

SUNSPOT LITERARY JOURNAL

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CHANGING THE WORLD
THROUGH WORDS AND ART

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From the Facing It Series / Jack Bordnick



Only Our Shadow's Know / Jack Bordnick

Yet You

Jane Wiseman

anything they said was said slap on it
but what you said came out of the red deep

had a nostril big as a person could sit in it
feet like the sailing off the golden sheen

anything they did they did like one two three
but yours was a silver purse for fishes and fronds

you hauled it up the holy bronze of the deck
across the boards you spilled for only me

the dreams they dreamed were small and gray
dreams of yours towered to thunderheads

drifting the continent oh I could feel
the lightning flash from the dark underside
and the leading boil of it sang shrill and green



A Peep at the Moon / Tianyagen Yan



Nightmare / Tianyagen Yan

I love the Dark Hours of my Being

Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from German by Wally Swist

From *Book of Hours: The Book of the Monastic Life*

I love the dark hours of my being,
in which my senses deepen;
in them, as in old letters,
I have found my daily life already lived,
and, like a legend, far and subdued.

From them comes knowledge that I have space
for a second timelessly broad life.
And sometimes I'm like the tree
that, ripe and rustling, over a grave
fulfills the dream that the boy who died
(around whom its warm roots crowd)
lost in sadness and song.

Ich liebe meines Wesens Dunkelstunden

Rainer Maria Rilke

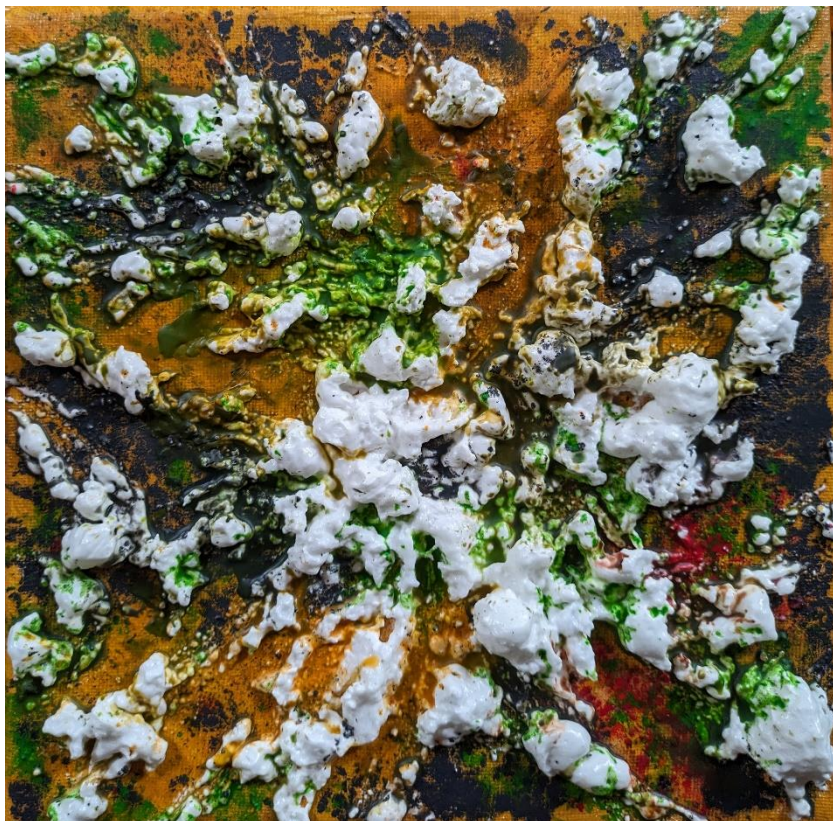
From *Book of Hours: The Book of the Monastic Life*

Ich liebe meines Wesens Dunkelstunden,
in welchen meine Sinne sich vertiefen;
in ihnen hab ich, wie in alten Briefen,
mein täglich Leben schon gelebt gefunden und
wie Legende weit und überwunden.

Aus ihnen kommt mir Wissen, daß ich Raum
zu einem zweiten zeitlos breiten Leben habe.
Und manchmal bin ich wie der Baum,
der, reif und rauschend, über einem Grabe
den Traum erfüllt, den der vergangne Knabe
(um en sich seine warmen Wurzeln drängen)
verlor in Traurigkeiten und Gesängen.



Binary Stars / Garth Upshaw



No Diagnosis / Garth Upshaw

Blueprint

Kristian Butterfield

Some nights there's something about the placement
of the lights beyond my bedroom window. They spell
out a message, some code I can't yet decipher,
but I'm working on a machine to watch the lights
and read the lines on the palm of the world.

It's not what this poem is about but I want to tell you,
when my grandfather died, I eulogized him in verse
and I regret it. I said something like:

there is no sleep without
a dream, no night
without stars.

Good god. I was young but still —

Anyway, I'm working on a machine to suck the air
out of a room in case of a fire, and another to share
memories of dreams without vandalizing the feelings with
words,

and another, to fight the overwhelming sadness of every
ending,
two big fucking gloves that just *go* at the bedside, big and loud
and simple,
trying their best to knock those feelings of inadequate usage
back from wherever they came.



Mysterious Classical Monument / Michael Noonan



Decorated Vase / Michael Noonan

Ode to Your Hands

Pablo Neruda

Translated from Spanish by Wally Swist

When your hands reach out,
love, into mine,
what do they bring me flying?
why did they stop
in my mouth, suddenly?
why do I recognize them,
as if then, before,
I would have touched them
as if before their being
they would have traveled
to my forehead, my waist?

Their softness came
flying over time,
over the sea, over smoke,
about spring,
and when you placed
your hands on my chest,
I recognized those wings,
golden dove, in them
I perceived that clay
and that color of wheat.

The years of my life
I walked looking for them.
I climbed the stairs,
I crossed the reefs,
trains dispatched me,
the waters delivered me,
and in the skin of the grapes
I thought I touched you,
the wood all at once

brought me your contact,
the almond announced to me
your secret softness,
until your hands
closed on my chest
and there like two wings
they finished their journey.

Oda a tus Manos

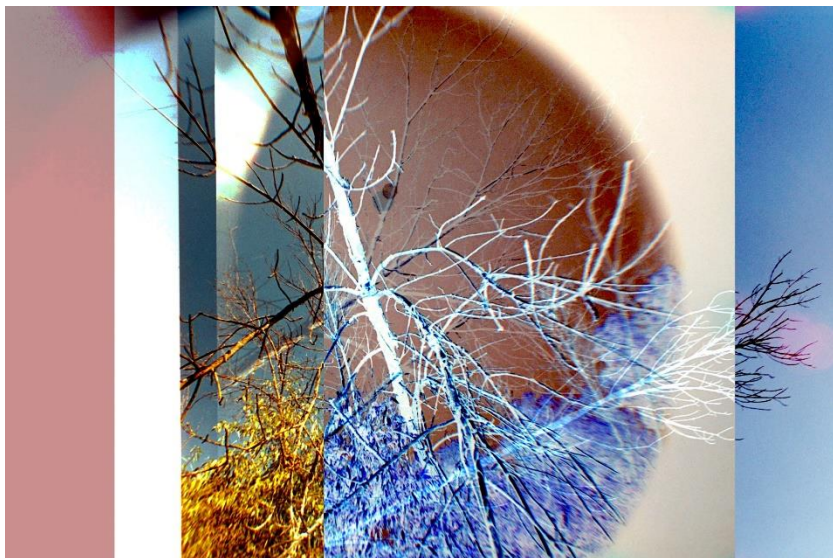
Pablo Neruda

Cuando tus manos salen,
amor, hacia las mías,
qué me traen volando?
Por qué se detuvieron
en mi boca, de pronto,
por qué las reconozco
como si entonces, antes,
las hubiera tocado,
como si antes de ser
hubieran recorrido
mi frente, mi cintura?

Su suavidad venía
volando sobre el tiempo,
sobre el mar, sobre el humo,
sobre la primavera,
y cuando tú pusiste
tus manos en mi pecho,
reconocí esas alas
de paloma dorada,
reconocí esa greda
y ese color de trigo.

Los años de mi vida
yo caminé buscándolas.
Subí las escaleras,
crucé los arrecifes,
me llevaron los trenes,
las aguas me trajeron,
y en la piel de las uvas
me pareció tocarte.
La madera de pronto
me trajo tu contacto,
la almendra me anunciaba

tu suavidad secreta,
hasta que se cerraron
tus manos en mi pecho
y allí como dos alas
terminaron su viaje.



From the Transitory Space Series / Leah Oates



Anomalous Introspection / Robert Gillespie



Grand Highway / GJ Gillespie

I return home from my Silence

Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from German by Wally Swist

From the *Book of Hours: The Book of the Monastic Life*

I return home from my silence,
within which I lost myself.
I was the singer, and God, the rhyme,
still resounding in my ears.

I will be quiet and simple,
and my voice stands;
my face lowers
to ardent prayer.
To the others I was like the wind,
as I called her trembling.
I was far away from where the angels are,
high, where the light melts into nothingness —
But deeply dark in God.

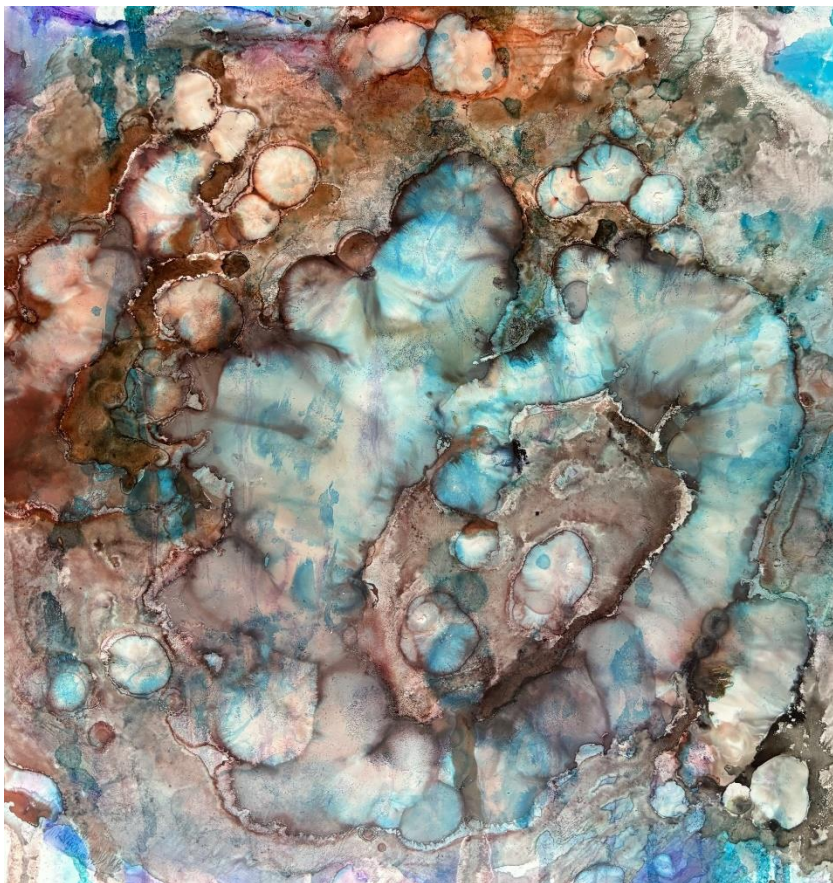
Ich komme aus meinen Schwigen heim

by Rainer Maria Rilke

From the *Book of Hours: The Book of the Monastic Life*

Ich komme aus meinen Schwigen heim,
mit denen ich mich verlor.
Ich war Gesang, und Gott, der Reim,
rauscht noch in meinem Ohr.

Ich werde weider still und schlicht,
und meine Stimme steht;
es senkte sich mein Angesicht
zu besserem Gebet.
Den andern war ich wie ein Wind,
da ich sie ruttelnd rief.
Weit war ich, wo die Engel sind,
hoch, wo das Licht in Nichts zerrinnt —
Gott aber dunkelt tief . . .



Color Penenda Ena 2024 / Cynthia Yatchman



Color Okto 2024 / Cynthia Yatchman

It won't be quiet in the Houses, be it

Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from German by Wally Swist

From the *Book of Hours: The Book of Pilgrimage*

It won't be quiet in the houses, be it
that one dies and they carry him on,
be it that on secret command someone
takes the pilgrim's stick and collar
to ask for the way abroad,
on which he knows you are waiting.

The streets will never be empty
of those who want to see you as that rose
which blooms once every thousand years.
Many dark people are almost nameless,
and when they reach you they are tired.

But I have seen the procession;
and have believed ever since that the winds blow
from the movement of their cloaks,
and are silent when they lie down — ;
so great is their walking in the plains.

Es wird nicht Ruhe in den Häusern, sei's

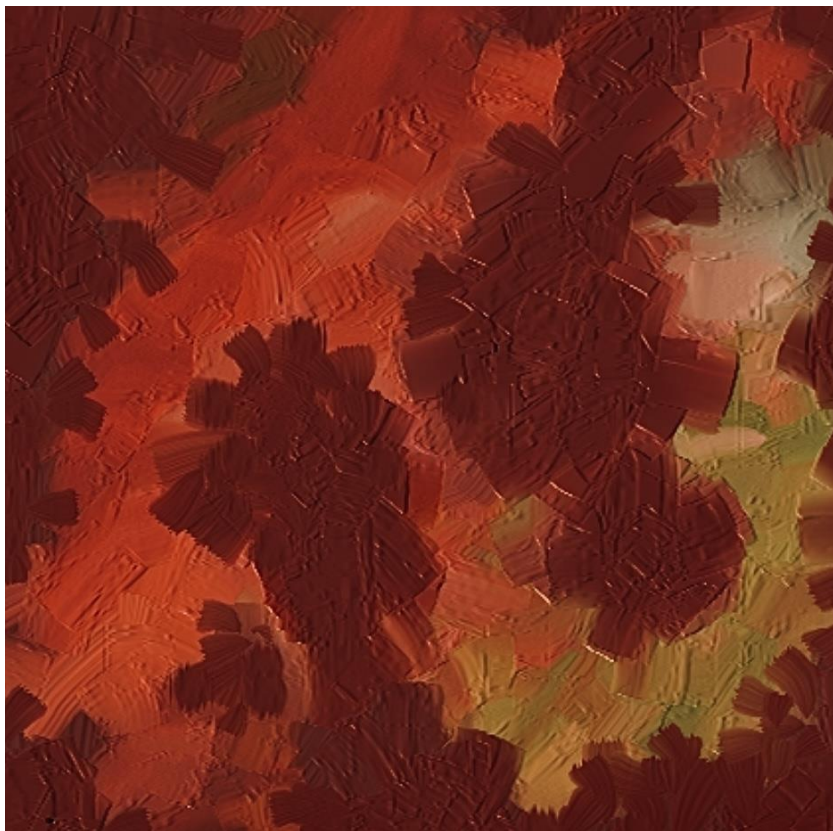
by Rainer Maria Rilke

From the *Book of Hours, The Book of Pilgrimage*

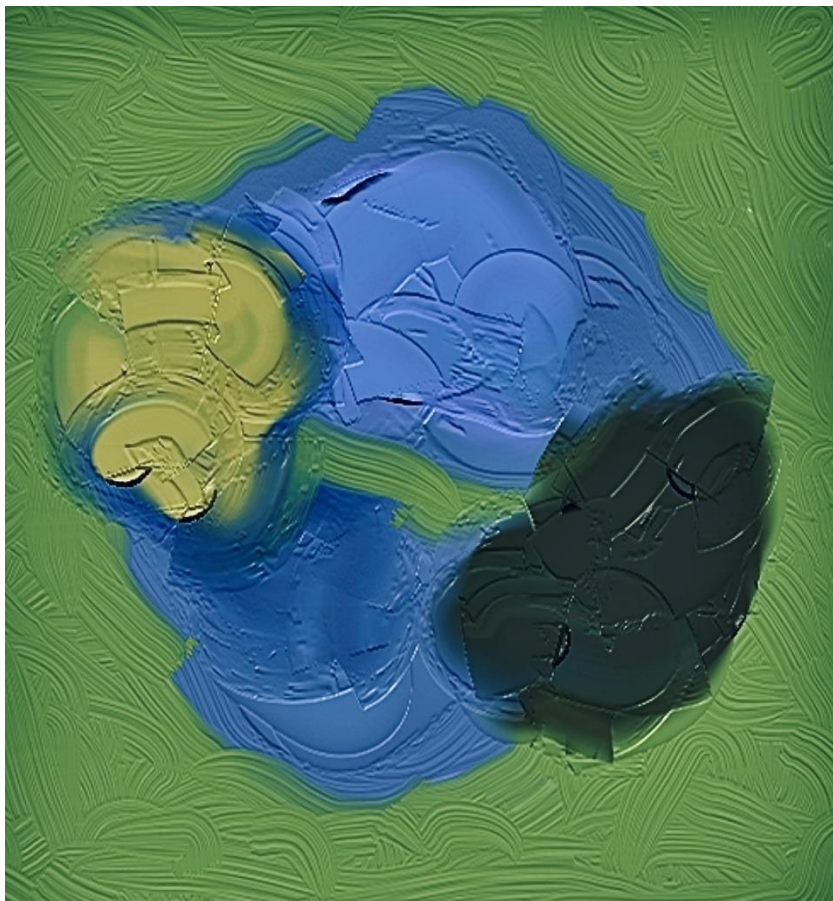
Es wird nicht Ruhe in den Häusern, sei's
daß einer stirbt und sie ihn weitertragen,
sei es daß wer auf heimliches Geheiß
den Pilgerstock nimmt und den Pilgerkragen,
um in der Fremde nach dem Weg zu fragen,
auf welchem er dich warten weiß.

Die Straßen werden derer niemals leer,
die zu dir wollen wie zu jener Rose,
die alle tausend Jahre einmal blüht.
Viel dunkles Volk und beinah Namenlose,
und wenn sie dich erreichen, sind sie müd.

Aber ich habe ihren Zug gesehn;
und glaube seither, daß die Winde wehn
aus ihren Mänteln, welche sich bewegen,
und stille sind wenn sie sich niederlegen — ;
so groß war in den Ebenen ihr Gehn.



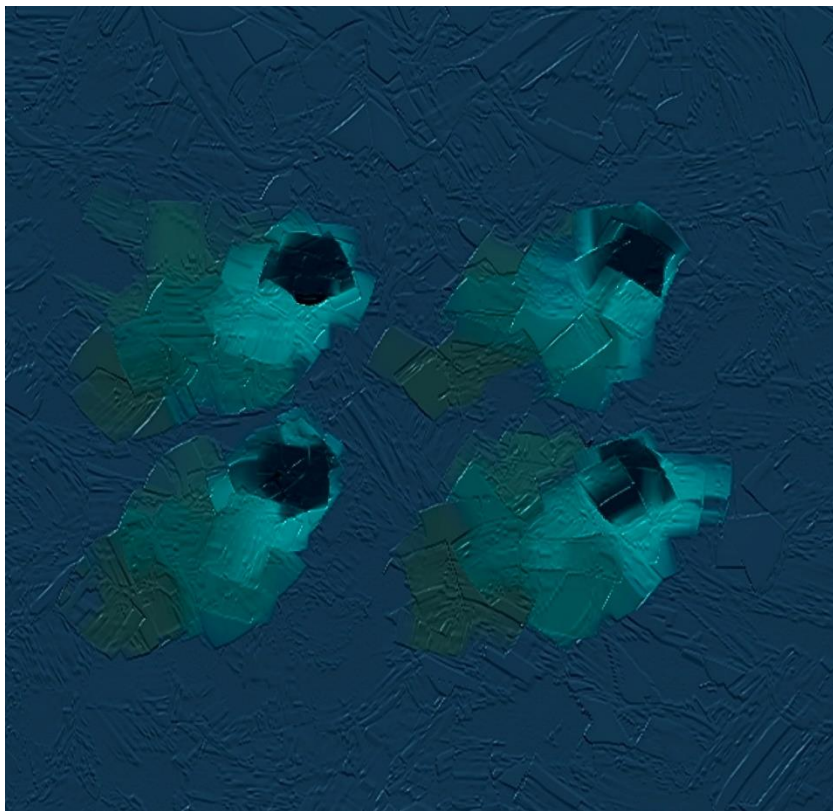
Flare / Irwin Freeman



Quasar Botanicus / Irwin Freeman



You, Black Gold of the Sun / Irwin Freeman



Solar Wind / Irwin Freeman

A Vile Body

Chad Gusler

and he was transfigured before them

The light come a cropper and bats swooped low over the stilly water, nipping day-drunk bugs from the dank air—one, two, and gone, over and again. The sun streaked long and then it were nothing, quick as a blink. But the man stood there in the burgeoning gloom, hands flat against his tight skirt, the slimy wood thick on his haunches. Trula knowed she could've worn his skirt better—her hips narrow as the Poor Fork linns that channeled white over the mossy stones—but she weren't fond how he leant against the piling, as if he thought himself a man of say. Hell, a man in a skirt weren't lofty to her.

He smelt like strawberry Jell-O and the sparse scruff on his chin like to gag her. But being the pastor, she said him anyways, offering her name. The sky was dark but faithful Orion held forth, Rigel's blue light blinking the black, and then he offered his own: Flannery. He was from afar, but his flat timbre said as much.

"Chicago?" she asked.

"More or less," Flannery said.

Trula patted her jacket till she found her cigarettes. He preferred candy cigarettes, but this evening's different, he told her, taking one of the two she forked out from a near-empty pack. She put a match to it, and after he inhaled, he folded down the piling till his knees framed his face and his junk flashed the stars.

"Shit," he said. "That's strong."

She averted her eyes and lit her own cigarette. His fledgling were snug down in its wiry nest between his pale legs. It shown lonesome, like it hadn't knowed a friend in ages, but she stuck out her hand anyways and Flannery grabbed ahold of it and lifted himself up. She'd yet to happen on a bonny cock, but she weren't exactly looking neither.

"You can spend a night," she said finally, poking his hollow chest, "and then you'll be off."

Flannery adjusted his wig, its burnished tips holding a crazy-ass flare. “A reasonable request.” He held out his cigarette. “Want the rest?”

She did.

Hitch brung her morning coffee, and though his gait weren’t right, not a slosh splashed over the cup’s delicate rim. She’d bartered that cup off a dirty clod along the way to Black Mountain. It’s raku, the boy told her, wiping his nose on the flappy arm of his gray sweatshirt. “And here’s the Word of God,” she said, tossing the extra she kept in the glove box for such occasions. “Thy silver is become dross.”

The boy nearly dropped it, but that Bible weren’t much anyways, the font between its shit covers stupid with curlicues. But how could she trash it given the nosy garbage man? The clod’s daddy took it and sat in the tumbledown weeds, smoking a cigarette, eyes shifting across the thin pages. And from where she’d stood, it looked like he were raking through Jeremiah, maybe even pausing at one of that prophet’s limp-wristed twines. Would it kill a prophet to be dick-sure for once? No, it wouldn’t. And here she was now, fingering the pages of her morning Bible, asking Hitch if he’d looked after their patron, maybe give him a scoosh or two of coffee and a hot biscuit if you made any?

Hitch shifted his weight from his gammy leg and slapped flour from his apron. “He’s an odd palmer.”

“Queer as you,” she said, closing her Bible, “but he suspires all the same.”

He bowed till the oils in his curls were diamonds in the streaming light, and after he closed the parsonage door, she bundled to the window above the sink and peeked through the hanged spider plant: Hitch traiked himself across the boneyard, overselling his limp and leaving bent grass between the headstones that’d send Horse away with the fairies—Horse, her gardener, don’t take no shit. Hitch slammed his shack door, and the wooden sign above it went crooked. Sequel, the sign showed, and she never twigged why it weren’t fastened with two nails. He’d yoked his hut to Trula’s church several years back, daubed its notched logs with mud and run a cord from the light pole in the parking lot to power his TV and toaster oven. The

thatched roof sprung rye in the spring and mushrooms in the summer and leaks in the fall. He planted thyme at the entrance, which felt nice underfoot, though he gave her shit when she trod it barefoot.

“Looks like a cozy anchor hold,” Flannery said.

Trula startled then settled. “A bulging tick on a bitch in heat.” She let the spider vines fall. “He brung you coffee?”

Flannery raised his cup and took a sip. “Outside my door waiting,” he said. “Good, too.”

“I’ll give him that,” she said. “Don’t know how he does it.”

Flannery drew a chair and sat. “I’d say French press and a dark roast.”

Mustard, her old tom, was clawing at the screen door and she let him in. “You get any sleep?”

“Very fine,” he said, stroking the cat at his ankle. “What happened to his whiskers?”

“That idiot is drawn to fire,” she said, “a moth to flame.” Trula patted herself down before she realized Hitch hadn’t yet brung her daily pack. Christ, smokes came later on biscuit days—when’d she learn? And would it kill Horse to brake at the TastyShak for a pack? She pays him good, but he’d kick up a fuss, swearing her body—a preacher’s, no less—were the Lord’s temple. As if his lungs weren’t fucked from years underground.

She went to the sink and filled her mug, and when she turned, Flannery was dangling an immaculate smoke. “Jonesing?” he said.

“Where’d you get it?”

“Shirt pocket,” he said, handing it across. “I keep a spare for desperate times.”

Trula eased into her chair and flicked her lighter. “And last night weren’t desperate?” she said, pushing Mustard away. The smoke cleared her smarts.

Flannery stood. “Desperation is a continuum.”

She asked where was he off to, and he told her somewhere, but His portrait came first, because that’s what he did every morning, without fail, a picture of Our Lord, thorns and all.

“You an artist?”

Flannery shrugged. “Some would say.”

Trula's cigarette flared, then was soon drowning in the bartered cup. "I don't trust no pictures," she exhaled. "They're too still."

Flannery raised his penciled brows and slipped on a pair of cat eye glasses. They slid down his greasy nose, but he straight away pushed them up and drew a tin from his purse. The rectangular box—about the size of a pack of Virginia Slims, her favorite when the giving were good—smelled like mints, and inside the tin were tiddly daubs of red, yellow, and blue: a trinity of colors where the candies once burrowed. A tiny block of paper nested on the inner surface of the lid. Flannery sketched a quick pic on the pad, Jesus knocking on an open door. She knewed that verse: Behold, I stand at the door and knock, the Revelator wrote. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him. He that hath an ear, let him hear. Hadn't she opened that door eleventy times? She relinquished a penny in her good deeds jar, then an extra—bringing in the stranger deserves you two. And now the quart jug was nearly full, the year not even half-sewn.

Flannery was mixing his colors, his chicken fingers crackerjack with the brush, and Trula was tickled it were her door Jesus rapped on, the peeling panels showing the rotted wood and the line of ants up the frame. But why would Jesus bother knocking on an open door? He'd always seemed more barger than mannerly. Maybe Flannery knowed something she weren't privy to.

"What if a picture captures something the painter weren't expecting?" Trula asked.

Flannery tore the picture off the block and rested it in her hand. "Then the painting's real."

Jesus' thorns were glorified and the whole picture blazed. Flannery swiped some biscuits and opened the door. "This one will take some time to cure," he said before letting himself out.

Later, she told Horse that she weren't sure what to make of it.

Horse's rake clattered against the apple tree. He looked at the picture. "It's your door," he said, yanking on his mangled khakis. She turnt her gaze since she weren't keen anent the fibrous cicatrix that split his left nipple and bored into his pants and down his leg, a loose root looking for dirt... What a fucking scar! Still and all, Horse's good nipple stood erect in the sun, spoiling to fight its devil twin.

“But why’s it open?” Trula said at last.

Horse’s pants skid down till hip bones jutted like an exclamation. He weren’t wearing his belt. Or underwear. She’d give him a belt and click three pennies to her jug. But underwear? That were his fucking business. And now she’d unclick a penny for swearing.

“You never been one to leave a shut door,” he was saying, offering up a clove and yanking up his khakis.

The clove crackled and turnt her lips too fat for chit-chat.

On Fridays, Trula prepped her burial wrist with the Bible that lay fat on the altar next to the dead daisies. It were her precious King James, bound in leather, the one Pop had willed the morning of his passing. Its pages were brittle as onion skins, but its hulking cover contained the fearsome whomp of a casket lid. Over and again—*whumpwhumpwhump*—slamming the King James covers till Genesis cancelled Revelation. Till dusty eddies, startled in the rafters, swirled through Friday’s final light. Till sweat clouded her sight. Ain’t no body, holy or otherwise, able to creep from a Trula-shuttered box.

Hitch knowed to retreat on Fridays—the *whomps* were an aggravation—so he spent dusk near the Poor Fork’s linns and pools, skipping stones and lifting rocks till the hellbenders fled. And when the bats came, Trula hollered his name then made his tea; and when his sweetness were restored, she sent him hutward, now off you go.

But she was soon beating on his door.

“I’m praying,” he called out.

Trula jiggered his sign, but it went crooked anyways. “Open up.” She banged again for good measure. There come a fistle inside, some cussing too, then Hitch stood at the opened door, hair a tangle of busted springs. She thrust Flannery’s picture under his nose. “Look at this.”

Hitch reached the light cord and squinted at the painting. “That palmer do it?”

“This door was open last night,” she said, pointing, “and now it ain’t.”

Hitch turnt the picture over. “Initials F and O in showy scribble.” He gave it back and made to shut his door, but she wedged

it with her elbow. “What’s it matter if it were opened or closed?” Hitch said at last.

She pressed her foot into his thyme. “Pictures don’t move,” she said, “and his crown is in pieces.”

“Maybe this picture’s slippery.” Hitch swept her elbow and latched the door, then his voice come up muffled behind the wood: “Don’t let it get your panties twisted.”

But she worried her burial wrist at her kitchen table, kneading it with her thumb, her articulations not what they were. That picture weren’t but a transgression tramping across gospel truth, she thought, watching her own image floating cold on the oily coffee in the bartered cup. She figured she’d be potty about a moving picture, but when it came down to it, there was something unsettling about a picture moving when you weren’t looking, especially a Jesus one. She weren’t one for surprises. She swirled the liquid till her likeness disappeared, then adjusted her hair and made note to have Horse give her a cut—he were shit-hot with his scissors. And now what was right in the world? Maybe stilly pictures were the better choice. She dumped her coffee in the sink, watched its aimless drain, then parted the hanging plantlets from her spider plant and rested the picture on the sill.

Just cause it were a gift didn’t mean she had to gaze on it.

In the morning Shakey come clanking up the road on her purple bicycle. Trula had just settled by the window with her coffee and cigarette, and when she heard the racket, she pulled aside her grandmother’s lace curtain. The chaffer’s pots and spoons rattled from the green clothesline strung up inside the bicycle’s chipped frame. Tin cups jostled in the wicker basket tied to the handlebars. Yellow tassels showed from the rubber grips—Christ, a pounce day, already the third this year. In the cart, amid the sponges and buckets and scuttles and rags, was a small bookshelf strapped to the cart with bungee rope. It were stocked with library castoffs, mostly stiff-spined books of poetry—fancy poets like Blake and Auden, Rich and Lorde—but a few magazines, too, mostly *Cosmopolitans* and *Vanity Fairs*, marcescent from wet thumbs and wetter gazes.

Shakey chimed her bell and leant her bike against the fence. She was soon kindling the hinges, easing Trula from her recliner—

shit, just give me a minute, why the hurry? Trula opened the screen door, then moseyed down the stone pavers Horse had pulled from the Poor Fork. They were smooth and round—best for flattened arches! Horse told he—and still cool in the sleepy air.

“New powders!” Shakey said, hoisting herself onto the fence cap. She turned her face toward the morning sun and rested there, tits perky as spring ramps. She wore pants sewn from ties traded by mine widows at the rag sale, and they clung to her hips like plastic wrap round a Sunday chicken casserole. Her water bottle were full of flowers, though it didn’t keep her from sipping at the haze. When she finally hopped over the fence, she released the tambourine from her belt and banged it steady against her thigh. *Well there ain’t no grave gonna hold my body down*, she sang. Trula brushed her toes against the plush moss running riot in the cracks between the pavers—it was nice to feel something pleasant, even it were only for a moment. Mustard nudged her ankle and threwed up a violent purr. *And when I hear that trumpet sound, I’m gonna get off out that ground*. She suddenly chucked her tambourine, and the cedars limning the road hugged the racket in their berried branches. Trula’s cedars were like that, loyal and given to necessity, not prone to heave her careless echoes across the folded mountains. No, Trula’s cedars weren’t fickle like the Poor Fork’s nosy waters. And in the muffled silence, Shakey snapped up the fur flaps on her flannel trapper and sponged the pearly sweat from her hot cheeks. “So here’s a mycelial pounce,” she said at length, pulling a small beaker from her pocket and rotating it from her thumb to her pinky then back again. “Good for morning blues.”

Trula ground her cigarette on a paver and flicked the ash with her toe. “Haven’t had those for quite some time.”

Shakey tossed the pounce over her shoulder; it sailed perfect over the pickets and landed in her cart. She pulled another vial from her pocket. “Okay, well here’s a bit of bayberry powder,” she said. “Good for fever dreams.”

“Lost those long ago.”

“Or as a douche for your bothersome discharge?” Shakey pulled the cork and offered up the vial. “Give it a whiff.”

Trula took it and held it under her nose. “Smells like a candle,” she said at last.

“Mix in a drop or two of Horse’s firewater and you’ll be good as new.”

Trula shoved the beaker into her pocket, and it nestled there close to her lighter. “What else you got?”

“Just wait for this one,” Shakey said, pulling a small box from her blue velvet shoulder bag and handing it across. “It’s from a birder over Black Mountain, down in Delphie.”

Trula pulled the blue ribbon and it fluttered to the ground. She lifted the lid and there, snug down in shredded newspaper, was a taxidermed blackbird, its glossy feathers stiff as a wedding dick. She raised it from its nest, then nearly dropped the thing in horror; its body weren’t just bird, but toy too: the birder had stuffed and stitched a wind-up dog into the bird’s emptied chambers, a joining of flesh and plastic. It even showed the price on a bright orange sticker: a dollar ninety-nine from the Delphie dollar store. She shoved it quick-like into its nest and handed it over—that monster like to creep her.

Shakey clutched the box and laughed. “They’re chimeras,” she said, “and the birder’s made lots of them—a robin transfigured with a china cat; a cardinal with a wind-up mouse; a titmouse with a rocking horse, though that one’s a bit unwieldy in my juddery cart.” Shakey pulled the blackbird from its shredded papers. She wound up its red mechanical legs then set it loose on the river-stone pavers. It stalled and Mustard like to hiss the monster back to hell before its four legs bungled it forward. But it weren’t keen on provincing till its feet were purchased on the moss between the stones. Then it straight away fledged but were on its back in a snap, legs kneading the warm air like tit-chuffed kittens making biscuits on their mama. When its vigor ran dry, Shakey scooped it up and nestled it to her breast. “Isn’t it delightful?”

“If you like devilish things.”

Shakey put it back in its nest. “So just the bayberry, then?”

Trula nodded and lit a cigarette, then tilted her chin to blow the smoke away. “Though I got a little something you might like,” she added.

“You’re looking to barter?”

“Just wait for this one,” she told her.

Trula returned and handed over the picture of Jesus. It had moved, hidden there behind the loosely folded plantlets: now her door

were shut and Jesus' crown more luminous than ever. But she went like the cedars and kept that secret close, even though her prickled skin might as well have blown her gaff. But Shakey was enamored, she could tell, because for once she went dumb. She pulled the painting from under the cedars' shadows and held it in the brightening sun. "There's a burning fire in it," Shakey said at last, "and it's exquisite."

"It's my door and savior," she said. "But the palmer who made it said it might take some time to cure."

Shakey fiddled the painting with her pinky. "Feels dry to me," she said, sliding the picture into her blue velvet bag. "And fair is fair, so I'm leaving you the robo-blackbird in kind." Trula tried her best to refuse, but Shakey held up her palm like a movie star and insisted she keep it, adding that she was throwing in the mycelial pounce for good measure, it will do you some good. Trula nodded, and after Shakey's clanking faded around the bend, she popped the lid and sent the ground mushrooms to the sky.

It came back on her a dry rain.

The bright day sky turned to showers and the clouds, resolute as a bitch, sat low in the hollers, concealing cedar and oak and ash and maple. Trula donned the plush robe hanging from the hook behind her bathroom door and went to the porch swing. Fat water dripped from the swollen eaves, and Mustard jumped into her lap, jamming his zealous nose into her palm, but she were a mindless petter. The robe was pink and cozy and typically kept gloomy days at bay, but today she were sadder than the Man of Sorrows Himself. And that grief sopped her bones, like to cement her right there to the swing in fact, but Trula straightened her spine and anchored her toes; she were a preacher after all. But the chains scraped and groaned, and that was what hell sounded like, she decided.

Horse loped around the corner and up the porch steps. "You're liable to catch you a bug sitting here in the rain." He held his garden shears loose against his side.

She ran her eyes over the soaked lines of his body. He was wearing a shirt, but it were blurry against his wiry frame and the scar showed itself clear as day. His muddy khakis were hitched with twine.

“My porch roof don’t leak”—she tapped her head—“and now look who’s dry.”

Horse wiped his brows then pulled a plastic pint from his pocket. “That chaffer said you might need it.” He put the firewater on the railing. “It’s poured out from a bitch of a batch,” he added, “so slow or meet death.”

Trula eyed the shears. “Nothing bigger?”

“My fingers got the palsies with things too big,” Horse said, beginning to whinge.

His whine set her on edge—Christ, what was it about her that drew all the dickless twits about? She ran her impatient fingers through her thick hair. “But they sharp though?”

Horse ran his thumb across the flinty blade, then nodded and snapped the shears shut, jolting Mustard from her lap. Horse asked why not use a normal scissors?

“Does it look like I got all day?” she said.

“But my trembles,” Horse was saying, and Trula wrenched the shears from his hand and snipped off a clump of her own hair. “See?” she said. “It’s not hard.”

And soon the steel felt good against her hot head. But how was it she could hear through skull bone, the blades that sheared buzzing in the core of her brain like a cicada? It was a grace and a miracle, she thought, this other way to hear, and then Horse cut her ear clean off.

Mustard dashed from the ficus and was on it in an instant. He bit into the fat lobe and ran off under the porch. Trula cursed and Horse ran after the cat—*here kitty-kitty-kitty*—then returned with her ear wrapped in his soaked shirt. “I didn’t mean to split you,” Horse said. “Here’s your ear back.”

Trula snatched the T-shirt and shook the loose ear into her lap, then clamped the material to her head to staunch the bleeding. Horse asked if it hurt, his voice a bare muffle. “There ain’t much blood,” he added, “so that must be good.”

Trula grabbed the firewater and splashed a bit onto her wound. It burnt like holy hell, but she clenched her jaw and, tempering her spleen, knotted the shirt round her half-shorn head. When the pain lessened to a throb, she examined her ear, tracing her finger along its ridges and valleys. She’d never caught onto her ear being a question mark, how the valley arched a perfect S then swung back to her skull,

washing up on her leather lobe. But she weren't surprised—wasn't that what a preacher's ear were for? Questions slide in and truth spews out.

"Best put it in the church freezer," Horse said. "Maybe they can stitch it back."

But that prospect were iffy; best make do with a simple hole in the head. She turned her ear over, and it felt no more than a bark of cold fat girding a discount steak.

Shakey weren't a flashy sponger. Sure, she could fiddle at a goniometer and locomote like any other sponger, but she often fetched up at some hidden place—in the cedars upside the road, say, or behind the church where Horse liked to piss—and then finished her journey on a short foot; she hated making a scene. But tonight she come a sponging onto the porch swing: one second it were just a lonesome Trula and her cigarette, and a flash later, Shakey were there with Flannery cozy in her lap. Trula nearly shit herself.

"Took the fast ride back," Flannery said, adjusting his sock-filled bra.

Shakey shook her tambourine and blissed out to an old tune: *They whupped him up the hill*, she sang, *they whupped him up the hill for me*. Flannery joined in: *On the day when I was lost, they hung him on the cross, they whupped him up the hill for me*. After lots verses and some flat tripping, Flannery flopped into the swing and draped his arm around Trula. But he gave her a turn when he seen the bloody wrap and the crusty hair. Shakey chucked her tambourine into the wet grass, and the steady rainfall filled the rushing silence.

"It's only a lost ear," Trula said at last, stubbing her smoke on the porch floor. "Not like I got the clap or anything."

Flannery plucked at the bloody rag. "Where'd it go?"

"To church," she said. "Horse put it in the deep freeze."

"And that's why God gives us two of everything," Shakey said. "It's a grace, really—two lungs, two kidneys, two ears, two eyes."

"Two by two," Flannery said, "but can you hear?"

Trula lit another cigarette. "About half as well."

"Some are born to sweet delight," Shakey said, "and some are born to endless night." She plunged her hand into her embroidered

reticule and drew out Flannery's picture. "Look what your old limn is up to."

The picture had moved again: now Christ were offering a loaf of bread at the closed door; now the ants were foregathered on Jesus' wrist, supplicating the round loaf. The crown of thorns shown terribly, so much so that the light cast an umbrageous figure against the door: there was a head and an ear, an arm and a torso, but she couldn't make out anything else.

"They are gone away backward," Shakey said. "Introibo ad altare Dei."

And Flannery translated: Go to the altar of God.

Trula weren't one for transubstantiation—communion were a symbol and nothing more; hell, she couldn't even say Eucharist—but she banged on Hitch's door and told him to put Christ in the oven. He pitched a fuss, claiming palmers are early to bed and early to rise, farmers who sow reap fragrant surprise.

"It's not even nine," she said, banging again.

"Make your own damn wafers," he called out.

Trula kicked his door and his sign went crooked. "You're as fucking useful as a mute in a choir."

Later, after much cussing and clattering from the church kitchen, whiffs of hot bread wafted across the boneyard and through Trula's window. Shakey was finally gone, having sponged herself back to Delphie, and Flannery, who was hoofing it to Tennessee after Trula's morning service, was snugged in the spare room. Trula were nursing a sermon, as she did every Saturday night, and the passage that come to her was from Paul's epistle to the Philippians: *For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we also look for the Saviour, she read, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.* The chimera rattled its box and the sudden zizzing broke Trula from her brooding. She slammed her Bible against the table. The rattling knocked off. She lit a cigarette and thumbed the pages till Philippians showed itself. She read the passage once more, exhaled, and the robo-blackbird started up again. That monster were in a bad way, like it were pining for a walk, and Trula was all at once compunctious; she lifted the box from her shelf and pulled off the lid. The creature stared her up. She hadn't really noticed its black eyes.

And even though it were dead, those eyes held her lively image—
threw it right back at her, in fact, bandaged head and all.

What a way to refine resurrection.

Trula tucked the monster under her arm and strode to church. The sky drook her head. Hitch's shack was so dark she let him be, fished her own key from her night-coat pocket and unlocked the sanctuary door. She traiked downstairs into the claggy darkness, and though the air was warm, her body always went stropy til she flipped on the kitchen light—only then could she take a normal breath. Hitch's two loaves sat cooling atop the freezer next to Horse's contribution, a faithful quart of grape juice stomped from his gnarled vines set in the rocky slopes of Kingdom Come. She moved Christ and his blood aside, along with the blackbird, and opened the freezer. It gasped, and there, next to the spinach, waited her ear. Horse had wrapped it real nice, tucking in the plastic to keep the ear from burning. She picked it up then nearly dropped it seeing as it weren't a bit frozen; it had, in fact, softened the spinach. She laid her ear out and the radge lurched like a drunk, its gears droning like hornets.

"Hold your britches," she said, giving it a slap.

In the drawer next to the sink were Horse's Pez. She grabbed the abhorrent lamb dispenser with its missing eye—Horse's favorite—and stretched her ear around it till the lamb's mouth were jutting from her waxy earhole. It felt like eternity before it stuck, but the last bit of Super Glue from the wrinkled tube were good enough. She held it all in place with duct tape; it weren't pretty, but she decreed it art.

Trula found a bible—all the drawers had least one, all KJV—and turned to Isaiah 1. She unwrapped a bundle of Pez and began copying each word from that first chapter onto its very own Pez. She toiled late under a buzzing light, over seven hundred words in tiny script on over seven hundred Pez. When she were through, she shuffled the Pez and loaded twelve random words into the lamb. And what does the Lord require of thee? Then the lamb spoke, ejaculating candied words through her earhole. Trula knocked together a portent:

putrifying cucumbers
delight not
ass
give ear
scarlet sins

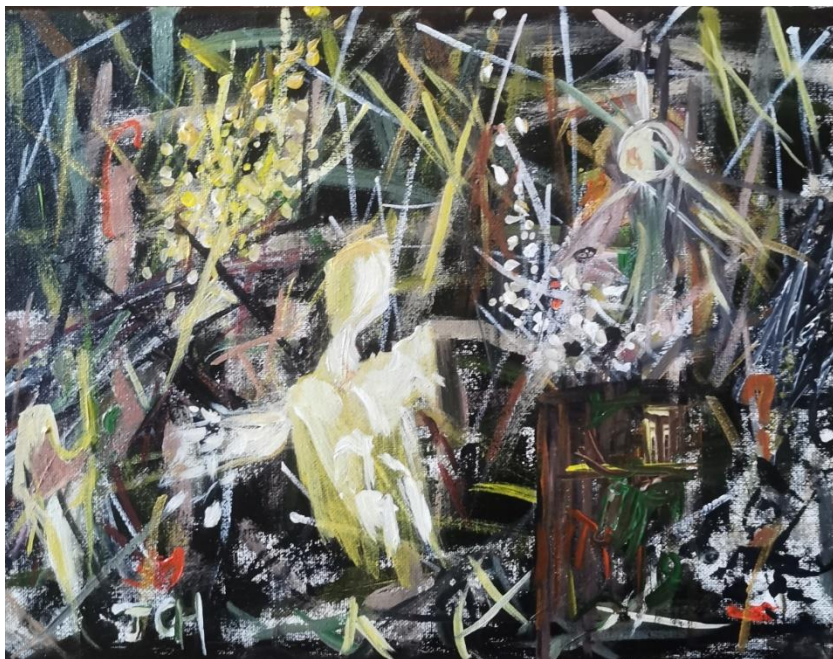
redeemed mouth
hear

Hungry now, Trula took a pinch of bread. But it were like raw chicken; the grape juice chaser iron from a split lip. She nearly kecked, but then she twigged God's shifty flow through the bread and juice, over stuff and substance, blurring the lines of all her shuttered boxes. He was the Three-and-One standing across the Poor Fork's linns.

Trula stood alone, but her God were queer.



Love, Raymond / Emily Krill



To Exit the Modern Labyrinth / JJ Chen Henderson



am3 / Anita Maksimiuk



Ferry Landing 2 / Leslie Kerby

Chicken Man

Ronnie Yates

The Chicken Man has dusky arms and the head of a warrior. Shaved head but for on top, that blade of hair. Brave hair. His own comb, like his compadarion, his bird. The Chicken Man has dusky arms. His Daddy always asking, Are you my son? You perhaps not from these loins. But I will keep you still. Gave him ice cream. Let him run. The Chicken Man's Daddy was a White Face. And is dead. The Chicken Man knew. Said Boo. Whispered in his ear. They came and took him. The Chicken Man watched from his hiding place. Was scared, was running, was just a knee-high and skinny like a stick, Daddy would fun him.

Now the Chicken Man bathes hisself in grasses. He is lying in the warm sun on the cool grasses. His chicken is with him. Daddy's chicken he found and took from behind a fence. In his asleeping Daddy came up like the burning sun, said yes, that is the one. A boy chicken, a Rooster, he keeps not saying right. The Chicken Man is a Rooster. Has hisself a comb, a yellow comb colored that way by Ghost, who used a bottle of the stuff to make it that way, like a blade of Sun, Ghost said. Chicken Man's chicken has a comb the color of blood. Feathers is black, shining. Chicken Man bathes in grasses of this field while his chicken pokes around. He won't go far. For the Chicken Man has a house for his chicken, if not for hisself, as always finds, yes, too, plenty of feed and water. He will feed his chicken first, he will make sure there is a little mountain of plenty. The house come apart like this, you pull off the top and there's a bowl, you fill with water, and you spread the feed in the grasses. You don't make a show, the crowds will not like it. Dirty chicken they will say, dirty food in the clean bathing grasses. The Chicken Man has a box to keep things for hisself, what's in it changes. He has not looked in a while.

The warm sun is dropped down low, the day is cool, the grasses is just some warm, with little cool edges. Chicken Man lies there on his side, bathing in grasses. He will must walk all night to guard against them, the night hordes. But now he has made a place to lie down, and a yard around him for the chicken, strong black bird with

shiny armor and a blood-red comb. Chicken Man's chicken will guard him.

Over across the street, other side of a fence, the crowds are eating ice cream. Chicken Man has had it, when he was knee-high, sure, but again not long ago. It was cool and sweet, too sweet, and it dripped and bathed him. He wore it that night and many days. He said here it is, you too, but Rooster did not touch it. Can't stab it with his hard-pecking mouth.

The Chicken Man wears a strange contraption, that thing for a horse, to make them pull? What did he do before? Before the blood-red comb and little mountain. He lifted, and put, lifted and put. His hard dusky arms. And Man like Daddy gave him paper and coins. Where they go? He feels them pockets lean. They lay flat as he bathes in grasses. Maybe he only saw it in his asleeping.

They watching us, the Chicken Man thinks. Crowds other side of the fence. Crowds this side with dogs. Lemme rest here and bathe, please. That girl, dusky arms too, she running around this circle that circles these grasses. It pleases him to see her, dusky arms like mine. But he knows the eye that watches him is not blind. That's a lie he told hisself. That no one was watching. They watching. They waiting. Chicken Man's chicken is a black dog. He got fight. We got fight. Let that girl be, dusky arms like mine. Let her run. Let her run that circle. She reminds us. We had a Mama too. Somewhere in our asleeping we will find her.

The Chicken Man is not my name, neither. I have a name I no can do out loud.



Connections / Elizabeth Yuan



On the Wings of a Gyrfalcon / Robin Young



Waiting Out the Storm / Robin Young



In the Nest / Annie Dawid

Finalist Geminga 2024

The Morning After You Passed

Alfie White

Geminga 2024 Best of Fiction

I changed the sheets, washed, put on deodorant, tried to read and eventually did; I turned on the news, saw that life carries on, looked outside and saw it there too; I watched an insect climb my bedroom wall and blew on it to make it fly, but it just fell down, down, down the crevice of my bed into that unreachable darkness; I prayed to a God that it found you there, that it carried a bit of my breath with it, a faint breeze lifting a stray hair of yours, reminding you, reminding you, of I don't know.

Dear Susan, I Am Your Antony — Emily D.

Rosa Lane

Geminga 2024 Best of Poetry

Wind-driven, I'm off
to Alexandria, torqued,
compassed *mare nostrum* —
keel, ribs, tongues' hardwood, cockled
beguiled, you sway me steady.



Don't Look Up / Pamela Viggiani

Geminga 2024 Winner

Eclipse

David Landau

Rigel 2024 Finalist

It's hot. I get out of bed. I go over and crack the window still half-asleep, stubbing my toe on the cardboard box by the dresser. *Fuck*. I look around the room at all the other boxes. Most of them already chock full. The rest still waiting for the last of things.

Funny how you forget.

I stand there, looking through the blind slats. There's a big moon coming up over my neighbor's house. No sooner does it crest the roofline, its beam casts my backyard in this eerie glow, like some searchlight after finding its target.

I scissor the blinds open wider with two fingers and lean in closer. My toe hurts. I watch everything.

Everything that's still there, that is.

The chaise lounges, set side by side in the middle of the lawn. The wilting potted plants on the terra-cotta tile. The diving board with its broken spring. *Never did get that fixed, they'll dock us for that*. The grill grate leaning up against the Weber BBQ legs, jail-like. And imagine all the creepy-crawlies that come out at night, slipping through the bars, and going on the lam. The light sconces mounted on the stucco siding. The metal ones with the moon and star cutouts we bought at the little stand in Tuscany in the rain. *I wonder if we can take those with us*. And just beneath, the kinked-up hose. *They can have that*. I wish I was a bug.

I look back at the digital clock on the nightstand. Just shy of 3:00 a.m. It's then I remember reading about the eclipse that's supposed to happen about now. My wife's sleeping, breathing quietly. Her hair limp in the humidity. And nightgown damp against her breasts in the glow of the clock.

I watch a moment. I can just make out a bead of sweat snaking down her throat. I wait for her to stir. And when she doesn't stir, I look out at the chaise lounges again. I wipe some of my own sweat off my face. And think to myself. I think, *Wouldn't it be funny ...?*

Then I do it.

I slip off my pajamas and tiptoe out the French doors—well, tiptoe as best I can on account my big one still's sore—and go lay on the chaise. I angle the back down on its lowest rung. Look up at the moon. And wait for something to happen.

And I have to tell you, it feels nice lying there, a slight breeze cooling my body. Creeping in and around all the crevices. Real peaceful too. Except for the vinyl webbed strapping a bit scratchy on my bare bum. Mostly it feels strange. I mean, I've been in this house thirty years and never once did I ever get the gumption to go outside at three o'clock in the morning and lie butt naked on a chaise.

I lie there for some time. I listen for the crickets. I watch the moon—a tiny piece of it is missing now. The sky's turning a strange color. I wonder what the odds are of the International Space Station passing right overhead at this exact moment. *Should I cover up?*

I think of the guy who strapped a bunch of helium balloons to his lawn chair and took off and was spotted miles high by a passing 737. I think he kept his clothes on. I wonder if my backside is all crosshatched from the vinyl strapping. I wish I had some balloons.

Then there's this noise coming from the side of the house. Where we keep the trash cans. Must be a raccoon, I'm sure of it. A whole family of them's moved in. And escrow hasn't even closed yet. I think to myself, *That's funny*. But who cares, really. It's somebody else's problem now. So is that old can. Been trying to get rid of it, like forever now. Put it out next to the rest of those fancy plastic containers the city gave us. But the garbagemen never take it. I mean, think about it ... how does one throw out a trash can anyway?

And just when I am thinking about that, like it's one of the great mysteries of the universe, I see this lone star. I try to guess which one it is. I go through all the obvious names I know: Sirius, Arcturus, Vega, Capella, Betelgeuse. Then I wonder who names the stars in the first place. And if you tried to name all the stars, how far would you get before you ran out of names? I think how great a name Theodosia would be for a star. That's my wife's name, Theodosia. I look over at her through the crack I left in the French doors. And tell myself to ask her in the morning if I can borrow her name for a star. *It would have to be a noble star, though, to be called that.*

The moon's half-gone now. The sky's getting darker. I can see more stars.

Just then the pool pump shuts off. Everything goes quiet. I can hear myself breathing. I can hear my own heartbeat. I wonder, if you were up in space high enough, could you hear the moon and planets go by?

I wish our son was here. I wish our dog hadn't died. I wish we didn't have to sell the house.

I wish, I wish I could wield a giant broom and sweep all the scattered stars like so much dust into a pile in some far corner of the universe. And throw them out with the trash, for all the good they do sometimes.

It's then I hear another noise. But it isn't a raccoon this time. I look, and there's Theodosia walking across the lawn. She comes up, lifting a strap off her shoulder with the slip of a finger. Then the other. Gets that look in her eye and starts to slink out of her nightgown. But all it does is stick to her skin from the humidity. Finally, she pulls it off, dropping it at her feet. And lies down on the chaise beside me.

"Couldn't sleep?" she says.

"Ran out of sheep. Switched to stars."

She smiles. Looks back at the house. Then squeezes my hand.

"It's time."

"No, it's not. It's money. The lack of it, that is."

"I'd rather lack money than time with you." She looks around the yard. "God, that old diving board. Remember when Johnny did the backflip the first time? How old was he, four maybe? You were so proud."

"Then I tried."

"Yes, you did. And split your chin on the end of the board. Blood everywhere."

"It was fun, though."

"And remember how you used to whack the avocados off the tree with the pool net?"

"Wish we still had that tree so we could sell 'em, they were so big. We'd make a fortune."

"And remember when we lost power that time, and it was Johnny's birthday party, and you cooked the frozen pizzas on the BBQ?"

"I was just being sensible."

"God, they tasted awful."

“When we first met, you said you were attracted to the strong, sensible type.”

“I think that was strong, *sensitive* type.”

“Well, whatever. That was long ago and far away.” I then turn toward her, her nipples erect in the humid night. “We could mess around ...”

“Yes, we could. Or, on second thought, we could just be.”

“I still got it in me, you know.”

“Yes, you do.” She smiles, then looks deep into the night. “By the way, it wouldn’t work.”

“What wouldn’t work?”

“All those stars you’d sweep into some far corner of the sky. They’d just create a giant sun piled up like that, and light up the whole universe.”

“What?”

“You were talking out loud. That’s what woke me.”

“Oh, I do that. Don’t I?”

“Yes, you do.”

I look up, way up, trying to see what she’s seeing.

“I’ve loved this old house.”

“As have I.”

I feel for Theodosia’s hand and find it.

“Remind me to ask you something in the morning.”

And with the moonlight now all but gone, we lie naked together under the star-strewn sky. Just touching.

Getting the last of it before the movers come.

The Older Man

Alan Sincic

Rigel 2024 Finalist

Respect the older man. When he was a baby they gathered around him. Respect the older man. He ate his vegetables. There is a turn to his ankle where the polio missed him. The falling safe missed but he helped them count the money, the great war missed but he helped them stack the bodies respect the older man. The mad dog missed him and the trolley car swerving, the invisible contagion on the rim of the drinking glass and the assassin's dinner invitation and the suicide's masterful logic and the mad accidental excitement of the ten-year binge. Hundreds are dying as he eats his breakfast. He missed, he was missed, missed the purge and the spoiled tuna salad, the letter bomb and the sucker punch and the iridescent blue of the shark infested waters. He wipes his mouth and a thousand fall. Respect the older man.

He did not land on the silver screen and there are no shots of his smooth young cheeks and respect—a million times he has wiped his face and still it has not left him.

Respect, respect the—it is his belief that the woman still remembers the look of his thighs, the children still remember where their bodies began. Do not break the legs of the older man. His eyes are his only ornament. The hairs of his head have left of their own accord, he wears the skull of his head with pride, he points but his arms go off in a different direction but not break the arms of the older man, his arms are the arms of a compass and they point to the places where he's been and they point the way they pointed when he was a baby, and they gathered and they asked him what he wanted and in every direction is the direction that he pointed.

Respect the older man, he is going where his body cannot go, he is an acrobat, he is practicing a trick, he is thinking of a stunt, his body he forgets and he gathers it in pieces when he stands. Respect the older man he is a daring piece of furniture, he folds his bones like a broken umbrella, his legs are the legs of an elegant chair, his arm is a clock, is a clock, and he goes by the blood in his wrist. He calculates the steps to the door, the weight of his head, the size of the earth.

Respect the older man. He stands in his roots, he is no longer green, it is hard to remove him. He cannot be retrieved. He stands in his roots, he is waiting for fire, he cannot be retrieved.

He has memorized the sun in the lines of his face and the moon in the whites of his bones. Respect the older man.

He shrinks in his clothes like a man underwater, a slow-motion man in a big diving suit, he lives at the bottom of a thousand feet of water and he cannot be recognized by his high school photo and his record is clean and he cannot be arrested and he moves too slowly to be noticed by the police. Respect the older man.

When he was born he was shot out of a cannon and the crowd rose and cheered like their seats as well were wired with shot and out into the naked air he went a good trick but it took too long and now the crowd has gone home, the tent packed away, a garden planted in the sawdust ring and a vine of tomatoes growing up the face of the net, and still he sails out through the air looking back at the cannon's mouth and wondering how he ever fit, his ass to the stars and the smoke rising up from his neighbors bright homes like warm little factories spreading farther and farther beneath him.

Respect the older man, do not deny the older man, the falling safe missed and he helped them count the money, the great war missed and he helped them stack the bodies, the mad dog missed and the trolley car swerving, the purge and the tuna and the bomb and the punch and the iridescent blue of the shark infested waters and do not deny the older man. He looks at the flesh on your soft pink arm, he wipes his mouth and a thousand fall.

Stand in the tower of your own hard body and wait for the visit of the older man, respect him, respect him, become an invitation, clasp your bones to the bole of your heart and wait for the visit of the older man. Respect the older man, wait for the older man, do not hurry the older man he is a long-time traveler, he is a marathon, he is a killer, he keeps you waiting the whole of your lifetime then at last he is here. Respect the older man. Stand in his bones and look out of his eyes. Respect the older man.

Disturbances

Lenora Steele

Rigel 2024 Best of Poetry

The rocks in our gardens, of which there are quite
a number, we chose; all of them
over the years on drives and jaunts to
beaches and streams, to fields and forests.
Every one picked for its particular shape or color
or history. At one time we
could tell you where each was found,
we were always finding them. These days the heft
 has grown heftier; we don't bring so many home
 anymore.
We have taken to collecting stones though. Small white
 stones, and filling
our inexhaustible pockets with the little kernels of time.



Guardian, On the Road to Mt. Nemrud—Turkiye, 2011 /
William Lewis Winston

Rigel 2024 Best of Art

The Key Is to Keep Saying Sorry

Adrian Fleur

Rigel 2024 Best of Fiction

She had blue strands twisted in her braids, and white and pale yellow and grey. She had a head chock full of them, curling down around her neck, tightly wound and tied up neatly at each end. I could close my eyes and still see the imprint of those twists being twisted, round and round by tired fingers at the taxi rank in town. We had spent a good six hours waiting for her hair to get done, guzzling Cokes and gnawing on *biltong* in the sun. My best friend, the girl with the colorful braids in a purple tutu and striped stockings who was now yelling *Drink!* in the club. It was a Thursday night and we were underage, yelling over Seether while clinking together our too-sweet Bacardi Breezers.

Drink! I'd never been a good drinker: always too full too quickly, too tired, hungover before the booze could hit me sideways, aching for bed long before the lights came on and we were shoed away home. *Drink! Drink so we can go talk to those boys!* I'd never been one for drinking, let alone drinking and talking—let alone talking to boys. I'd get by with smiles, with laughs, with lame high-fives. I had no jokes, no pleasantries; I had yet to grow an enticing personality. I was seventeen, remember. I didn't know any better, or how to live any differently.

I'm going to talk to him, to that one! Tim? His name is Tim. Or is it Nick? She was so drunk, I thought. More drunk than the night we'd pinched her mom's brandy and made a bonfire in her backyard and sang out of tune while playing guitar. She was more drunk than our most recent slumber party where some kid named Sky or Storm got rushed off to the ER to get her stomach pumped—and we all knew it had more to do with a bunch of teenage girls practicing kissing each other than with the alcohol percentage in cheap beer or wine coolers. She was even more drunk than that one terrible morning after we'd crashed a 21st the night before, and some older girl taught us about hair of the dog and made us down leftover milk stout for breakfast. She was so drunk, and I knew it was going to be a bad time, but I didn't

have the foresight to stop her or fix things or take us home. I was seventeen, remember, and so she dragged us over to Nick and his friends and planted us square in front of them. And I saw the glint in his green eyes, I took note, I faltered, but then I straightened up and pushed away the moment. I tried to sound like an adult when I said to him, *Hey, Nick! How're you doing?*

Heeey! It's you two! They watched us. They stared.

Great! Hi! We just wanted to say hi. That's why we came over here.

Just to say hi.

Well, it's about time!

I should have said hi earlier, when we saw you. I just couldn't reach you. In the bar, you know? Anyway, my friend, well—you know each other, right?

That's me! She wobbled on her feet.

She wanted to say hi too, I guess. I could feel embarrassment growing on my cheeks.

Neat. Sweet. So how come you never say hi to me in school?

My friend nudged me in the ribs, and inwardly I groaned and rolled my eyes.

Don't I? Maybe it's because you're the grade above me. I'm not sure.

Oh, it's not that. I've seen you talking to Dax and those guys. I've seen you hanging around with Ray sometimes. It's not that. Maybe you're shy?

Again, the nudge in the ribs, the groan, the eye roll.

I don't know. Maybe it's that then. Anyway, bye!

And I hauled us both back to the tables in the far corner on the roof, back to my boyfriend and some other people we knew, and my best friend laughed deliriously and squealed, *He likes you! He likes you!*

And that's when Jeffrey flew up, demanding, *Who? Who likes you? Who?* And she thought it was a game, so she told him, *Nick! This guy from our school.* And then he punched me in the face.

I was seventeen, remember. I didn't know what you were supposed to do when your boyfriend punched you in a public place. So I just lay on the ground for a while. I felt lame as ever—as usual—I felt dumb and small and paralyzed. I guess those feelings blocked out the pain. And then all of our friends flew into a rage, yelling, throwing bottles, shoving each other and screaming at Jeffrey and then, at some point, I was pulled up. And my best friend kept saying, *I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!* And Jeffrey was there, in the space where I stood, his face that

I loved which in dreams so often became a demon, the glint in his green eyes the same one I'd seen so many times, that I thought I'd seen just minutes before in the eyes of a new boy, because all boys had that glint in their eye, didn't they? Didn't they? But Nick had never punched me before, pushed me into walls, pulled my hair or clawed at me, or swore at me and called me names. *Slut! Whore!* I can't remember them all now. I managed to say, at one point while Jeffrey was screaming at me, *I was just saying hey! I was talking to him for her.* But he always hated when I tried to explain. So he stopped screaming at me and pushed me away, but instead of going away, I fell back down to the ground onto my dumb body that never worked properly. I just fell down like the dumb seventeen-year-old I was, like Jeffrey always said I was, like that was all I knew how to be, because I was only seventeen—remember?

I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry! My best friend couldn't stop herself from crying and telling me she was sorry. I knew that same jingle, I used it all the time. *I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry.* She was so drunk, more drunk than I'd ever seen her. She couldn't stop telling everyone else she was sorry too. Our friends. Jeffrey. The big bouncers who came to take him away. *I'm so sorry.* And when I got up again she brought me water, but I didn't need it. By then I was sober. Every time she looked over she just cried harder. I told her I was fine. She told me she was sorry.

The bar owner came over. I'd never liked her and her stupid pigtailed and her drawn-on eyebrows. I always ducked when she came too close, scared she'd I.D. us, call the cops and kick us out. Kill the shots, the vodka-sodas, the Bacardi Breezers. I guess that night I realized she was all right. She was one of those older women who knew it all, who thought she'd pass on some wisdom to us young chicks. She crouched down and told us about some prick she married back in the 90s, about how much time she wasted with him, about how she could have lived her life so differently—if only she'd known better. I didn't really get it (I was seventeen, remember). All I wanted was to go home and sleep off my hangover and wake up with my best friend so we could catch the number 10 bus to the beach, and buy ice creams that melted all over our skin as soon as we took them out from under the shade and into the blistering Durban sun, and then we'd give our change to the guys who slept in the space between the barriers and the sea, who made sand sculptures of elephants and dinosaurs and would

even make us into sand mermaids if we gave them a sip of our ice teas or the dregs of our over-sauced Wimpy chips. All I wanted was to go back to earlier that day, that perfect day we had just lived with the sin of sugar and meat on our lips, when our butts were parked in camping chairs at the taxi rank while Mdu braided my best friend's hair from scratch, and we read each other's horoscopes and laughed at the back page of *Heat* magazine, at the pictures of the silly speech bubbles coming out of the mouths of our favorite celebrities.

All I wanted was simplicity. I didn't know how to live my life any differently. I was only seventeen, remember.

Proper Adults

Caitlyn Moony

Rigel 2024 Winner

It's Friday afternoon, and I am clipping away at my hydrangeas with the kind of meditative focus that comes with years of exhaustion and quietly swallowed injustices. Tom has told me to just leave them this weekend, considering all the incoming guests and commotion. He warned me the lawn would get all stomped on by everyone's heels and children. That I'd end up back at it on Sunday morning anyway. And he's right, of course. Maybe I should just pull them all out.

My long, perfectly manicured gravel drive, filled with its tiny, carefully selected little grey pebbles would have looked so beautiful with neat pink and white rose bushes. But the cliché of it would have killed me. I hate roses, thanks to my mother's drug-induced romanticism when the midwife had asked for a name.

"Mom!" I inhale sharply and start towards the front door where the yelling has emanated from, turning straight from my kneeling position and twisting my knee grotesquely as I stand. I wince with pain but dig the garden shears hard into my closed fist and breathe through it.

I have seen other mothers grow into a state of zenned-out tranquility, a languid laissez-faire as their kids morph from infants to toddlers, and toddlers to children. A "*so he's stuck another pen in his eye, that's why he's got two,*" kind of attitude that comes with surviving watching your offspring put themselves in the line of deathly peril on a moment-to-moment basis. Boy Moms. For the first three years of my mothering life, I was one. But as eagerly, as desperately as I had wanted to stay one those moms, my second child had been a girl, and with that the Zen had dissipated into the ether like cigarette smoke blown sneakily through a bathroom window.

I had waited patiently for that sense of confident ease, and the superior smile that came with it, to return. It never did. Every single bleat, whine, groan from my little girl, and my heartbeat races into high gear. It is the Boy Mom's job to let him be him. To let him make mistakes, and push boundaries, and ask for forgiveness rather than

permission. The Boy Mom must shrug off her anxiety from her tense shoulders and “let boys be boys”. That doesn’t work for girls, though. It is the Girl Mom’s job to push, to prod, to poke, and to protect. To point out flaws, and paths to flawlessness. It’s a lot. A Girl Mom must embrace her anxiety, she must lean into it and let it consume her. It’s a Girl Mom’s job to feel, perpetually, like a failure.

“*Mo-om!!*” my lamb bleats again, slightly higher pitched this time.

I stride swiftly up the grassy slope that runs parallel to the drive towards the house, forcing my knee to take as much weight as the other. I refuse to be the kind of woman who hobbles. I will be old and grey with brittle bones and arthritic toes, and I will walk as I do now, even if it kills me.

Meegan stands leaning against the front door with a jutting out pubescent hip. She taps her bare wrist with the finger of her other hand and gives me one of her looks.

“Mother,” she whines at me again, and I reach out to stroke the side of her freckled little face, relieved there doesn’t seem to be any immediate life-threatening emergency; pissed off that I’ve screwed up my knee for no apparent reason. Of course, I could tell myself that next time I will ignore it and stay pruning my plants, because it’s never, ever really anything urgent. But you can’t do that, can you? You’re not allowed, them’s the rules. Child yells, mother runs. We’re all just a bunch of Pavlov’s dogs. And we’re never allowed to talk about it lest we be, not a Boy Mom or a Girl Mom but, worst of all, a Bad Mom.

Meegan pulls away, flicking her long blond hair over one shoulder. Meegan has always been Tom’s child, both physically and in their mutual flair for the dramatic. By fourteen, she is already almost taller than me, and slim and muscular. I am small and dark and, as Tom likes to phrase it, “juicy”. My youngest offspring will soon tower above me, casting a shadow over me, and still demand me to cut the crusts off her sandwiches.

“Mom, it’s nearly two? Shouldn’t you be getting things ready for tonight? Nothing is set out yet and guests will be arriving in like, three hours? It’s stressing me out. And Stuart has been in the bathroom for like an hour!” She yells, this last part, for the benefit of her older brother, I assume. Her bottom lip juts out in a little pout, and I wonder where she learned that from. Certainly not from me.

“Alright, Meegan,” I soothe. “I’ve just finished up in the garden, and we can start getting stuff ready here in the kitchen, ok? Do you want to help?”

I still feel like I’ve got little children sometimes. I’d had to grow up much quicker. Tom and I met while I was in school, married while I was still in university, moved into this old farmhouse that I inherited from my parents, and then had the kids. We both studied law, but it’s just him practicing. I’m official hydrangea pruner and child wrangler.

“No, I need to get ready, obviously?” She looks at me like I’ve been knocked on the head with an idiot stick. That’s why you need to get Stu out of the bathroom.” I shudder to think what the kid has been up to in there for an hour.

Everyone said that when you have a second, the older one will eventually help out. Not at first, of course, not while they’re still adapting to not being the only star anymore, but eventually. That never happened with Stu, though. He just never adapted. He still views Meegan as a little parasite that sucks everything away from him.

Meegan lurks behind me while I bang on the bathroom door. “Stuey, my love? Everything ok in there?” Silence.

“Honey, it’s getting late, and we all need to start getting ready. Can you come and help me in the kitchen and give Meegan a chance to get in there, please?” There’s a rush of water and then my pink-faced boy slinks out, shoving his shoulder hard into Meegan as he pushes past towards his room, making her squawk with indignance.

“I was in there for like ten minutes,” he grumbles.

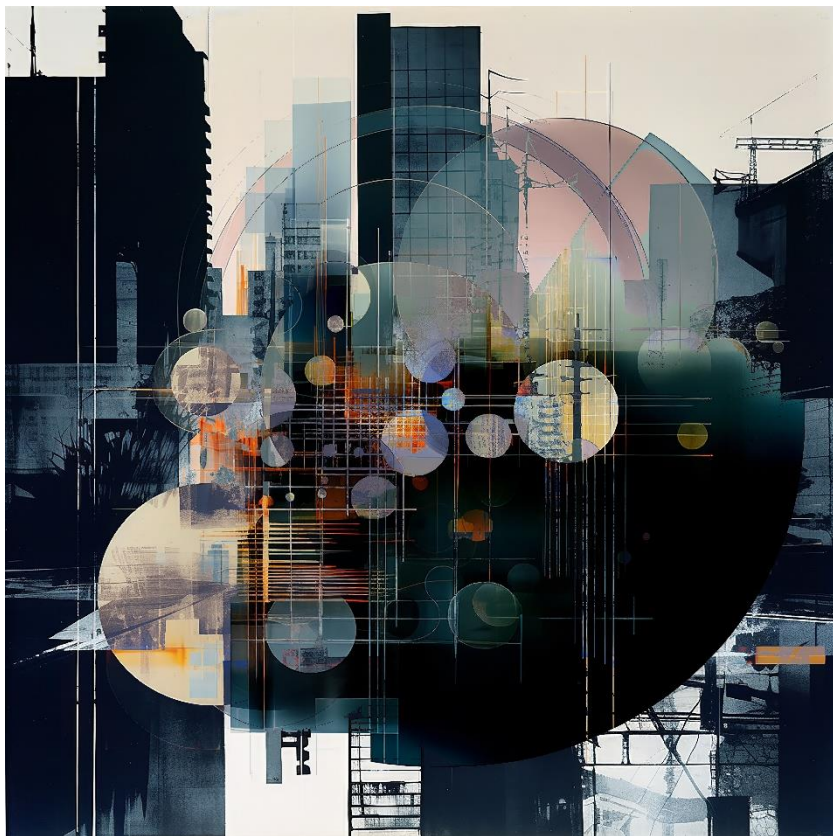
“Oh, please,” Meegan rolls her eyes. “He wasn’t,” she says to me, conspiratorially. “And look what a mess he’s made.” There is water splashed all over the floor and I grab a towel from the rail, shuffling it under my feet as if I am some fifties shimmying housewife.

“Ok, your turn to get in there,” I smile at her and unsuccessfully try to caress her cheek again.

“But I need to eat something first?”

We stare at each other and for a moment, I don’t know how to respond. I want to ask why she interrupted my gardening to yank poor Stu out of the bathroom if she wasn’t even in a hurry to get in there. I want to ask why she hasn’t made herself a sandwich. I want to ask why she couldn’t have asked her father to help with any of this.

But I really don't want to get into a fight right now; it'll just delay everything, and I honestly don't think I have it in me this afternoon. If I was *my* mother, I would have asked her if she really thought eating something was a good idea. I would have looked her up and down while I asked, waiting for her face to crumple in insecurity. I would have told her the party was no place for little children, so if she wanted to attend, she was going to have to grow up, and grow up fast. But I'm not my mother.



Bauhaus Los Angeles / Holly Willis

Art with AI Assistance



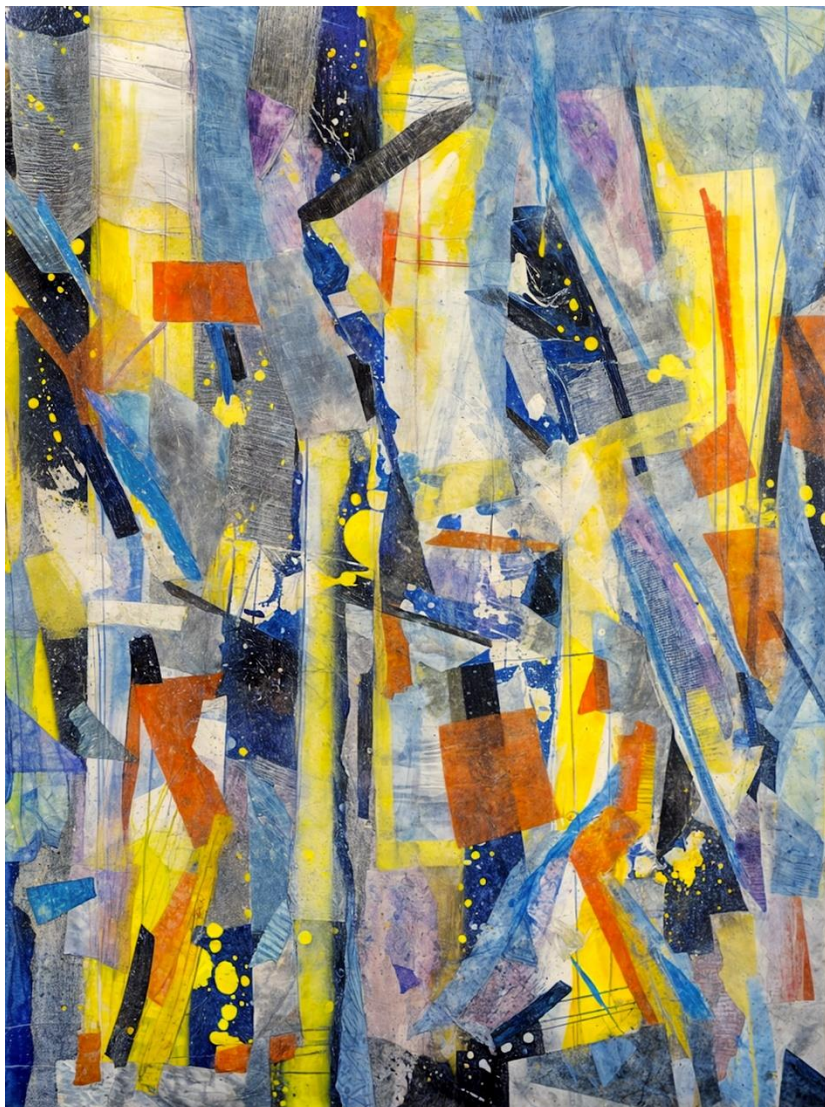
Infinite Inspiration / Gerburg Garmann

Art with AI Assistance



Heroes and Villains Enhanced / GJ Gillespie

Art with AI Assistance



Forever Young Enhanced / GJ Gillespie

Art with AI Assistance

Dean Martin

Jennifer Seigle

Goldilocks Zone 2023 Finalist

Sitting in a wine bar at JFK in late November I am watching the planes execute elaborate choreography on a large scale: wings passing wings, hulking centers meeting jetways, doors opening and closing, passengers bound for.... The world. *Spatial relationships, movement, architecture*: it's all happening in real time.

Behind me a woman in a shiny pair of expensive boots has absentmindedly ordered a glass of "red." But she's not here for the wine. She is searching for something else. A plug. She is searching for a plug.

I wonder—does she see the fleet of police cars surrounding this flight? Does she see the swirling and rushing? Without my glasses they create an urgent kaleidoscope of red and blue. Colors flashing in the night like the holiday lights that will soon surround us. On the runway a jet is rolling again. Slowly. *Tempo*. It bounces a bit on the uneven pavement. *Movement*.

I am tempted to get my glasses. To find out what the lights are all about. There. Focus. Clarity. The kaleidoscope is gone. The lights are clear. I still don't know what's happening. Do I need to know? Do I want to?

Something about those black and whites, lights and sirens blaring, in the heart of New York, will always give me this feeling. Terror—muted, but present. Is that the defining emotion of my generation? A dull sense of dread in the pit of my stomach. Is this the next one?

Back at the wine bar Dean Martin is telling me to pick myself up and dust myself off. I have already picked myself up so many times. More times than I can count now. And the dust never comes off. Does it? I wonder, am I starting over now? Am I just taking a break? Am I just roaming the country drinking overpriced wine in airport bars? I am deeply ambivalent about this. Deeply. What is it that I'm afraid I'm supposed to be? What if I am not supposed to be anything? What if I am just here—until I'm not.

I continue drinking and the lights keep swirling outside and the world appears to be ending on the tarmac. Dean is crooning about landing on the right side of life. “Just forget that you’re a worrybird....” Easy for you to say, Dean.

Red blue red blue against the night sky. JFK is surprisingly quiet for rush hour on a Friday night. It’s November. Doesn’t anybody go anywhere anymore? Don’t I?

Remember when flying felt glamorous—and vaguely fancy. I remember feeling a tremendous sense of power the first few times I pulled my roller bag through the terminals at Logan and LAX. Look at me. Little me. Making my way through the world. I’M HERE! I’m gonna be somebody.

But maybe I’m not. Because it’s twenty years later and I’m still just little me. Making my way. Pulling my roller bag through the world.

The woman behind me in the fancy boots has been nursing her glass of “red” since the dawn of time. After crawling on the floor under the table she has managed to plug her phone into a light pole. I admit that I’m impressed with the determination. Now that she has reconnected to the world she is telling someone that she “feels really bad about it.” I don’t think she does. I don’t think she feels much of anything. I wonder how many more generations of humans will actually feel things.

The lights are still there. More black and whites now. A big ladder truck.

I am jealous sometimes, of the people who don’t feel so much. I wonder what it would be like to walk through the world without the fear that I have missed the moment, missed my calling, missed I don’t even know what. What was I supposed to be chasing? I didn’t get a map so I chased it all. And then started back at the beginning. Everything changes. And yet I always end up with the same terrible bob haircut. How is that possible? Life is a cabaret. This haircut is not.

The parade of police cars are leaving. Screaming away with lights flashing. The ladder truck is slowly packing up behind them. What happened? I wonder. Did you make it better out there? Did I? But it doesn’t matter. Listen to Dean. Pick yourself up. Board your flight. Keep pulling that roller bag. Because you’re not ready to put it down.



In the Woods Once Upon a Time / Robin Young

Goldilocks Zone 2023 Best of Art

Revenant

J Carraher

Goldilocks Zone 2023 Best of Poetry

the time grandmother
appeared as revenant, a
shadow cast under the pale
arbor encrusted with dead
vines falling across
stiff snow, she asked if
i had seen her lost
body. i replied
that I hadn't, but
remarked that sometimes
her soul blew this way
and that from the old, sagging
clothesline where she used to hang
our wet swimsuits, mid-summer.

Mis-en-scène

Kathy Flann

Goldilocks Zone 2023 Winner

Mise-en-scène:
How I Turned My 100% Perfect Rom-Com Moment
into a Total Horror Movie

For a year, I'd felt butterflies with Graham, the kind of sparkling, gossamer attraction everyone says they want. But when he finally reciprocated my interest, I discovered the problem with butterflies—grand gestures startled them. They might flutter anywhere.

I'd just returned from my night class, *Holiday French*, when the iron doorknocker split the silence in half, jolting me out of my textbook. Maybe the bang seemed ominous simply because I'd devoured so many romances and dramas set in places like Golgotha Village, where I now lived—a single row of ten skinny houses built in the 1600's, perched above a small city and the Irish Sea. "Laundresses" had once lived in these homes because the wind on the hill had been ideal for drying clothes. The gusts would also have swayed the bodies of condemned inmates, who were marched up here from the castle for execution at the gallows. Nowadays, though, life here was quiet, and I studied the door before I got up and opened it.

Graham stood there in the dark. At the threshold, he stood close to me, the way he always did, closer than people usually stood. I gaped, blinked up at him. He wore a navy shirt with his fire brigade company logo and navy pants—suggesting he'd come straight from his shift.

He lived three hours north, on the coast beyond Glasgow. We'd had an extended almost-a-thing, and he was almost interested. I'd always been the one to visit him, and his ambivalence held my attention like a gem rotating in a case.

Neither of us spoke. His eyes, ice blue, held mine, and even in the dark, he had that hint of rose at the cheeks. With the black hair, he looked too damned Scottish to be real. Then—as if he were not a

figment of my imagination—he hunched his shoulders to protect against the chill, and he smiled his cheeky smile.

Something finally clicked. “Oh,” I said. “Come in.” And I moved aside.

I shut the door, gestured to a seat, and offered him water. I steadied my nerves in the kitchen while I ran the tap, staring at the wall and taking yoga breaths, trying to temper my giddiness. He’d probably just swerved off the A6 on his way to visit someone, I reasoned, or to pick up his little nephew from a school trip.

The last time we’d seen each other had been some weeks earlier—we’d met up at a bar the evening before my flight to France, where I traveled periodically to visit friends. Glasgow was my nearest major airport. He’d arranged for us to stay at the home of an acquaintance who was out of town. That night, as always, I donned a full set of pajamas, as if they were a Hazmat suit. In stories, heroines often allowed themselves moments of wild abandon, which seemed fantastic in theory. But sometimes casual hook-ups made guys like me more, and then a dread would flood my body with an urge to flee. Or if physical intimacy didn’t make that didn’t happen, and a guy was indifferent, I’d be the one hurt. It seemed a no-win situation—if they liked me or they didn’t. I told myself that casual wasn’t for me—I needed a stable situation with the right person. Still, he and I did make out *a lot*, even if it was rated PG.

I brought the glass of water to where he waited. He perched on a wing-back chair, hands clasped on his knees, as if he didn’t know what to do with them.

“Cheers,” he said, British for *thank you*, and he drank most of it down. Then, he looked around the tight room and the fake logs glowing in a fireplace designed for coal. He’d never been to my house. The previous summer, he did drive me to the job interview that got me here. He’d liked the city. “I could live here,” he’d said. Then he made a jokey *yuck* face. “As far as *England* goes.”

I sat down, returning to *French for Dummies*—I’d been searching for phrases to transcribe in my notebook. I yearned to converse for real in France, but so far could only order a sandwich and count to 100. The book had examples like, *Avez-vous un seau en plastique?* Do you have a plastic bucket? *Quelqu’un m’a volé mes poireaux.* Someone has stolen my leeks. *J’ai tout perdu!* I have lost everything!

I'd been contemplating that last one right before the knock. Maybe I could repurpose it to explain that I'd moved a lot, living now in my 25th home. The connotation wasn't quite right, but at least I'd be venturing away from leeks. I circled it now.

I said nonchalantly, "What are you doing here?" Maybe he'd let slip some new clue about his feelings.

Graham put the glass on the end table. He leaned forward on his elbows and hung his head, the way a sick person might lean over a boat railing.

I thought, *Is he okay? ...* And then, *Oh God, he's here to dump me?*

He popped up and smacked his hands on his legs. He looked me in the eyes.

"The thing is, Kathy—I love you."

"What?"

"I love you, Kathy. And I want you to be my girl."

"You *do*?"

I blinked from the settee. He'd driven here ... actually for me? I wasn't sure which stunned me more—his change of heart or his totally sincere and sweet use of *my girl*, like we really were in a movie.

"I thought we were in a 'gray area,'" I said.

We had discussed this in the bar the last time. Or rather, *I* had discussed it—after a second drink. I said I wanted to start dating in earnest. He eyed the floor like he might crawl under his stool. I hadn't wanted to hear him say that he didn't think of me *that way*. Again.

To preempt it, I'd said, "Let's just say we're in a gray area and leave it at that."

He had nodded over his whisky, and that had been the end of the discussion.

"A *gray area*," he said now with a snort. He rolled his r's and he pronounced it like greedy ear-iy-ah. "There's no such thing as a gray area. That's total shite."

I'd been baffled for so long—he'd taken time off work to be with me during each of my job-hunting trips to the UK. He'd brought me home to his family several times. On one trip, he produced from his suitcase a book of Robert Burns poetry he'd brought for the sole purpose of reading it aloud to me—which he did as we lounged on a four-poster bed at a B and B in Edinburgh. To say I pined for him would have been an understatement, like saying that "Four Weddings

and a Funeral” was *a little bit* devastating or that peak Hugh grant was *slightly* charming.

The next plot point in our story, I knew, was for me to burst into tears, throw my arms around his neck, and say *I love you, too*. Cue the music. It was simple.

But somehow, I couldn't. My heart raced, beating faster and faster, and not in the fun way. It seemed to expand to supernatural size—more like something from an M. Night Shyamalan story than a romance. What was happening?

He waited, studying the red carpet. “Yeah . . . so”

I banged on my own glass. *Speak, you fool! Say anything!* Suddenly, Graham seemed the protagonist here, a heartbreakingly vulnerable John Cusack holding up the boom box in the dark to Ione Skye.

“Well,” he added. “There you have it.”

I felt my lips go white. But then finally, muscle memory kicked in, and words began to form. And what came out was worse than any nightmare.

I said, “How are your folks?” and the, “Work good?”

Dear God. *Small talk?* No, no, no, no, no.

The roaring electrical noise of my heart drowned out every awkward thing that followed.

That night, we lay next to each other on an air mattress—my real bed was a twin. We kissed a little and then turned away from one another. He soon snored softly. I rolled over and studied his shaven head, the black stubble. Nothing had changed about my attraction. This trans-Atlantic situationship ticked so many squares on my rom-com bingo card. Wasn't this next step what I wanted?

I understood that I'd balked, of course—what I wouldn't suspect for a long time was that maybe it happened because I'd had so many surprises in my life already.

My own parents' whirlwind romance culminated with a quickie ceremony in Vegas. The only constant was change—divorce, new partners, twelve homes before the end of high school. My brother died in a car accident. My teen-aged aunt shot herself in the head, survived, and came to stay with us as she adapted to her paralysis. But these experiences were not surprising anymore, just scenery that passed when I fluttered around my mind. If I'd alighted anywhere, I

might have seen how these formative years shaped my inner landscape. Real connections seemed always doomed to metamorphize into painful loss.

The problem with “the one” was that there was only one. It was a risky number.

I didn’t have phrases like *avoidant attachment style* or *escape response*, just a feeling that I could have Graham or safety. Not both.

In the morning, we walked. For a British winter day, the clouds were high, and when the sun rose at 8am, a weak blue sky materialized. Normally, we bantered, even if it was just to quote lines from *The Simpsons* back and forth. He’d have that wry smile, that glint in his eye. Today, though, we walked in silence. The journey to town was three quarters of a mile downhill, and the views stretched to the coast. The sky was pink behind the castle turrets.

He marveled at my choice of words. *Pretty*, I’d said. He had repeated it. “Pretty.” And he wasn’t teasing me this time. He smiled in a genuine way, that adorable gap between his front teeth. “We wouldn’t use that word to describe a sky,” he said, wistful, like he wished he could describe the sky that way, at least unselfconsciously.

“What would you use it for?” I asked.

He gestured to me. “A person. A pretty girl.”

I studied the horizon over Lancaster, and the words came out before I knew I would say them. “I can’t do it,” I said. I turned to look, to see his reaction.

He kept his gaze straight ahead. He asked if there was someone else.

“What? No,” I said. I gestured to him and to me, certain now. “I just think it shouldn’t be this hard.”

What I really meant, though I didn’t know it, was that it shouldn’t be this easy—the way a trap door gives away on a gallows scaffolding.

Deep down, I preferred romantic interests to be distant enough to seem fictional, like guys I met in France with whom I could flirt but not converse. They didn’t disturb my butterflies.

When Graham drove away in his red Volkswagen hatchback, I knew I was supposed to chase the car, bang on the windows. But instead, I stood in the road and watched him go, like the Final Girl—like I’d survived something. I didn’t know that I wouldn’t see him

again, that he would exist only as a text, an email, an image of a fireman in navy that was there when I closed my eyes, so close that his breath rustled my hair, nor that we would each find long-term relationships eventually with others, nor that it would take years longer for me than for him.

What I did understand, albeit without language, was that, okay, this situation wasn't quite *j'ai tout perdu*. I have lost everything. But still. I had, perhaps, stolen my own leeks.

Contributors

Jack Bordnick's sculptures and photography incorporate surrealist, mythological and magical imagery, often with whimsical overtones to provoke experiences and self-reflection. Aiming to unbalance our rational minds, the predominant imagery deals mostly with facial expressions of both living and "nonliving" beings, and things that speak to us in their own languages.

Kristian Butterfield is a poet from Tampa, FL. He holds a BA in Creative Writing from Florida State University. Kristian's work appeared previously in *Book of Matches*, *Door is a Jar*, *The Owl Research Magazine*, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Chicago, IL where he works in investments.

J Carraher is a writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work has appeared in such venues as *Open Window*, *Severance*, *University of California Press*, *Sunspot Literary* and *Memoir Ink*. When she is not writing, J makes her living as a forensic examiner and lecturer. She is also a reviewer for Elsevier.

Annie Dawid's photographs have appeared on the covers of *Into the Void*, *Cake*, *Blue Earth Review*, *The Westchester Review*, *Oregon Focus* and *American Poetry Review*; and her assemblages have been featured in multiple art shows in Colorado.

Kathy Flann is the author of four books. A humor book, *How to Survive a Human Attack: A Guide for Werewolves, Mummies, Cyborgs, Ghosts, Nuclear Mutants, and Other Movie Monsters* was released by Running Press (Hachette). Currently, she teaches fiction writing in the MA program at Johns Hopkins University.

Adrian Fleur is a writer based in Minneapolis who previously lived in Thailand, Spain, and the UK. Her novel *Zithande* is based in the Eastern Cape of her home country South Africa, and explores the power of women's friendship across class and racial lines, collective resilience in the face of grief, and the deliberate act of seeking joy. www.adrianfleur.com.

Sculptures by US-based **Irwin Freeman** have exhibited at museums in Phoenix, Hattiesburg, Providence.

Gerburg Garmann is a painter, poet, and recently retired professor of Global Languages and Cross-Cultural Studies at the University of Indianapolis, USA. Her scholarly publications appear in English, German, and French in international journals. Her artwork and poems have appeared in various magazines and anthologies. She specializes in creating art for women. www.gerburggarmann.com.

GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, WA. A prolific artist with 20 awards, his work has been exhibited in 64 shows and appeared in more than 140 publications. Whether conjuring vivid collage compositions or enabling other artists, Gillespie remains dedicated to the transformative power of art.

Robert Gillespie is a multidisciplinary artist from Derry, Northern Ireland, now living and working in London. He grew up during the Troubles and investigates themes of cognitive dissonance and belief systems through multiple series of paintings, conceptual photography, and other media.

Chad Gusler has an MFA in fiction, an MA in religious studies, and a BS in theology. His stories have been published in *Broad River*, *Driftwood*, *Southwest Review*, *Maine Review*, and elsewhere. His works have been finalists for the Calvino Award, the Ron Rash Award, and the Tobias Wolff Award. He teaches at Eastern Mennonite University.

JJ Chen Henderson's fiction and poetry appears in journals such as *Fourteen Hills*, *Poetry East*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Freshwater Review*, *The Pointed Circle*, *The Clackamas Review*, and *SLANT*. Henderson is also an artist and has sold hundreds of her paintings.

Leslie Kerby's art is held at Columbia University, Arkansas State University, Copelouzos Art Museum, Greece. Art commissions from Norte Maar Gallery, BRIC Arts | Media and Visual Arts Center of New Jersey. Residencies include Virginia Center for Creative Arts Virginia and France, the American Academy in Rome and School of Visual Arts.

Emily Krill is an artist and graphic designer living in Pittsburgh. She makes collages out of paper ephemera, like ledger books from the 1800s, spelling homework from the 1940s, and mimeographs from the 1970s. Emily's main concern is that her work makes people happy. She thinks art should be like the City of Pittsburgh: livable.

David Landau is an alumnus of the Iowa Writers' Workshop summer program. His story *Sweetheart* was shortlisted for the Aesthetica Creative Writing Award and is published in their 2024 Award Anthology. Another story made the New Writing Prize longlist from *Wasafiri*, the UK's leading magazine for international contemporary writing. Other works appear in *The Cossack Review*, *580 Split*, and *Write City*.

Rosa Lane is author of four poetry collections including *Called Back* (forthcoming, Tupelo Press); *Chouteau's Chalk* (2019, UGA Poetry Prize); *Tiller North* (2016, Sixteen Rivers); and *Roots and Reckonings* (chapbook). She

won the 2023 Morton Marcus Memorial Poetry Prize and has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *RHINO*, and elsewhere.

Anita Maksimiuk is currently an MFA student living and working in Tucson, Arizona. Born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, she is constantly inspired by her home city, as well as her adopted one. Anita is a writer and printmaker working in screen print and traditional stone lithography. Passions include writing, languages, music, and adventure by way of endurance.

Caitlyn Moony is a South African-Canadian writer living in Vancouver, Canada. She enjoys travelling the world and writing about the various oddballs that scuttle about inside her head.

Pablo Neruda (born July 12, 1904, Parral, Chile—died September 23, 1973, Santiago) was a Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. He is perhaps the most important Latin American poet of the 20th century.

Michael Noonan comes from Halifax, West Yorkshire. He has had artworks published in *After the Pause*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, *Noctivigant Press*, *Baby Teeth*, *Odd Magazine*, *Wild Roof*, *Press Pause Press*, *Indicia*, and others. He won a runner-up prize from *Arts and Illustrators Magazine*. His drawings were shown at the CityScapes and Figurative art exhibitions. www.behance.net/gallery/182795873/Imaginative-Images

In Toronto, **Leah Oates** has had a solo show at Black Cat Artspace and group shows at the Gladstone Hotel, John. B. Aird Gallery, Gallery 1313, Propeller Gallery, Remote Gallery, Arta Gallery, and at the Papermill Gallery. Solo venues include Susan Eley Fine Art, The Arsenal Gallery in Central Park, and others.

René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke (4 December 1875—29 December 1926), better known as **Rainer Maria Rilke**, was an Austrian poet and novelist appreciated as one of the most lyrical German-language poets. His work is often considered mystical with imagery focused on the challenge of being in communion with the ineffable—especially in what W. H. Auden termed “the age of anxiety.” (Translator’s note.)

Jennifer Seigle is a director-choreographer and writer who currently resides in Arizona. She published her first poem at the age of fourteen and has been processing the world through words and movement ever since.

Alan Sincic is a teacher at Valencia College. His fiction has appeared in *Boulevard*, *New Ohio*, *Greensboro Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Big Fiction*, *A-3 Press*, *Gateway Review*, *Cobalt*, and elsewhere. His

stories have recently won contests sponsored by *Texas Observer*, *Driftwood Press*, *Prism Review*, *Westchester Review*, and others.

Lenora Steele's poetry and short prose has been published or accepted for publication in: *Atlanta Review*, *Event*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The New Quarterly*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, *The Fourth River*, and others. She lives where the dykes hold back the muddy red waters of Bay of Fundy in Truro, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Wally Swist's *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012) was selected by Yusef Komunyakaa as co-winner in the 2011 Crab Orchard Series Open Poetry Contest. He was the 2018 winner of the Ex Ophidia Press Poetry Prize. Recent books include *Awakening and Visitation*, *Evanescence*, and *Taking Residence*.

Garth Upshaw lives in Portland, Oregon, with his super-genius wife, three precocious grown children, and six enthusiastic chickens. His work has appeared in *Clarkesworld Magazine*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Bristol Noir*, and other fine venues. He has an MA in Theoretical Mathematics and loves carving spoons, bicycling, and curling up with a good book.

Pamela Viggiani is a mixed-media artist and art educator living in Canandaigua, NY. A native of the Finger Lakes region, Pamela received a BS and MS from Nazareth College of Rochester. She began teaching art in 1986 and continues to foster enthusiasm and creativity in her students to this day.

Alfie White (b. 2000) is a writer born, raised, and based in South London. Alfie's work explores the nuances and intricacies of the human condition and of everyday life, with a focus on moments of emotion and human intimacy which they find meaningful.

Holly Willis is a hybrid artist/theorist working primarily in film, video, and still photography. Her work often examines the materiality of the image within a broader context of new materialist philosophy and the histories of experimental film, video, and photography with the goal to design encounters that spark an embodied sense of curiosity and wonder.

William Lewis Winston, a teacher of writing, lives in Oakland, California. His poems appear in *Margie*, *InkPot*, *Comstock*, *Poet Lore*, *Orchard Lea*, *Vita Brevis*, *Sunspot*, and *Consequence*; his story "The Sound of Snow Not Falling" appears in *Litro*. Behind a camera since age ten, until publication in *Sunspot* his street photography, in distant lands, he kept to himself.

Jane Wiseman (she/her), a transplanted southeasterner, splits her time between the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico and very urban south

Minneapolis. Her poetry has appeared most recently in *Feral*, *Eclectica*, *SWWIM Everyday*, *NBR* (Zoetic Press), and other journals, with poems forthcoming in *Main Street Rag* and *Southern Poetry Review*.

Tianyagenv Yan lives in a difficult-to-define diaspora. She uses light clay to make mini-dolls and tells stories about the lived experiences of isolation, alienation, and being haunted by spiritual beings that are thorny to rationalize.

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. She shows extensively in the Pacific Northwest. Past shows have included Seattle University, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Pacific Science Center. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections.

Ronnie Yates has published poems and art reviews in *Colorado Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Quarter to Eight*, *Arts and Culture* (Houston) and on *Bomblog* and *Verse Daily*, and recently was a finalist for the Gigantic Sequins 12th Annual Flash Fiction Contest. Ronnie is an educator, and most recently taught poetry and literature in the Texas Prison System.

Based in Borrego Springs California, artist **Robin Young** works in mixed media focusing mostly on collage and contemporary art making. Her collage art uses magazine clippings, masking tape, wallpaper, jewelry, feathers, foil, etc. to develop deeply whimsical and intuitive pieces. Robin's keen eye and gripping esthetic guide her viewers into her own semi-readymade world.

Elizabeth Yuan is a senior from Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Illinois. She has previously been recognized by Scholastic Art & Writing awards. In her spare time, she enjoys falling down a rabbit hole of Wikipedia articles and drinking unhealthy amounts of coffee.

VIA

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