wish the fruit had truly killed me
it is too much.

let us pretend for the space of this moment
that my hands, my mouth, could pluck, unprotected,
the fruit of the cactus out from between its thorns
and come away unbloody,

that i could unbind & breathe deeply & the sun
would shine so brightly we would burn with it—
if you closed your eyes and kissed me, how would i
taste different from any other man?

*Drawing from the lines “through metaphor to reconcile / the people and the stones” from “A Sort of
Song” by William Carlos Williams, which have always resonated with me, this poem is a meditation on
the longing for tender love as a queer nonbinary person, and the struggle to accept it.*

Contributors

Barney Ashton-Bullock has had poems published in *'The Pandorian'* *'The New River Press Year Book'* and in the *'Soho Nights II'* and *'Soho Nights III'* pamphlets published by The Society Club Press. He has also written 3 theatrical song-cycles for Erasure's Andy Bell as the polysexual character 'Torsten'; *'Torsten The Bareback Saint'*, *'Torsten The Beautiful Libertine'* and *'Torsten In Queereteria'* and, from these, has had three spin-off poetry publications published. *'Mottled Memoirs'* in the performance programme for *'Torsten The Bareback Saint'*, the full poetry collection *'Schema / Stasis'* by The Society Club Press and five poems known as *'Filthy, Rhymey Murk'* that were included in the deluxe edition of the *'Torsten In Queereteria'* album published by Cherry Red Records.

He performs his own poetry as the narrator on the current Downes Braide Association album *'Skyscraper Souls'*, is the organiser of 'Soho Poetry Nights' events and has, in the past, represented the UK through the Royal Court Young People's Theatre with his theatrical poem *'North'*. His new pamphlet *'Café Kaput!'* is published by Broken Sleep Books in May, 2020.

Ferdison Cayetano is a student at the College of William & Mary, where he is majoring in history. You can find him on Twitter @ferdwrites. Please offer him jobs.

Lisa McCabe lives and writes in Lahave, Nova Scotia, Canada. She studied Film at York University, Toronto, and English Literature at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She has published or has poems forthcoming in *The Sewanee Review*, *A3 Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *HCE Review*, and *Limestone Review*, among other print and electronic journals.

D.S. Maolalaí has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times 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)

Connie Woodring is a 74-year-old retired therapist and social activist who is getting back to her true love of writing after 45 years in her real job. She has had 21 poems published in various presses including one nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize.

Rosaleen Lynch, an Irish community worker and writer in the East End of London, pursues stories whether conversational, literary or performed. Published online and in print, including *City of Stories*, *The Word for Freedom* and most recently the *Short Édition* story dispensers, *The London Reader* and *Jellyfish Review*.

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Mehreen Ahmed is an award-winning, internationally published and critically acclaimed author. She has written Novels, Novella, Short Stories, Creative Nonfiction, Flash Fiction, Academic, Prose Poetry, Memoirs, Essays and Journalistic Write-Ups. Her works have been translated in German, Greek and Bengali. She was born and raised in Bangladesh. At the moment, she lives in Australia.

Rob McKinnon lives in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia. His poetry has previously been published in *'From the Ashes - A poetry anthology in support of the 2019-2020 Australian Bushfire relief effort'* *Maximum Felix Media*, *The Wellington Street Review*, *Sūdō Journal*, *Sage Cigarettes Magazine*, *Re-Side Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow Literary Magazine*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Dissident Voice*, *Tuck Magazine* and *InDaily*.

Tim Dadswell is a retired civil servant living in Norfolk. He has had work published in and by *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears* and *Cocktails with Miss Austen*. He won second prize in a Brilliant Flash Fiction contest and was a runner-up in a Writers' Forum flash fiction competition.

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Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *Chiron Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *Weber*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, *Poem*, *South Dakota Review*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008).

He has taught university English in the US, China, and the Palestinian West Bank.

Bruce McDougall's work has appeared in journals such as *The Antigoniash Review*, *Ward's Literary Magazine*, *Dark Ink*, *Geist*, *subTerrain* and *the Amsterdam Review*. His short-story collection, *Every Minute is a Suicide*, and his non-fiction novel, *The Last Hockey Game*, were published in 2014. In addition to writing for *The Globe and Mail*, *Maclean's*, *Canadian Business* and other publications, he's worked as an airport attendant, a bouncer, a taxi driver, a social worker and a newspaper reporter. He graduated from Harvard College and attended the University of Toronto Law School, twice.

Edward Ashworth was born in Corsica but gained an interest in British history & culture after teaching himself English. He has been awarded several prizes by the French Ministry of Education and the French National Veteran Office for his work on the First and Second World War.

Gary Thomson is retired in Ontario, Canada. His short fiction has appeared in *Windsor Review*, *fiftywordstories [2]*, *AgnesandTrue*, among others. In his rec moments he blows Beatles and blues on his Hohner harmonica

Gareth Culshaw lives in Wales. His first collection came out in 2018 by Futurecycle called *The Miner*. In 2020, his second collection, *Shadows of Tryfan* is released. He is an MFA student at Manchester Met. Also nominated for Best of the Net.

Robert Boucheron is an architect in Charlottesville, Virginia. His stories and essays appear in *Bellingham Review*, *Fiction International*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and online magazines.

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. Hopefully with each passing decade the poems have become more clear and concise, succinct and precise, more appealing and “universal.” He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being *The Poet’s Curse, A Miscellany* (The Poetry Box, 2019).

J.L. Lapinel is a poet and educator. Her work appears in *Minnie’s Diary Anthology*, *Impressions: A Collection of Poetry*, *Quill Books*, *Front Runner Quarterly*, *Wide Open Magazine*, *The Cambridge Collection*, *The North American Poetry Review*, *Odessa Poetry Review*, *Minetta Review*, *The Tin Penny*. Her poem *Little People* was nominated for 2019 Pushcart Prize.

She is an MFA candidate at UMass Amherst and is very much enjoying living in New England after having lived half of her life in and around New York.

Keith Moul writes poems and takes photos, doing both for more than 50 years. He concentrates on empirical moments in time, recognizing that the world will be somewhat different at the same place that today inspires him. His work appears around the world. Besides this reprint of his 2012 book *Beautiful Agitation*, also scheduled for 2020 release is *New and Selected Poems: Bones Molder, Words Hold*.

Aiden Heung is a poet born and raised on the edge of Tibetan Plateau. He holds an MA in literature from Tongji University in Shanghai. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in numerous online and print magazines including *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Literary Shanghai*, *Voice & Verse*, *The Shanghai Literary Review*, *New English Review*, *Mekong Review*, *The Raw Art Review* among many other places. He was shortlisted for the 2020 Doug Draime Poetry Prize and he was also awarded the 2019 Hong Kong Proverse Poetry Prize.

He can be found on twitter @**AidenHeung**

Patrick M. Hare's work has appeared in *The Wellington Street Review*, *The Stirling Spoon*, *Vestal Review*, and *Photochemistry and Photobiology*. He lives near Cincinnati, OH, USA but can be found on twitter @**nkupmh**.

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature* and directs the Louisiana Literature Press. Jack’s

work has appeared in *Southern Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *The Shore*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, *Okay Donkey*, *EcoTheo*, *The Hopper*, *Terrain*, *saltfront*, and other journals. His latest collection is *No Brother, This Storm* (Mercer University Press, 2018). He served as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.

Rekha Valliappan is a multi-genre writer of prose and poetry. She earned her MA and BA in English Literature from Madras University and her LLB (Hons) from the University of London. She has won awards and been nominated for her work and is featured in literary journals and anthologies including *The Sandy River Review Online*, *Aaduna Literary Review*, *Ann Arbor Review*, *Dime Show Review*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *Mason Street Review*, *Artifact Nouveau*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Foliate Oak Literary Review*, *X-R-A-Y Lit Mag*, and elsewhere. Find her on Twitter @silicasun.

Douglas Cole has published six collections of poetry and a novella. His work has appeared in several anthologies as well as *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Galway Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Louisiana Literature* and *Slipstream*. He has been nominated twice for a Pushcart and Best of the Net and received the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry. He lives and teaches in Seattle. His website is douglastcole.com.

Thomas Morgan is a writer from Worthing in West Sussex. His short story *Promises* was published in the 2019 Leicester Writes Short Story Prize Anthology, and his story *Encounter* was published online on Visual Verse.

Joey Nicoletti is the author of four poetry books, most recently *Boombbox Serenade* (BlazeVOX, 2019). His Pushcart Prize-nominated work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Drawn to Marvel: Poems from the Comic Books*, and *Poet Sounds: An Anthology Inspired by The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds*. He's on Twitter @JoeyNicoletti and Instagram @joeynicoletti.

James Miller is a native of Houston, Texas. His poems have appeared in *Cold Mountain Review*, *The Maine Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Gravel*, *Main Street Rag*, *Verdad*, *Juked*, *The Shore*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Califragile*, *Meat for Tea*, *Plainsongs*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Rogue Agent*, and elsewhere.

Dr Emily Bell is a writer and historian, based in Loughborough, UK. She is currently writing a new biography of Charles Dickens for Reaktion Books, and she's been published in *Ink Pantry* and elsewhere. She tweets at @EmilyJLB.

Ian C. Smith's work has appeared in, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Southerly*, & *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island, Tasmania.

Emily Pollock is an undergraduate student of history at Boston College. She gains the majority of her writing inspiration from her studies and her long-term passion for history. As a high school student, she received multiple honors from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She also published with and edited her school's literary magazine. As a current full-time college student, she dedicates her writing ability to many, many historiography papers and some poems on the side just for fun. She was most recently published in *The Laughing Medusa* at Boston College. She is sometimes located on Twitter @crowsnestgirl and on Instagram @middlenamekendall.

Maura Yzmore is a writer and scientist based in the American Midwest. Her literary short fiction can be found in *Jellyfish Review*, *Gone Lawn*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *Bending Genres*, and elsewhere. Website: maurayzmore.com Twitter: @MauraYzmore

K. Persinger is a Southern Californian poet and an undergraduate student double majoring in Comparative Literature and Anthropology and double minoring in Gender & Sexuality Studies and Archaeology. Their work can be found in *The Wall*, *Neon Anteatr Renaissance*, *New Forum*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, *L'Éphémère Review*, and *Werkloos Mag*, as well as on their blog ashandabstraction.tumblr.com.

Call for Submissions

The *Wellington Street Review* will open for submissions on the 1st April 2020 for our June issue, themed *Journeys*.

