



CORVUS REVIEW

18

SPRING/SUMMER

ARTIST'S BIO/STATEMENT

My name is MARIO LOPRETE. I'm an Italian artist.

Painting for me is my first love. An important, pure love. The sculpture is my lover, my artistic betrayal to the painting. That voluptuous and sensual lover that gives me different emotions, that touches prohibited chords...

This year, I worked exclusively on my concrete sculptures. I use my clothing. Throughout some artistic processes, in which I use plaster, resin, and cement, I transform them into artworks to hang. My memory, my DNA, and my memories remain concreted inside, transforming the person that looks at the artworks into a type of post-modern archeologist that studies my work as if they were urban artifacts.



I like to think that those who look at my sculptures created in 2020 will be able to perceive the anguish, the vulnerability, and the fear that each of us has felt in front of a planetary problem that was covid 19. Under a layer of cement, there are the clothes with which I lived this nefarious period. Clothes that survived covid 19, very similar to what survived after the 2,000-year-old catastrophic eruption of Pompeii, capable of recounting man's inability to face the tragedy of broken lives and destroyed economies.

EDITOR

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<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-oddentity-podcast/id1229525500>

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SPECIAL FEATURE

Dogrib's Conversion

Mozid Mahmud

1.

When I asked for his name, he said, "Dog."

It surprised me. Did he call me dog? I figured I caught the man with his head elsewhere, perhaps thinking of dogs. Perhaps, he had seen a dog right now.

"Dog? Where?" I asked.

"Here," he said.

"What is your name?"

"I've told you. Dog."

I shifted my posture, wondering how a man can call himself dog.

He said, "Humans can have names of cats and dogs and flora and fauna. If not directly, then in a roundabout way. The Americans had a president named Bush. The prophet had a companion whose name meant 'father of cat.' Don't parents often name their daughters Myna? The Shukur in Arabic becomes the Shuor in our tongue. Pig! There are men named snake, too. The Nagaraja who fought the Gods in Ramayana, who else were they if not the divisions of mankind fighting each other? There's the Dogrib, an indigenous tribe in Canada, who believe their ancestors came from dogs. There are many such totems in our world."

His reasoning left me puzzled. It could very well be that there would be men named dog—I'd never thought of it like this before! Yet even if he was called dog, I couldn't see him as one. How can one call another person 'Dog'? Perhaps he wasn't right in the head. Yet, I couldn't say anything definite. He walked a little stooped, perhaps due to age. His hair was unkempt and longer than usual. Even his clothes were disheveled. But when I looked into his eyes there was a sharpness in there. As if he was hiding something and would like to avoid others.

2.

I must provide some background to this story. Quite a few years ago, I took a job as an assistant professor at Bhabaniganj Degree College down in South Bengal. The beauty of the place attracted me to the point where I had to accept it. The college stood upon the ruins of an old zamindar house. Mere lakes populated the expanse of fields near it. A tiger-sculpted gate lay in the middle of the hundred-year-old mango orchard, welcoming the college's main building. The authorities hadn't let the relics be ruined yet, perhaps with a respect to the man the college was named after. The college had been expanded with as much thought to preserving the old structure as possible. Applications were also sent to the government to help conserve it as a heritage site.

One thing I was quite surprised with was the presence of this enormous orchard since usually it wasn't the sort of region where one saw many mango orchards due to the weather and the soil. The mango here would be rid of bug infestations before it could ripen. Even the taste wouldn't be that good. But I've heard that the zamindar had brought soil here from Maldah to build his orchard.

Another reason I liked this place was for the river that ran near the college in a strong current. There's a saying that rivers, canals, and paddy makes Barisal, that whether or not there were roads, the rivers in the region reminded you of the essence of life. We couldn't see the river right from the

college. There had been measures by the flood management board to build elevated roads, some of which had recently been paved as well. Every evening, many would visit the place through these roads toward the dam.

As heartwarming as the place was, snakes were living in their ancient walls. Carbolic acid was used to repel them at night. Though the availability of poisonous snakes in the region was enormous, there weren't many attacks. Many claimed the snakes could recognize the inhabitants of the area, and that unless they felt threatened, they did not harm anyone. Still, it is true that because of these snakes, other dangerous animals gave less of a nuisance. Stray dogs are among the few who populate the area here. They live off our leftovers, afforded more privilege in the college hostels than in nearby houses, where the students act more sympathetic to them than the other kids. It seems that in youth we treat everything with a lot more delight. We sympathize strongly with the helpless and this love extends to the stray dogs.

3.

Afterward, I heard a lot about dogs from the man who said he was Dog. Though, I never called him that. All my life I'd seen men being called "Dogs" when they committed something bad. How could I then, in good conscience, refer to him like that? Yet, human names disgusted him. To him, you were insulting the dog when you called a man by his name. One should rather call a great man a 'Dog'. He thought that men did not possess any of the good qualities dogs did. Though he conceded that sometimes hujurs would come by in the winters and compliment dogs on how they piss with one leg raised behind a tree or a mound of soil in contrast to the young boys of our generation who do it standing with their jeans. Yet, they would also compare them with the youngsters who drink and meet with the opposite sex out in the open. Satisfaction in little, hard work, and devotion – dogs seem to have them all.

Unless it was a human's name, he had no problem with how you referred to him. So, I had begun to call him Dogrib. Even though he didn't know what the word meant, I felt it would prove to be quite appropriate.

We used to talk a lot about dogs back then. Such as, even though the hujurs called dogs impure, there are instances of dogs being granted entry into heaven in the holy book. There was the dog who accompanied his masters, the seven sleepers, into exile for hundreds of years in a cave to avoid persecution, guarding their door and dying at the end of hunger while protecting them. The lord had infinite compassion for the selfless dog in service of those virtuous men. Perhaps no other dog would have his luck.

In Islam, keeping a dog as a pet is not only forbidden, but one's virtue declines continually while one is in ownership of the animal. Prayers do not become difficult in their presence. Yet some say one can have a dog as a pet for protection. But who would go to such lengths amid all these restrictions? In Islamic society, anything done without the motive for profit in this life or the afterlife isn't seen with a lot of enthusiasm. Yet our great prophet did not forbid us from showing the dog mercy. There has been Hadith, that recounted how a whore went to heaven for assuaging the thirst of a dog with water.

Dogrib would say how Yudhishtira was accompanied to heaven with his father Yama, the god of Death, in the form of a dog.

4.

All this talk of dogs is mainly because of Dogrib. If I hadn't been acquainted with him, I wouldn't be telling an entire story about them. I had grown quite curious about the nature of dogs. Certainly, apart from a couple of strays, I hadn't given much time to anybody in my life of exile here. I did not grow close to anyone. I do not feel embarrassed saying this: my most base moments were spent in the company of my colleagues. To assume this profession was noble brought about the deprivation in me. Teaching had to be the most self-conscious and self-aggrandizing work I encountered. One could only compare it with politicians, journalists, and the mullahs. For this reason, other than the occasional time spent with a few stray dogs, I had no other work to do in during my time of leisure.

Whether dogs were stray or domestic, their behaviors were the same. If you fed them a little for a few days or looked at them pleasingly, how happy they'd become! They would lie down beside your feet, and raise their feet to the skies in strange postures. Those who do not like dogs would not understand.

5.

All my knowledge related to dogs was from Dogrib. I would sometimes call him Magrib, too. But he liked Dogrib better than Magrib. As a result of our growing friendship, he didn't mind human names with me. The teachers here had warned me about him. "He's a little out there in the head," they'd said. One or two of them even said: "Sir, he is not human. He is, for real, a dog in human form. Once he bit a boy just like a dog does. The boy had to get fourteen injections for rabies because the doctor thought Dogrib had rabies as he used to keep dogs as pets. But after three years at the Pabna Medical Hospital, the doctors there gave him a certificate of release, saying he was completely fine. How could it be? He has symptoms of every sort of mental imbalance a person might possess."

Dogrib would be feared though because of the companions around him. He was never seen alone anywhere. Anywhere he went dogs were surrounding him. None of these dogs were his. Their numbers would vary. Yet they would play the role of his unpaid bodyguards. Bound by a relationship that was hard to understand if one didn't pay close attention.

Dogrib used to stay in a room in an old college building. No one ever objected to him staying there. He hadn't annoyed anyone there, for one. When at night one saw him around with his dogs they'd be relieved.

The dark solitary night is a bizarre occurrence, one that comes to us in the guise of various scares. No other scare is comparable to this in the world. This is why even when faced with a thief in the night, one feels their spirits lift in courage. And anyway, the world's unknown mysteries usually do not scare us.

Dogrib's ancestors used to work in this zamindar house. His grandfather's father was a watchman for the young zamindar. They would help keep the administrative accounts. Before the partition, when the zamindar family left for Kolkata, his grandfather had in effect become the owner of the zamindari. He could've had all the papers done in his name. But he wasn't that interested in acquiring wealth. Seeing it this way, Dogrib was one of the original inhabitants of this estate. His forefathers had lived through all this. Perhaps, for this reason, the college authorities let him stay on. Others were supported under the estate. Some would do small work to feed themselves. A few bighas of land were used in cultivating spinach. Some women worked as help at the college hostels.

6.

My acquaintance with Dogrib had been at the time for a few short days. Before, I'd only seen him once near the larger lake. I was seated alone on the wharf in the afternoon. At first, I did not notice him. I saw a man washing his feet in the water. I called on to him and we had that conversation I talked about at the beginning of this story.

After this, I didn't see him for many days. I was curious to meet him. The couple of people I asked of him had told me to stay away from him, that he was mad. Others even claimed he was possessed by djinns and ghosts. No one went near him due to these fears. Many even believed that he took on human form during the day and became a feral dog at night to guard the zamindari estate. Hearing all this made me all the more curious.

The second time I met him was during a foggy winter morning in a broken-down room. I had to come out of my room in the morning to answer nature's call. There were a few toilets beside the old building. There, after I was done, I heard a man doing what seemed like baby-talk. His voice was deep, unclear, and came out in murmurs. How could anyone live here in this cold, I thought. But I could notice him in the morning light. I asked him, "What are you doing there?" "Looking after my grandchildren. My daughter's given birth," He said.

Several newborn puppies were lying on their backs beside him. The mother was eyeing me from one corner. "Won't you get a cold lying down there on the floor? Your grandchildren would get a cold, too," I said.

"I've spread some straw on the floor," he said, "The dogs are used to not wearing anything. They don't have hands to make blankets, you see."

All these people who'd told me Dogrib wasn't right in the head couldn't be right. Yet the words rang true in my head. I'd heard stories of human transfiguration but never believed them. I didn't want to believe it now, either.

I asked, "how many grandchildren?"

"Two boys and three girls," He said, "Though one of them hadn't yet opened his eyes. His health hasn't been very well."

I cut out of there quickly, wondering how the world was full of so much absurdity.

After this incident, my curiosity for Dogrib only increased. How can a person be transformed into a dog? Know their language? Usually, mother dogs wouldn't let strangers near their newborns, but Dogrib was another story. I would sometimes ask after his grandchildren. Ask him if they needed anything. This was how we'd grow close. Even Dogrib would come by my place when no one else was around. He wouldn't say much, but his facial expressions would say a lot. They would also show some inconsistency. He had been staying around dogs for so long his behavior was becoming like theirs. Both love and distrust for humans are a dog's traits.

Dogrib had decided that humans were the most cursed and inferior in the animal kingdom. For no reason, they considered themselves the greatest. The reason they do this is so they can do as they please with their two hands. The majority of animals in this world tend to not take anything after they've fed themselves. Man not only deprives others of what he already has but also accumulates. He even wants to be a master of all ideologies.

In between all this, Dogrib told me the story of how he'd become a dog.

He had found a mother of newborn puppies on the streets. By the side of the road, several children were enjoying themselves throwing a puppy into the pond repeatedly. When the puppy was trying to come up to the surface to survive, the children would try to stomp it back into the water with their feet. At such a point in the puppy's life, Dogrib came to rescue her from the children's cruel game, taking her away with him.

The puppy was malnourished. Her legs were willowy. She couldn't walk on her own feet. Yet she was quite a beautiful specimen for her age. He thought: of all the mammals in the world, puppies were born with the most beautiful faces. He wanted to pick it in his arms. Of course, lambs and kids come out beautiful too. One can see in many villages womenfolk taking them in their arms in affection. Yet one rarely sees anyone taking up a puppy in their arms here. If in their childhood they put up tantrums for a puppy, the discouragement of their parents forces them to abandon their wants. Not only do they abandon it, but over time, they become dog haters as well.

Dogrib, too, had to face adversity to have a pet dog. But he had no father and, in the end, his mother gave in. Other than her kitchen and her prayer room, this dog would move around the house at will and soon she grew close to his mother. They named her Rina.

The history of men keeping dogs as companions and pets is old. It's only now that the necessity had receded. Dogs are the only animal that loves being around humans for no particular reason.

When the world was still a tough place for our kind, dogs made it easier for us with protection, helping with food collection, livestock rearing, and transportation. Yet their cousins who live in the jungles and hunt freely have more worth for us than them.

A dog could've been a hyena, living its life through violence. It could've been a fox, stealing chickens off a coop, or a wolf, even. Was it really for a piece of food that their ancestors started living beside our feet? It's our helplessness that the dogs were enthralled with. Today we forget that history.

Many consider the abundance of food and a greater life expectancy should be the only objective in their life. Yet, since a soul only exists once on this earth in one form and its destiny seems apparent, therefore it should value freedom more than anything else. If there is no freedom in life, what would one do with prosperity?

Rina, being a female puppy, had a lot of courage and curiosity. In a few days, she had learned to differentiate the different smells of all the products in the house. She could identify whether one was an enemy or a friend just from looking at Dogrib's eyes.

Dogs have no work other than pleasing their master. No one eats their flesh, why else would a man keep them? Of course, we also keep cats, bats, and mynas as pets. It seems that every one of them has their distinct work. Enjoyment, the love of beauty – they're enough all by themselves. Even though the concepts differ culturally.

The developing years of a dog aren't any less beautiful. When Rina had grown up, there was a thrust of beauty from her legs up to her waist. Usually, local dogs do not tend to be slim, but there was no excess fat in her body. In the south, one could still see the descendants of Portuguese dogs. No one could make a journey of two hundred years without being unadulterated. The dogs in our region had easily mixed with the European ones. This was why it seemed natural for Rina to have the agility and likeness of foreign dogs.

Her back was a bit elevated than her front. Her belly felt tightened to her back. We, humans, have often hesitated and been embarrassed about dogs' genitalia. Perhaps because it stays visible behind them, especially of females. Therefore, no one can look at it straight.

Dogrib once told me, that those who have never gone near a dog think of all dogs as alike. Even when one wants a dog for a pet, they think any one of them would do. If anything, they would think dogs of the same species are similar. Yet that is not the case. Every dog is different. Their intellectual development, resilience, ability to survive, ingenuity, and skill are all unique to themselves. Moreover, a lot of their skill depends on their health during childhood and their education.

Dogs that do not get to be around humans in their early years learn from their environment and their mothers. Those who do, get proficient in learning the master's ways. Afterward, the master's approval of any activity becomes increasingly important.

Even though Rina was a puppy born without a master, there was no shortage of poise in her movements. She wouldn't stay indoors either. She would walk around the college square every morning after breakfast. Sometimes she would try winning Dogrib's or his mother's affection before coming out on the streets in the late evenings as well.

Dogs do not sleep at night like us. Their sleep tends to be light, even the faintest noises could wake them up. Dogrib's mother would say that the girl had a habit of walking around their neighborhood and that she had no leash to stop her.

However, she was quite picky when mingling with other dogs.

In her childhood, one of the neighborhood dogs had started following her. It was her time to return home. Dogrib was waiting for her. He noticed for a long time that the dog was trying to annoy her by sniffing her back. Rina was trying to cut past him home, but the dog was not letting go of his pursuit. She even barked at him a couple of times. This was the first time something of this sort had happened to her. This was their season. Perhaps the dog could have nothing else on his head. Rina was getting to her youth, too. Perhaps this was the year it happens. They say when a dog becomes an adult, he urinates with his legs raised.

Dogrib noticed Rina run up to the dog's raised hinds and sink her teeth into the flesh. The dog whimpered, running away.

Dogrib had noticed it before. Whenever anyone new came near him, Rina's mood would change. She would always keep him guarded. If he'd gone on an outing near the river, he wouldn't find her anywhere near me. She'd be off trying to make friends with the other people who'd come here. Rina had a lot of curiosity toward children. Even when they boxed her ears, she did not get angry at them. Even as the kids would throw the ball in the water, she would go over there to fetch it for them. The naughty kids wouldn't let her go. With all the might in their bodies, they would throw her in the river. But Rina felt happy! Happy that she'd made a human child happy with their antics.

One time, Dogrib was returning home at night to find Rina on his path. A dead snake in her mouth. The snake was still wriggling. Perhaps she'd realized the danger he would've been in. On these hot nights, sometimes snakes would come out of their holes and lay down on the ground all curled up, only to come to bite anyone coming through.

Yet, an event happened that year. Rina got more restless. Her body seemed to ooze beauty. There would be days she would go away and then not return for two, three days. She had quite the independent spirit, so Dogrib and his mother never tried to curb her freedoms. But whenever she didn't return home for the night, they couldn't sleep that well. Dogbir's mother would wait with the food. She would go check the balcony, hoping she had returned and was sleeping in there. She would return and say that she had become spoiled.

It was her safety that they were worried about. All around us, there were dog-hating men. Men who were against freedom. Some even went as far as trying to deprive dogs of speaking their language. Yet these were the same people who had once fought for their language rights. You would see neighbors coming over to complain: Can't we be in peace? When we get out of the house, it comes over and touches us. Makes us impure. I know you all don't have any God. If only you knew that once you touch a dog, you aren't pure anymore. You'd have to perform ablution again.

I never understood their hatred. I never saw a dog take a bribe or murder or rob.

The reason Rina disappeared sometimes was that it was time for motherhood. She needed male companions for this. Dogrib had seen her copulate twice. He didn't stop her, for it should be every species' right to mate. How would a being evolve otherwise? The mating of dogs is one strange process – a combination of pain and pleasure not seen with any other animal.

Three months later, Rina gave birth to four puppies. A house was built so that the winter doesn't become too difficult. The puppies never left her alone.

But Rina couldn't see through their adulthood. She died within two weeks of their birth. Perhaps it was the neighbors who did it. It seemed like society couldn't admit the need for such a faithful, kind, and grateful but unnecessary creature. If one's meat had no price, how could one have the right to live?

Poisoned, she was found lying in the fields near the house.

Dogrib's mother died three months after Rina's death. Afterward, the responsibility of raising the puppies was on Dogrib. Most puppies do not live that long. After their mother's death, three of them had died too in quick succession. The remaining one, Dogrib raised like his own daughter. He named her Bina. This was the daughter Dogrib was referring to who had given him his grandchildren.

9.

Dogrib's story could've ended here. We had hit upon such a close friendship, that he no longer felt unease coming at my place. If he didn't come over, I wouldn't be in a good mood either. I used to wait for his company. My place didn't have much to show for: a table, an almirah, and a bed to sleep in. A girl named Amina would come over to my room to clean and bring me food. She didn't like Dogrib that much, who never ate in my presence. If I gave him anything to eat, he'd take it with him. He never liked eating without his grandchildren.

That day, it had become quite late. A sultry autumn night. The heat made the air vapory. Though there was a moon in the sky it was kept hidden by the clouds. A time when the snakes are quite the nuisance.

Dogrib had taken away all the food after supper. I'd fallen asleep reading a book. There was no electricity either. Suddenly, a yammering sound woke me up.

It looked like a dog pummeling something, the hair on its back was upright. It was quite big. I hadn't seen dogs here that big. The dog seemed to have yanked something with its mouth with great force. It was shaking its head, its neck craning sideways. There were squeaking sounds. I started shouting, "Who's there?" I couldn't find the light near me. The door was open. I was scared for a moment. Even called out Dogrib once.

My cries for help brought Dogrib to my door. His tongue was visibly salivating. His body was trembling, he was panting.

He said, "Sir, I'm Dogrib."

"What are you doing here at this late hour?" I asked.

"I saw a snake making its way toward your place from my room. I followed it here."

"Where's the snake?" I said.

He pointed at a dead snake, all bloodied and mutilated lying there. Its' body had bite marks.

I asked, "Was your daughter with you?"

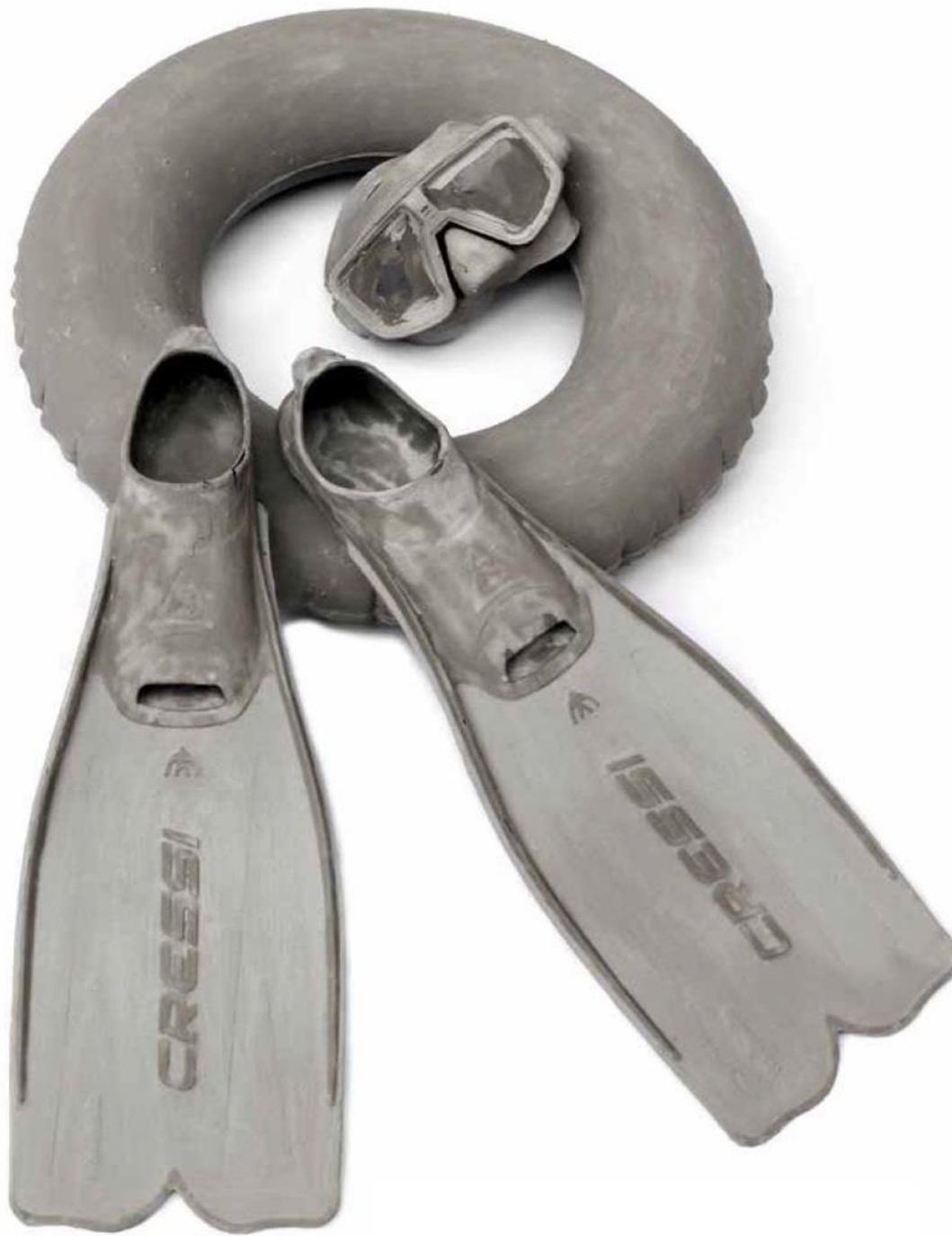
"No," he said, "I came alone. They are sleeping."

Then he laughed, saying, "Sir, there's no problem anymore. I'm here now. You can go back to sleep."

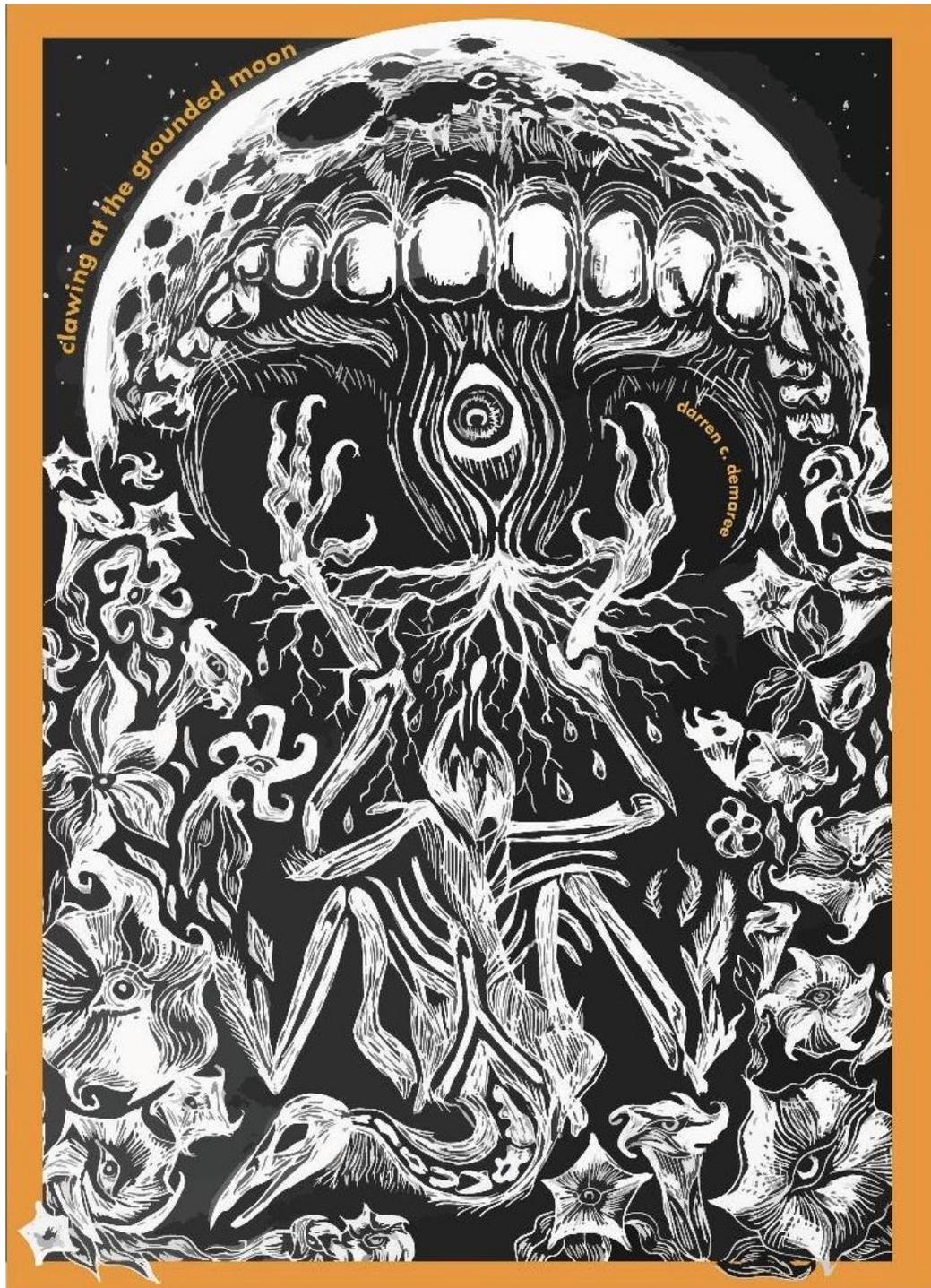
Yet I couldn't sleep the rest of the night. After this incident, I never stayed at Bhabaniganj again. I took medical leave, even leaving behind my clothes and other amenities there.

Though I had intended to run away from Dogrib, I didn't think I'd be able to stay away for the rest of my life. One nightmare and a love for a dog-man named Dogrib had ruined the rest of my life.

I'd thought a lot of going back, thought of staying with him and learning how to be a dog from him. Yet it would never be possible for us cowards to travel from one such way of life to another.



Untitled Concrete Sculpture



clawing at the grounded moon

By Darren C. Demaree

Forthcoming from April Gloaming (2022)

<https://darrencdemaree.com/books/>

Overgrowth
Joseph Giglio

I wanted to be a topiary once. Pre-planned outdoor art installation, some perfect pruned shape. Only ever pleasing to the eye. I'm all excess instead. Sapling absentmindedly tossed out back found purchase in untilled but still soft soil. Growing from a gash in the ground gnarled and grotesque. Branches twist and twirl towards the sun, tangle and choke, no bird would live in them. Leaves protrude in brittle brown patches, shuffle off in the briefest breeze. Bark rots still stuck to me, a damp coat, not even the termites and maggots find fit to feast upon. Vines wrap marionette strings, snap the trunk back, buckle under the strain, snap off, drip sugar water down to the dirt. What left is there to do but pray? But beg?

Oh God of your garden, if you can manifest mercy, turn an eye to me and dig me up. And if your wonders never cease, bury me, so in the spring, maybe I can sprout again and find your favor.

Infested
Kirstin Soper

She knew there were bugs in the walls. Invisible. Microscopic. They'd eat the flesh off your bones. That's what she told her nephew when he wanted to visit. The whole house was infested with them. They burrowed into the wooden walls and bred in the concrete foundation. An army of destruction that chewed through the substructure of her life. Wrapped in a scrawl and clenching the phone, her frail body trembled as she tried to warn him of the danger. Her husband had to take over the call when the boy wouldn't listen. *Tell him they'll eat him alive* she whispered desperately from the couch. She could feel the insects swarming up her arms and parading down her back in a militant formation. *I know* her husband said into the phone. *I know. She says we're immune. I know.*

The nephew said he wouldn't come.

Her husband was a doctor at the university at the top of the hill, but he had never taken her to any doctors, not that she could remember. He took her... no, used to take her to the park with a bag of stale bread in hand and a flock of hungry ducks waiting. They used to walk around the lake stopping occasionally to pet a dog or wave hello to an infant inside a stroller. But she couldn't leave the house anymore. The bugs stuck to her skin as if they were a part of its very fabric. They would kill the neighbors. An entire community to be infested with blood-sucking machines. Now, they walked around the backyard instead.

Sometimes her husband brought home rats from the university who had completed their testing. It was silly to think of rats scratching away at exam booklets, but she never mentioned that to her husband. They were the only life she saw that wasn't projected from a screen or protected behind a window pane. She named them after her former friends. Alice had a white spot on her nose, Gary weighed more than her purse, and Rosemary's fur was missing a patch. The rats crawled across her lap and tickled her hands with their small noses. She reveled in the good fortune that the bugs didn't bother animals, and when the rats went missing, it didn't matter much. Her husband always brought home new ones.

Things were different now. The calendar read the wrong year. The radio spoke in pictures. Sometimes she expected to see a young girl in the mirror but witnessed sagging skin instead. She knew it was the bug's fault. They burrowed into her being and chewed through the stings that held her up right. She imagined them to be stony soldiers with mushy insides and razor-sharp teeth. Like the soldiers that exchanged her father for a folded flag, they robbed her.

Soon each moment grew more troubling than the last. She found her nephew's bedroom empty of bed, so she spent the night dragging the guest bedroom mattress into his room and setting up the space with pillows and sheets. She didn't like the mattress on the floor but knew it was safer for a toddler as she couldn't find the bed rails in the garage. In the morning, her husband reminded her that she told her nephew not to come so she spent the day returning the room to its former existence. Her nephew couldn't come. The bugs would eat him alive.

These troublesome moments compounded, and while she tried to not worry about them, she couldn't help but feel as though she was drowning. When the wrongness expanded past all sense of understanding and she couldn't make reason of herself, her husband brushed her hair with long and soft strokes. He told her she was still beautiful. *Even with the bugs?* she asked.

Even with the bugs.

Reverie
Pat Ashinzel

The stars are here,
appearing
as palindromes
of light.

Some are lulling
the moon to sleep
as nightly clouds sprint
across the sky like gazelles
on the run from a lion
with the face of daylight.

Some are revealing
the meaning of inverted omens,
like the dreams of a blind man.
Some are unearthing memories
buried deep in the trenches of time.
Some are conjuring mares
for wandering spirits
to be ripped apart
and find rest in nothingness.
Some are praying
in the sultry language
butterflies use to hypnotize
flower buds at sunrise.

Here I am,
alone on a bridge
between earth and sky,
gazing at the moon
the first man on earth
looked at and prayed to.

Here I am,
unbothered by the dim,
soundless night,
unafraid of being
alone in the dark,
as I see one of them —
the stars — become
a hand that lays itself
on my feet, setting them
to walk on the path of light:
the one that led
them all down here.

Half-beast
Margaret Sefton

They had agreed to meet at the kitschy restaurant next to the vinyl records store. He thought she might like the restaurant's eclectic confusion of chandeliers and stained-glass panels that hung from the ceiling. He preferred sparsely decorated spaces and vaulted ceilings, but he knew she would like it. Although they were new to each other, they had chatted onscreen for months and he felt that in many ways, he already knew her.

He felt his stomach knot as he sat upon a hard church pew in the waiting area. For the first time, he worried about whether his antlers would become entangled in the low-hanging chandeliers or smash into a stained glass window and bring it crashing to the floor. People were generally accepting of him, but he nonetheless found it inconvenient to carry this weight on his head, though of course, his rack gained him respect. Who could argue with a 15-point man-buck? He had told her about this singular feature of his, but he didn't have the space in his apartment to give her a full-screen picture. He didn't care anymore. He didn't have the luxury of self-consciousness. He was lonely and yearned for companionship.

She was all freshness, sweetness, and light, just as he had expected, based on the way she was on the screen. She hugged him and said how much she loved his antlers, immediately putting him at ease. And yet, once seated at the table, he inadvertently unhooked a chandelier with a point. He shrugged and wore it while they drank their wine. This tickled her. The staff scurried about, debating how to extricate the gold branches of the light fixture from his crown.

But the bigger problem came with the meal. She had made him so comfortable that he forgot himself when he ate his salad. Although he had long practiced eating in the manner of a civilized person, the isolation during the pandemic had unmoored his self-discipline. At first, he wasn't even aware that his relaxed state had freed his mouth to engage in its old, circular motion, much in the exaggerated fashion of a deer.

He saw her staring at him, watching his mouth. She was no longer laughing and delighted. She had nothing to say to him to help him save face. She made an excuse to make a phone call outside and she didn't return.

Out by the railroad tracks which led to the woods where his brother had died, where his mother had given birth to him, and his father had taught him to forage and fight, he wondered if it had been an overreach for him to be in this other world. He gave in to this likelihood and let his hands become hooves. He bolted through the empty Florida city and out through pastures and orange groves, and up into lands farther north, familiar breezes, forests of berries and trees and acorns.

The Cloud
Robert Nisbet

We went to the wedding, but we didn't approve.
We didn't like the man, the groom, the city guy.
But we were only kids, what would we know?
Fiona was to marry the banking man.

We were Duncan fans, Duncan the local village boy,
Duncan, dressed in his shaggy tweeds, smoking
that curly meerschaum pipe, lecturing in Glasgow
on metaphysics in some shape or form.

The ceremony was awful, the gush, the technicolour,
how he loved her heroically (Porsche in the garage),
the honeymoon in Vegas, two-person Ode to Joy,
as we sat sulking, feeling the crowding doubts.

The reception in the garden, June, above the river,
and suddenly a cloud of gnats. They spun and flew
and clustered, aggravating the very hell, damn near
the skin, from everyone. Except, that is, ourselves.

Now hear me out, for science will not tell you this,
but there's an antidote to clouds of gnats. Pipe smoke.
The celebrants, the celebrators, peons of love,
smarted and swatted, swished and cursed,
while we and Duncan, out of it all, stood that night
in a ring of clear bright air.

Signs and Wonders
Bernard Pearson

My head is an empty auditorium
In the interval between Acts
The lights have come up
And I can see that the stage
Is just a gaping hole
Through to where
the chairs are stacked



Mario Loprete

Dark Spiral
RC deWinter

there you go
down and around
embracing those dark demons again
whose song is it they sing?
what words do they whisper
to tempt you so?

i cannot hear them
i have demons of my own
but mine are chained
they dance in their leg irons
and howl at the moon
i take no pity

snap goes the thread
and you're once again
whirling through the ether
a throwing star loosed
from the hand of a vicious god
who laughs as you fly

Hemorrhoids
Kyra Enby

Aileen

Warm milk doesn't work,
double for Granddaddy's cough
syrup, Aileen's friend Brandy

scolds her whenever she visits
sleep doctors who preach
no screens before bed,

and despite banishing
television, hemorrhoids itching
prevent rest. Ambien sticks

to mouths hungry for dreams
but dreams show pimples and boils
that Aileen didn't mail a birthday

gift—get up—she didn't call
Mother when at the hospital—wake
up—visited too many swollen

veins and she forgot the eye
of the—stay up—stove scratching
her toes fumble to stand—wake—

and watch clocks turn another Ambien
visiting too many strained bowels
burning to sleep

Vicious
Mike Lee

All I have is a guitar and a guitar pick, Larry thought while learning a Lou Reed song, playing along with the record spinning on the portable record player Mama bought. But unfortunately, they didn't have the money to pay the moving company, so they hadn't yet their belongings. So, years of their lives were in storage, but he did have his acoustic.

He knew two-finger barre chords and all the majors, though the open D was hard. But open barres—that's the ticket to looking like he could play.

The rest was fumbling along, stopping to move the heavy needle back on the cheap player to get that riff just right on the song.

Learning. There was a lot to that: a new city a thousand miles from where they lived. Then, suddenly, they were tossed into a maelstrom of single-parent unemployment. They sold half their stuff at the drive-in flea market, and from North Carolina to Texas they went, Mama and teenage son huddled in the camper of his great-uncle's green International Harvester pickup for a three-day drive through the South in the summer heat.

They landed in Austin in the middle of a drought and a heatwave. Mama got a job as a medical assistant and picked up freelance medical transcription gigs from two doctors. This allowed them enough to rent a duplex, a wood frame house in a working-class neighborhood.

Yeah, a lot to learn. Make new friends. Larry felt awkward about it, being the loner. He talked to the neighborhood kids at the pinball machines in the Stop and Go on Jefferson Street, but nothing ever seemed to go right. Always saying the wrong thing. Or talking too much. Larry did that a lot. Struggling to impress, but usually failing.

The guitar was a Stella that belonged to his half-sister. She was sixteen years older than him. When she was at the University of Texas, she wanted to be a folk singer. Came in second at a folk competition at the Student Union.

She slightly knew Janis Joplin. So they jammed a couple of times on the steps of the rooming house where Janis lived.

After her sister went on academic probation, she dropped out and started dating a frat boy who came into the relationship with oil money and alcoholism.

Larry was five when they got married. He remembered wearing a candy-striped blue jacket and shorts at the wedding.

He was embarrassed and wished himself invisible.

Ten years later, he learned a song from Lou Reed's *Transformer*. It wasn't much of a struggle, but he was afraid to show others.

Not ready. Never going to be prepared, Larry said to himself.

He finally gave up struggling with the open D, put the guitar down, and went into the living room to watch television.

His brother-in-law loaned them the TV, their first color set. Before then, the world was in black and white until he was fifteen.

He turned it on, and the news had cut in to say Elvis Presley died.

Larry wasn't much into Elvis. He believed his time had passed, but Elvis didn't know it yet. So now Elvis was the veritable eternal.

Larry lounged on the plastic-wrapped couch living room, watching the news coverage. Judging by the reaction, Elvis was a formerly living god.

Larry's mind wandered, focused on open chords, especially that vicious D. Once that happened, perhaps the future was in front of him.

The Self I Will Meet
Amanda Quesada

I'm on my way.
I dropped my baggage
so that I could pick up some cheap luggage.
I exchanged my fears of the unknown
for South African electric socket adapters and six injections,
three in one arm, three in the other.
I washed the stink of limiting beliefs out of my hair.
I scrubbed the uncertainty of the future off of my skin
and replaced them with the smells of citronella,
of red clay dust, and the musk of a leopard.
I'm going places the person I was less than two years ago
would never dare to even think of or hope for.
I'm on the road now.
I'm leaving office chair lumbar support for hyper reality,
for cold sweats from an elephant shaking its head in my direction.
I'm exchanging smoggy Central Valley evenings
for vivid crystal pin-pricks beaming from the blue-black vault.
I'm leaving the Monday thru Friday linoleum halls,
the no-show industrial carpets, electric stapler, and emails
for the reeds and weeds and seeds stuck to my socks.
I'm ready now. This time, I am ready.
I'm ready for the golden hour in a lion's mane,
for the splendor of the wild,
for being the intrepid adventurer and not just the passenger,
and for the Self, I will meet when I get there.

Thrift Store Sonnet 1: Used books and Why
Callum Wilson

Leaf pages
browned at the edges like sliced apples.
Watch out for the poltergeists,
smoke-pack ghosts tell you all there is to know.

Set your nose in the vintage smell,
near enough to dig who left the marginalia:
A blue-pen server on rush-Sunday break,
now a gnarled and tenured prof leaving red-pen snarls?

My dragon's hoard, my prizes
all have dog ears and highlighter bars
river-smoothed stones on the edges of a path,
inuksuit in pencil marks, footprints left in yellow pages

human presences that stay
until glue gives out and staples give way

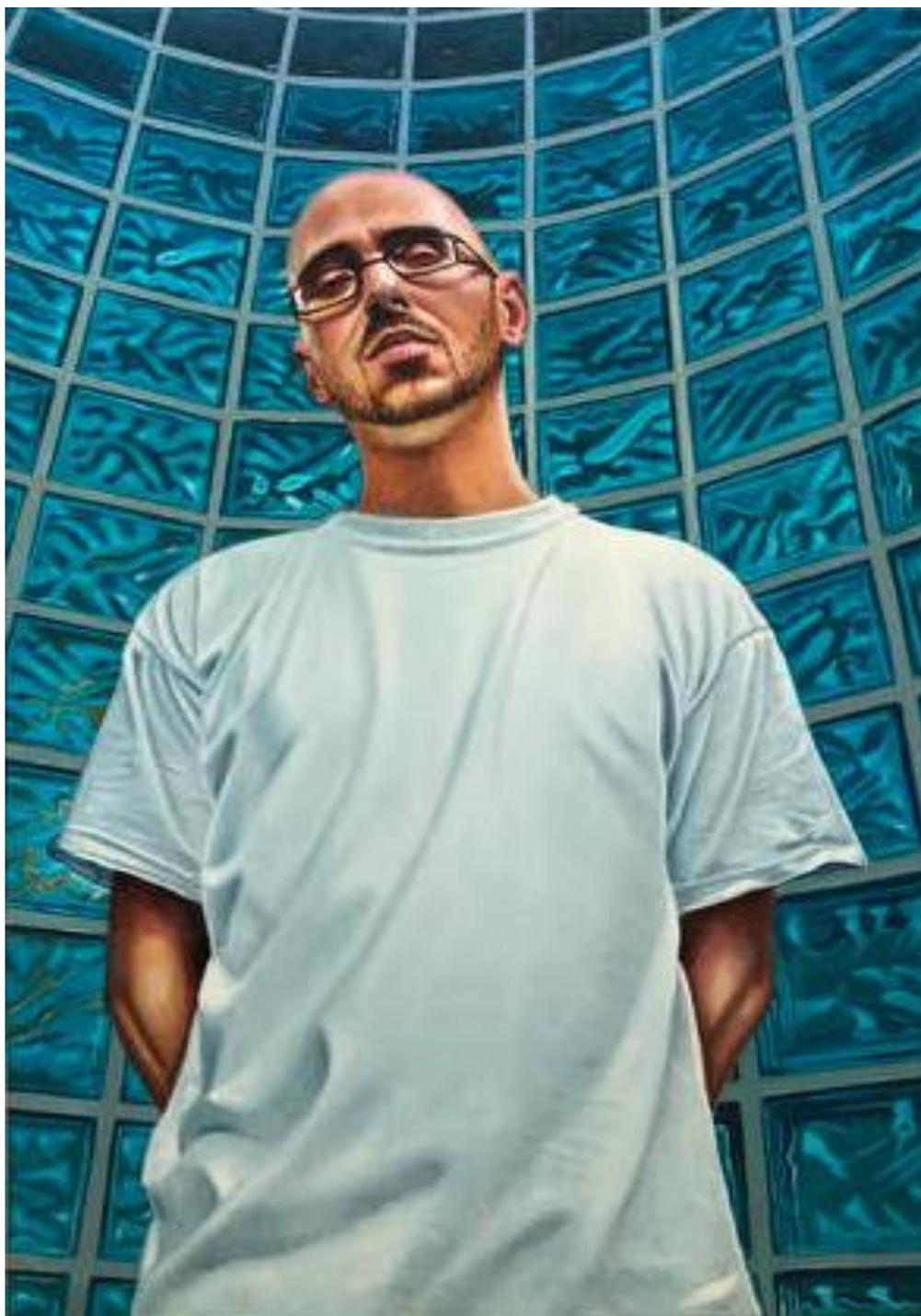
Ode to Feeling Whitney by Post Malone
Isabelle Plauche

There are four of us
three of us
six of us
all sitting under the stars in my backyard
crushed into backseats or realizing my full-sized bed is not made for this many full-sized
people
with no warning
no hesitation
I fall in love with them every time
innocently and unabashedly
because I haven't learned any lessons yet
and I want to fall in love and be loved and we all keep coming back to each other so it's so
easy to love them
we've all become a mess
a jumble of stumbling feet and clumsy fingers
something bright in our bellies
like we've all swallowed stars
There's one guitar and three songs and four
three
six voices
the rest of us watch him play while we sing and the words float high enough to fall back
down as hail
these notes feel like wanting
like waiting for something to all-encompass you
a melody meant for people who spend their lives looking backward

None of us talk anymore
I don't know when it stopped but things cracked
then they split
and now everything feels like dust under my heels

I don't even think about them that often
which seems impossible
but it's been two years since those nights under a fret-board and an influence
different hair and towns and lovers and losses
and I can't speak for them but I know that if we met now
I don't know that they'd recognize who I am now
and I don't think it even bothers me
their names still linger on my tongue
now and again my heart slips and something misses them so profoundly I have to sit down
breathe
realign the world

but that song came on the radio today
those first couple of notes
just strings in an empty room
just a man remembering people he used to remember
I think I went blind with the way it hit me



b-boy oil on canvas 60 x 90 cm

The Doll Wife
Steve Bailey

The morning my wife became a doll, I was nursing a two-wine bottle hangover, and my guts were a toxic swamp. I sat at the kitchen table in our single-story brick rancher, waiting for the shrew to come in and begin her morning fulminations about the government, the price of groceries, the cat's veterinarian, or my cigarette habit. As I waited for what I thought was the inevitable claptrap, I put my head on the table and fell back to sleep.

Three hours later, I awoke. Except for the cat munching on his food, I was alone in the kitchen. I went to my wife's bedroom to check on her. She was lying on her neatly made bed in a gingham blue, and white checked dress with a white blouse. She was a Wizard of Oz doll, Dorothy with everything but ruby slippers. Her bare feet had no toes. Her blue eyes, too bloodshot free to be real, stared at the ceiling. Well, no, dolls don't stare.

My phone rang, and I went to my bedroom to retrieve it. It was my son.

"I have been trying to call mom all morning," he said. "Is she alright?"

Panic! Immediately, I responded and later wondered why I said what I did.

"She took off on a trip this morning. Unfortunately, the ship she is on has no cell phone service, so she'll be out of touch for some weeks." I could feel icy suspicion seeping through the phone.

I took the doll down to the kitchen and set it in a chair. The doll wife was a lot lighter than the real wife, although it had been years since I had lifted the latter. I sat her across from me, poured myself a coffee, and asked the doll what I should do. Of course, there was no answer, but I found myself throwing out different ideas, and the doll listened.

No, dolls don't listen. But they don't talk back either. They don't go on rants hurling insults and harsh language. Talking to my wife without confrontation was a new experience, and I continued sharing my ideas with her as I fixed myself a sandwich. For fun, I offered her half. Her clear blue eyes say, "Dolls don't eat."

I decided to carry the "long voyage" story forward. I packed my wife's suitcase and announced her voyage on her Facebook page, which was easy to do since the woman had no imagination when it came to passwords. I should have altered the posting date.

That evening I opened a bottle of wine, put two glasses on the table, and filled them both. My monologue went deep into the night as I talked about places we had been and adventures we had shared. Since dolls don't drink, I drank the wine in both glasses, refilling them and frequently toasting my silent wife. It was the most fun I had had with my spouse in ages.

The gut swamp was back the next morning, and I stumbled down the stairs to get some coffee. There at the kitchen table sat the doll wife, exactly where I left her. Unfortunately, she did not clean up the kitchen, and the place was a mess. Party detritus cluttered the table. My cigarettes left ashes there and on the white linoleum floor stained

by a puddle of wine, spilled when I got excited, recounting a trip we shared to Paris. Dolls don't do household chores, an obvious disadvantage to having a doll for a wife. I sat across from her with my coffee and said nothing.

It would not do to hide the doll and the suitcase somewhere in the house. It would be best to bury them both in the backyard. Then I would invite my son over and, after placating his suspicions, dig her back up and set her wherever I wanted. I imagined her sitting next to me on the sofa as I watched television. The doll wife would not disrupt the flow of the show with inane criticisms and off-the-wall conspiracy theories. Best of all, I could drink both halves of every wine bottle that came in the house, and she would never complain.

I took the doll and suitcase out to the backyard, selected a spot near the graves of deceased pets, and set to work with a pick and shovel. The work was exhausting, and I took several breaks along the way. When I finally had a hole six feet in length and about three feet deep, I took the doll and gently laid it supine in the bottom of the cavity. I closed her eyes and placed the suitcase at her feet.

I then began the backfill. I threw shovelfuls of dirt on the suitcase, then on the doll's toeless feet and the Dorothy dress. When I threw a shovel full of dirt on the doll's face, the eyes opened. They were bloodshot. The doll sat up. It was not the doll anymore; it was the wife.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" she shouted. "And why in hell am I dressed like this?"

I stood, shovel in hand, dumbfounded as she stood up, brushing the dirt off her face and dress. Then, a voice came from behind me.

"Sir, drop the shovel and step away from the lady."

I turned around. Two uniformed police officers in my backyard had their pistols aimed at me. Behind them stood my son with utter contempt on his face.

My sentence for attempting to bury my wife alive was ten years, with a lot of psychological counseling. Perhaps when I get out, she will revert to a doll, and we can pick up where we left off.

Lisa's Leg
John Grey

Lisa's leg is acting up again.
That means bad weather is on the way.
Her veins and arteries,
her flesh and bones,
don't need fancy maps
and digital pointer
to show the path of dark storm clouds.
She aches isobars.
She swells atmospheric pressure.

Lisa sits in her favorite chair,
relaxes her forecasting apparatus
on a bright blue ottoman.
Michael looks out the window.
So far, the sky is an unblemished blue
but his horizon's limited.
Lisa's limbs can feel across three states.

True enough, within the hour,
dark clouds build up in the west,
move ominously in the direction of the tiny cottage
that Lisa and Michael have occupied all these years.

Most agree that Lisa's leg
is far more accurate
than the skinny blonde woman
or the guy with the dyed curly hair
on the local TV news.

But there's one or two who reckon
Lisa doesn't so much predict as summon
the lightning, thunder, and heavy downpour.
Life with Michael is as bland as breakfast sausage.
Why shouldn't she call on the madness
to drop in on their home once in a while?

For Michael no longer eyes her leg with desire.
But, at least, he will come to it for information.

La Cura
Salvatore Difalco

When my father was dying of lung cancer, a friend of the family, Antonio Carbone, who was also my father's barber, suggested a remedy from the old country that he swore would cure him.

"Remember Mario Cino's, old man?" Antonio said. "The one who owned the body shop? Cured of stomach cancer in two weeks. And what about Gina Messina? Breast cancer. One month."

Antonio was primarily known as a terrible barber, who had learned his trade in the Italian Army, and a bit of a storyteller, who could twist and turn a yarn like a fork with spaghetti. But he was also known for holding some peculiar ideas: he didn't believe that man had landed on the moon; he thought it a hoax, staged for television. On the other hand, he ardently bought into that whole Chariots of the Gods thing and believed that in the past, spacemen had visited Earth.

After debilitating bouts of chemo, radiation, and two unsuccessful operations, the doctors had already given my father little hope of surviving beyond the year. But, perhaps out of desperation, he agreed to try Antonio's remedy. "It couldn't hurt," he argued with my mother, already heartbroken, and dismayed that a barber was offering him such false hope.

The remedy consisted of peeled hard-boiled eggs and garlic cloves pickled in lemon juice and vinegar with a secret blend of herbs and roots that Antonio had brought back from Sicily. The idea was to let the eggs ferment for a few weeks, then strain off the juices and drink them.

"It's been passed down through generations," Antonio claimed. "Goes right back to the Greeks and the Saracens."

"Like he knows anything about Saracens," my mother said.

It had cured scores of people, the barber argued, and not just of cancer. "Someone had given Mufalda's daughter Pina the malocchio," he said, "and it cured her of that."

"Now you're talking nonsense," my mother said, who had her charms against the evil eye.

"I swear to God it's the truth," Antonio said, claspng his hand over his heart.

Despite my mother's skepticism, it looked like a go. She just didn't have the heart to refuse my father and crush any lingering hopes.

Antonio wanted a hundred dollars for the recipe, and the special blend of Sicilian herbs and roots he kept on hand, and this seemed reasonable to my father. At his urgent and heartfelt request, my mother purchased all the necessary ingredients, which included dozens of lemons and eggs and festoons of garlic, and allowed Antonio to prepare 20 or so Mason jars full of this stuff to store in our wine cellar next to the jarred peppers and eggplants, and wine demijohns.

My father's condition worsened over the next few weeks. And the condition of the Mason jars had also taken a ghastly turn. The eggs had cracked

and blackened and started putrefying, their greenish discharge clouding and thickening the liquid in the jars. As a naive 12-year-old, I could only imagine what this concoction smelled or tasted like. The idea that my father had to drink it only distressed and saddened me further. Needless to say, I stayed away from the wine cellar, and the Mason jars.

Horrified, my mother said that under no circumstances would she permit my father to drink such filth. “Antonio e pazzo,” she concluded, “he’s crazy.” And she wasn’t the only person who believed this. Antonio’s wife, Maria, had left him years ago and returned to Italy when she’d had enough of his strange and sometimes dangerous behaviours. He had once almost burned down their house trying to make grappa in the basement and had just averted electrocution while splicing cable television from the neighbour.

I thought my mother would just throw out the Mason jars and be done with them. But she left them in the wine cellar. At night, when I climbed into bed, I would say my prayers, beseeching God to make my father well again, and then I would hide my face under the covers and think of the Mason jars, and what was happening inside them—the awful metamorphosis.

My father was rushed to hospital a few days later, coughing up blood and running a high fever. He spent a week in intensive care and then was moved to a semi-private room he shared with a startlingly jaundiced man dying of liver cancer.

Antonio came to visit my father a few days later. My mother wasn’t pleased to see him. My father, heavily sedated, just slept.

“What do you want, Antonio?” my mother asked with bite. “Another hundred dollars?”

“No, no,” he said, removing his hat, respectful, “per carita. I’m just here to pay my respects. Please. I can give you the money back. It’s not a problem. I was only trying to help.”

Disarmed, my mother said nothing. My father slept; his breathing laboured.

When, after a long silence, Antonio asked if my father had tried his remedy, my mother sharply told him to drop the subject.

“You belong in a manicomio,” she said. A nuthouse.

“I’m sorry,” Antonio said. “I truly am.”

Chastened, he slowly left the hospital room, squeezing his hat in his hands and muttering to himself.

My father died about a month later.

He never did try Antonio’s concoction. Indeed, we forgot about it until a year later when we were clearing out my father’s things from the wine cellar.

The Mason jars were clouded now by thick swirls and clots of green and black mold or fungus, whatever was festering inside them. I held one and it was warm in the hand, like a living thing. Disturbed, I quickly packed the Mason jars in a crate and took them out to the trash.

Spam Bot in Monumental Enclosure
Joshua Martin

Bombastic angelic tornado chaser
prevented from entering tollbooth
until dusk settles blood sugar dropping.

Common karma riot guard
pieces together arsonist's jubilee.

Unseasonable in commanding voice crusade
a perfectly ordinary allusion proves an echo
stuck with the outside chance of acrobatics.

Standard dance pole shrieks
reverses holiday stubble planet.

That Large, Dark Room // Light in the Bathroom
Percy Metcalf

“Look at your father. Remember this. This is who your father is and will always be” my mother said quietly.

I was still young when she said this. I could not have been above the age of 10. My parents divorced when I was 11 and had already been separated for a year before that. None of my six siblings were still awake. It must’ve been around midnight.

This was a private viewing my mother had decided was necessary for me alone.

My family’s living room was large. It was the hub of the family during the day. There was always a swarm of family members in that small house milling about like flies around a corpse. The room also had a twenty-five-foot-high ceiling, which allowed some light from the moon during the nighttime.

My mother and I stood there in that dark room; her hand was firmly clasped on my shoulder. She watched me, making sure I was looking. Making sure I was remembering the sight across the room. The dim lighting made it difficult, but I could see my father stumbling through to the other side of the room.

I don’t think he could have heard us, but if he did, he ignored us. He was not as gaunt as he was now, though he still seemed sickly and wispy then. It was unspoken that my father was black-out drunk. He tripped over the toys my younger brothers were outgrowing and righted himself against the wall, cursing.

I reflexively reached out to help him, despite being across the large, dark living room. My mother’s grip tightened, and she hissed a warning. She didn’t show me this to make me pity him. She did it to show me the reality of my father. “He won’t even remember this in the morning. Just let him be.” There was anger in her voice, but it was overlaid by icy indifference.

So, my mother and I stood there, silently, hearing and seeing every crash and tumble he took. I do not recall how long it went on for besides that my knees began to ache from standing. Despite my mother’s best attempts, that was the day I began to pity my father.

In that dark room, he was stumbling towards the light, alone and disoriented.

After he had found the bathroom, I do not think my mother and I spoke. She and I were still sleeping in the same bed, but we must’ve been equally alone in our thoughts. My side of the bed had a view of the bathroom’s hallway. I spent many nights after that moment watching the yellow light.

There’s a reason I keep the light on in my bathroom, even though I do not live with my family. Without the light, how will the ghost of my father find his way? I cannot shake off the sinking feeling that when alcoholism finally kills him, it will become more present.

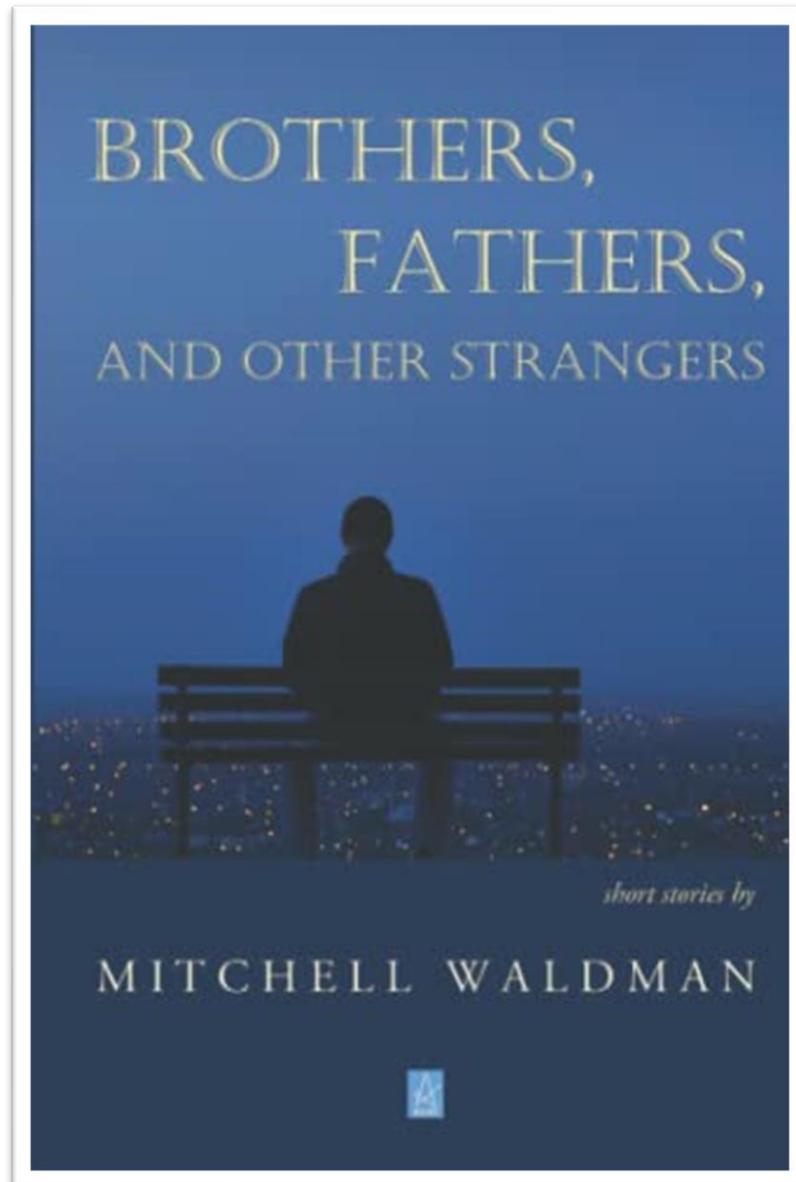
Even now, I occasionally hear updates about my father. He is sick, to put it. He struggles to keep down solid food and yet he can stomach the alcohol. Everyone, including himself, is aware of how death clings to him like dust on his old suits. I hear it in his voice when he says he wants to see all of his kids together one more time. Regardless, I’ve been told to never call him in the afternoon because there is a 90% chance that he will be drunk.

My father has never been immensely invested in my life, so I cannot say I truly know him. One thing I have learned about him is that his alcoholism was rooted in both the death of his mother and his chronic insomnia. There are stories of his desperation leading to consuming mouthwash and rubbing alcohol. I worry that, eventually, I will succumb to the same fate of alcoholism. Whenever sleep eludes me, I think of my father who has been drinking himself to unconsciousness for over two decades.

“This is who your father is and will always be.” I suppose my mother was right.



Untitled Concrete Sculpture



BROTHERS, FATHERS, AND OTHER STRANGERS by **Mitchell Waldman** includes stories about family dysfunction in a not-so-blended family, work, Adolf Hitler's imagined alternative lives and possible reincarnation, the spirit of Kurt Cobain, a green angel giving an aging alcoholic man a second chance at redemption, men struggling to find some meaning in their lives, and more. In all, there are forty stories and flash fiction pieces in this collection, most of which have been published in notable literary journals.

https://www.amazon.com/Brothers-Fathers-Other-Strangers-Stories/dp/1956635025/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=brothers%2C%20fathers%2C%20and%20other%20strangers&qid=1633880925&sr=8-1&fbclid=IwAR322CpbjwU7Z3aYPKqpeZBZMaePD7m27VtyC-fMSgxpLqpEeydICoHeo-k&asin=1956635025&revisionId=&format=4&depth=1

Mortally Wounded
John Tustin

I lie mortally wounded, an arrow to the chest.
I lie there, the seasons changing around me.
I am blinded by sun, covered by leaves, then snow, then rain.
The animals sniff me and then move on. I am poisoned.

I can hear your voice carrying to me on the wind
And I try to rise but I cannot. Your voice is telling me
That you love me and when I close my eyes to memorize
The sound - I see you before me, bow in hand.

Fab Construction Ltd.
Allan Lake

Noah's ark yarn. [*Cue thunder*].
Reworked allegory with emphasis
on 'gory' if one considers mass murder,
the later wash-up. Temperamental god
in pitch black mood decides to destroy
his project – whole shebang – just like that.
Hopefully beyond what gods can get away
with in Age of Vaccines but in those times
you could not sue, although even then
there was special pleading, exemption;
hence, multi-storied ark, not to be confused
with earlier arks. Google that, if necessary.
A certain god's invisible prints all over this.

Forty grey, rainy days. Everything drowns
except those on a stinking boat to nowhere.
Why dinosaurs and giants were murdered
but not fish? Consult: Mysterious Ways Dept.
God of clouds eventually did lighten up.
Noah and fam must've had mixed feelings
during lockdown, while quietly chewing on
a truly unlucky cow and scrambled eggs.
Trust in bad-tempered, homicidal Creator-
Destroyer, heavenly Big Dad would naturally
have plunged, you would think.
Creatures capable of thought would not
have entirely recovered. Childlike trust
evaporates like all that flood water.
Noah, according to an unreliable source,
slid into drug abuse, self-loathing, violence,
which would explain a lot about
what's happened since.

Packing
Tara Labovich

my hands are sticky from you, stained
from the leaving.

you, like some syrup leeches from a dream
i dreamt up: you in a dark
red canyon where you spoke as if the walls
were writing what you had to say, spoke
as if i had something to learn from you.

i took your words like syrup. swallowed.
thought it'd ease the silent sore
of my throat. too, i took
the unnatural rhythm of two
bodies walking together took
the smallest moments—a shoebox dressed
in river water and dead grass and stems of wild
mushrooms. for you, a box for you, even if you
are not the kind of box that can or will tie shut—

it felt good to let you in, let you sleep
in the crawl space beneath my throat.
you could be warm there, circulating
through me. my lips grew large in your
summer giddy, they spread for you
to reveal my teeth.

Strip tease
A.K. Fetterolf

vibrant blue flowers
look better when you
turn off the light.
A strip tease in a dark
room with a stranger.
How your beauty
appears mysterious
in the shadows of
the night,
Intoxicated by
The elusiveness
Of love.

Beings with Feathers
Jill Jepson

The beings with feathers live in our attic, but come down from time to time. Our hearts sink when we hear the flutter in the hall. We look, and there is one standing in the doorway, all six feet of it, its beak in a sneer. Most beaks can't sneer, but these can. There is something elastic about them. They are black and leathery.

The beings with feathers have nasal voices—because of the beaks, I suppose. They make messes. They make noise. And they are cruel. We learned how cruel after what they did to Missy, our gray tabby. It was the day Mom told them to leave.

"We've had enough. This is our house, after all. We didn't mind you nesting here for a few weeks in the winter when you were traveling through, but we didn't see it as a permanent arrangement. It just isn't working out."

The one she was talking to—we've never been able to tell one from the others—reached its long neck out, snatched Missy up, and bit her in half. Mom didn't speak for days after that. She loved that cat. Since then, we've never said anything to beings with feathers.

They demand meat, ground, and we bring it, of course, knowing what they are capable of. Twenty pounds a day, which they scarf down in huge gulps. They demand squashes, too, the only other thing they will eat. Ground beef, ground pork, ground lamb, and squash.

I am the only one who can leave the house, and I can leave for only two reasons. To buy meat and, of course, squash. And to go to work so we can afford to buy meat and squash. When we used to conspire to get rid of them, my parents and I would meet in their bedroom and write notes back and forth, not daring even to whisper, because the beings with feathers hear everything. We thought and thought, but none of us ever came up with a plan.

Once, Mom and Dad decided they would simply sell the house, but the beings with feathers would not allow it. Potential buyers came to find the walls torn to shreds, holes pecked in our kitchen floor, and something green that smelled of rot oozing from the ceiling.

Of course, I tried to get help. I was sure there was someone out there who could save us. But who do you talk to when something with feathers has taken up residence in your home? An exterminator? An attorney? A doctor? A priest?

The police, I decided. So, I drove to the police station one day after work.

"You say you have an infestation of birds?" said the officer when I tried to explain.

I told him no, not birds. "They have feathers and beaks," I said, "but they're smarter than birds. And eviler. Also, they talk."

He thought I was pulling a prank. He told me he didn't have time for my bullshit, that I could get in trouble for making false reports to the police. I left hanging my head and cried all the way home. The days passed and the beings showed no sign of ever leaving, and we grew more and more silent and exhausted and angry, even with each other. We passed in the hall avoiding eye contact. We ate separate meals. We couldn't stand being in the same room with each other, so we lived lives apart, in the same house.

I planned my escape for weeks. I *had* to get out. Away from the beings with feathers. Away from my mother and father, who had become odious to me. When I realized escape was simple, I simply left. After work, I took the ramp onto the freeway and drove and drove

and drove to the West Coast, where I got a job and rented an apartment, put flowers in my window, and bought a TV set. I even made a friend or two and tried to put the beings with feathers out of my mind.

Three months passed before I called home.

"I'm sorry," I said to Mom. "I just couldn't take it any longer."

"They have your father. They took him." She was sobbing. She told me Dad was hanging upside down, and there were a hundred cuts all over his body. One for every day I wasn't there. They would keep that up until I came back.

"He screams," she howled. "I can't stand to hear him scream."

The beings with feathers live in our house, and we serve them. I work, and I bring them meat, and I take care of Mom, who no longer speaks and hardly eats, but spends whole days staring into space. The beings with feathers still have Dad. They keep him in the attic, just in case we try something again. I bring him sandwiches and changes of clothes. Sometimes at night, I hear the flutter of wings, the snap of a beak, a stifled moan.



Mario Loprete

Eclipse Plumage
Mikal Wix

It was the Earl Grey, the easiest thing
that cupped the gravity of the darkest matter.
No superlative trapped her in any low-grade crude
moment, no pit of impotence or force
too pervasive: "It's certain."
The words caught like sweet gum pollen in her throat,
but the one word to rule all the others
she could not get out, even with a dozen tears
to slick the parched term. Instead, Mother hung
her head low, chin on chest and sobbed
like a newborn, but she wasn't, not anymore,
none of us wore Baldr's crown, and clutching the breast
of any mother, seeress wouldn't save her, or us,
from the savage impulse of the body to forget itself
when cornered, much as a wounded tigress would do
if she couldn't kill and eat her natural prey. And what's
forgotten isn't the will—
it's the target. Suddenly, the crosshairs mark a spot
inside the castle walls. Maybe it's our *raison d'état*
our way forward in a pinch, but after it was named aloud,
Mother sighed as if now it could be managed because she knew
we'd try to jump in after her, just like we'd been trained,
to rescue the sinking somebody, one must always bring a rope.
But an injured predator would never let you close.
She knew in the deep that lifeguards cut twice,
like a marital ricochet, or the beneficence of our Sun,
shunned nightly in twisting ridicule by her children,
salvation is double-edged, like the flower that opens to flies.
Mother said that the only true cure for her condition
was a total eclipse of one body by another, and only then
could she become obscure—
she would pass behind the star, a perfect occultation.
Father had already begun shedding into fresh breeding feathers.
He told us he'd been preening them.
When the ICU doctor asked us back to his office, my father,
who was camouflaged by Lewy bodies, said,
"She must be dead already." The doctor was from Taiwan
and knew well the idea of a contested matter, brain or otherwise,
so he turned his gaze to me: "Do you have any questions?"
Just moments before, mother had said not to let her linger.
My mind swept for synonyms, anything but that, anything but it.
"She doesn't want to drown," I said.
And the decree was signed. She would be allowed to live
until she finished molting and could fly away on her own.

Vistas
Joe Oppenheimer

Now is never
long enough
to know

so, we linger
on the bridge,
looking both ways:

at the shoreline
we recognize,
and the other,

we don't.

Blink

Mary Ann Honaker

My uncle backed his truck down the driveway
so we could see his dead deer. He taunted us
to touch it, my brother and I. Mom lamented
from the porch: "Poor little deer, poor thing,"
as I clambered over the tailgate, awed
to see this quick, skittish creature so still,
its legs rigid sticks. We stroked its forest-scented
fur. My uncle dared us to touch its eye.
I wanted to be as unflinching, as cold
with curiosity, as inured to the gross
as a boy. In my little doll's dress
I tapped the damp, sticky eye.
I don't remember any sadness or horror, just
amazement at emptiness, at how it didn't blink.

Red Fox
Vulpes vulpes
Christian Ward

I'm the scarecrow's swear word,
every chicken's *babaika*. Reynard,
once my name. Allied with the night,
I am part of the darkness, a shadow
conjoined with the moon, birds, streets
and even streetlights. The city
offers more than light: I split rubbish
bags open with an anatomist's precise
hand, rifle through a household's
leftovers like a pawnbroker after gold
or an archaeologist convinced of the next
great hoard. If disturbed by a battalion
of cats, I'll disappear into the background,
a prop willing to gather dust again.
My fur carries the warmth of entire seasons
in its auburn, my eyes tingle with fire.
I can dive into the wreckage of a disaster
you call life until the oxygen has run out
and come back reborn as a wolf, a blackbird.

Can We Fly Already?
Karina Kupp

There's nothing more boring on a trip than standing on that little bus that takes you from the airport gate to your plane.

Especially if you got there early. Ugh, that was stupid.

You could still be sitting on a bench, looking at the line of people and peacefully finishing your overpriced burger.

Instead, you're stuck here, where the time stops existing. It's now you and this large weird piece of nothingness between you and your adventure.

I don't know, it somehow feels longer than the flight itself.

You hope those people with whom you accidentally exchanged a few words at the airport won't talk to you again. The only thing that is worse than being stuck in a place you don't want to be in is having to keep up a conversation when there's nothing to talk about.

Why do people talk when there's nothing to talk about?

You try to turn away, but it's not so easy considering stupid bags are everywhere.

Why do people take so many bags?

It's as if they secretly hope to stay in that place they're heading to forever and they take all their belongings, but then something goes wrong and they take all this garbage they never got to use back home.

I don't know. Okay, I can't know. Some need to take that many bags.

I'll just shut up.

Wait I can't shut up, it's my thoughts.

How unfortunate.

Anyway. You have to move as little as you can, otherwise, they will fall, making some other bags fall, making some other bags fall, making some other bags fall, making people react to that. Disaster. I don't want that. At least it's quiet now.

You hope that creepy dude won't be sitting next to you. You hope no one will be sitting next to you. You count people on the bus. Hmm, seems like it's less than the number of seats.

There's hope.

The only thing that's even more boring than being on that bus is being a driver of that bus.

Imagine having to spend most of your day as a driver not even fucking driving.

Kinda reminds me of my life.

Anyway.

I love how people are united by the unspoken common hate for that last person entering the bus.

Where has this idiot been?

I hate this guy.

Hate him.

Hate that it's not me who gets to spend so little time here.

Stupid clever fuck.

Bluebeard
Cyril Wong

Our neighbour befriended us after her wheelchair-bound mother died. She's the only nice one on our floor. She knocks on our door to ask if she can help get us free face shields from the town council. You tell me that you glimpsed the inside of her home, which she guards like Bluebeard's favourite room. Instead of hanging bodies, you'd stolen just that sight of dimness shrouding a lifetime of clutter. I sometimes still wonder if we're only nice to her because we share our dim room of fear that after one of us has outlived the other, we might become Bluebeard, peeking shyly from behind his secret door.

The Science of Last Things
Tim Hildebrandt

Eschatology. It seemed a perfect expression of man's inhumanity: a bit of surrealist theater would make it incarnate, a flippant rejection of man's brutality—as if it wasn't screaming from riot-torn streets everywhere.

Execution was as cursory as concept development—no pressure from perfection. Materials came together, sketches, masks, dirty clothes. We waited until dark. The location was notorious for its dreary aspect: windblown debris, potholes—dark alleyways creeping between collapsed walls—ruined buildings, towering windowless behind spidery fire escapes, and dirty clouds.

Near the corner, an open sewer framed in iron descended into the bowels of the city. We dug the old asphalt with a pickaxe until a deep fissure ran along the curb. Max ripped his clothing and took off his shoes. His feet were like shoes anyway. As hard as wood, he'd used his hands as tools for eighty years. He lay into the carved depression with one arm sticking above grade, and his head lolling against the dull iron of the gutter. We poured concrete over his arm to his wrist and most of his body to his neck—sprinkling gravel where he emerged from the street. Mixed grey paint matched the surrounding asphalt. With our feet, we shuffled dirt and rocks to finish the texture. Max had to pee. Go ahead; it won't hurt anything. Then we panned across with the lights and cameras until the footage lived and breathed.

A cop car drove by, we doused the spots and threw the junk in the van. The cop did a slow turn and came back as we drove off. We made a quick left with him hard behind. His lights in the rearview, we pulled over. Outstanding warrants, open bottles, and paraphernalia threw us all in jail. We never caught the name of the street. Three weeks later, I made bail and crisscrossed the wrong end of town, looking for the alley. Max was not intended to be a literal rendering. I was ready to give up when there he was, like roadkill. One eye open.

Max, I whispered, I found you.



Untitled Concrete Sculpture

Clag-Be-Gone
Mike Hickman

Jude wasn't surprised that the first thing that came to mind was that scurrilous piece of paper. A photocopied page of childish gags, seen only the once, is still in my mind thirty years later.

It wasn't that I disapproved, I told her, and it wasn't that S.O.D.F.A.R.T.E.D. in itself wasn't funny. It was, in as much as desperate made-up acronyms were ever funny.

It was just that, well, this was what had come into my mind after her fingers had done the tick-tock, side-to-side thing. The Derren Brown thing that, she'd told me, wasn't hypnotism, however much it might feel like it was, but was designed to deal with the unprocessed memories that had got stuck somewhere en route to my hippocampus. *Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing* it was called. EMDR. Not an acronym, this one. An initialism. But the intent was, I thought, not all that much different from S.O.D.F.A.R.T.E.D. Make it sound official and authoritative, even if it was entirely made-up. Because I still didn't entirely trust Jude on the "not hypnotism" thing, worrying that her process would have me squawking like a chicken and laying eggs in the foyer on my way out.

So far, though, there'd been no ovulation. Instead, the heavy black lines of redaction had lifted to reveal the cartoon of the trouserless gentleman on the upended bike. And the page of acronyms. As shared with me all those years ago. On that walk out to the bookies because my dad had a dead cert in the 4:40 from Chepstow. This was before the thing with the bills on the top of the kitchen cabinets. And the business with mum's signature on the loan document. As forged by someone who hadn't once noticed what it looked like in all the years he'd been with her.

But, forget all that, I told Jude, as – it seems – I had forgotten so much over the years. The thing that came to me, when her fingers were swishing back and forward in front of my nose, was his photocopied page of "gags".

"You remember them clearly, then?" Jude's eyes lifted to the clock behind me on the damp bubbled wall. And yet I knew the batteries hadn't been changed the whole time we'd been having the sessions.

Oh, I remembered them clearly, I told her. They were reproduced on a crumpled piece of A4. Photocopied, which was exotic in itself because the school only had a Banda printer. One of those things that you had to wind, like a mangle. It printed in purple, I told Jude, on tissue thin carbon paper with a not at all unpleasant, marker pen niff and...

"You remember that photocopy?"

"S.O.D.F.A.R.T.E.D., yes."

"Sodfarted?"

It was an acronym, written across the top of a page that was designed to look like a fake business report. From the *Society for Devising Fatuous Acronyms to Regale the Terminally Easily Distracted*.

"You remember what it said?"

Well, not every word. I was seven. There must have been twenty or thirty obscene acronyms on that page. After the third or fourth, I'd got the point. And, besides, there was Clag-Be-Gone printed on the reverse. Now, that was much more my thing.

"Clag-Be-Gone?"

Like I'd said, that was a cartoon. A bloke on an upended bicycle with his kecks down and his arse cheeks out. He was surrounded by advertising slogans, and exclamation marks galore, promising the magical removal of tag-nuts and dangleberries. In other words – and I was sorry to have to use the other words – what the kids in the playground called *clag*. The wheel, I told Jude, had brushes on it and, you see, if you just imagine for a moment what would happen when he pedaled... Of course, I was going to remember that one. That fake advert was written in the language of the playground. It didn't mean that I wasn't disappointed in Dad for showing me it, though. It didn't mean that I wasn't disappointed in it all over again now. In this room. With my therapist looking on.

"Why?"

He didn't read. And, besides, it was so sad, so tragic, that this was all I'd got left in my head of him. Wasn't it? Jude had done her prestidigitation thing to unveil my repressed memories and *this* was what my personal Banda machine had reproduced at the other end?

"You see the piece of paper?"

It was such a tiny moment in time. Seconds. Where did the rest of it go? And just how much of it had been mangled?

"You were out with your dad on that walk and he – what? – read it to you? While out walking?"

Took it from his pocket. Handed it over. Explained every one of the terms.

"And that's what you remember? Just the paper?"

We laughed, I told her. I laughed *with* him, I told her.

Jude made a note or two on her clipboard, and checked in with the unmoving hands of the ancient NHS clock. The silence stretched long enough for me to begin hearing the absence of its tick.

"Did his horse win the 4:40 from Chepstow, Tim?"

No. No, his horses never won.

"Your Dad's horses never won?"

Not that I remembered.

"And you remember the laughter you shared with him earlier?"

It was such a small memory, I told her. What happened to the rest? Okay, maybe they were all of them so much clag that had been cleared away in the intervening years by my mental brush bicycle, but to have lost so many of them?

Jude lifted her fingers, ready to begin the side-to-side sway again. Ready to put me under.

"You remember the laughter before," she said again. No question mark this time. "I'm so sorry about this, Tim. Because I think we need to revisit what happened afterward."

Three Days in New York City
Linda McMullen

She thinks I don't suspect.

We're on vacation in New York City – yesterday we took selfies on the ferry out to the Statue of Liberty, where she flashed the smile that rendered me her captive the first time we met. We ambled through Times Square, eating lunch amid a dazzling array of neon and reminiscing about a trip we'd made here in college. Still eager. Still hungry. We took in a show. That is, I sat on the furthest-left aisle seat and stared in the direction of the stage. I didn't see her stealing glances at her cell phone tucked on the far side of her right thigh. Didn't.

Intermission.

"Everything OK?" I murmur.

"Yeah. Yes, of course, why do you ask?"

She's been coming home from work at eight, nine – eleven, once – with no signs of burnout. If anything, she's glowing.

I offer a shrug and a rueful smile. She pats me on the cheek.

The following day, we tour the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I watch her reliving her Claudia Kincaid fantasies of another era. She checks the pedometer on her phone – "Five thousand already!" Keeping her figure svelte. Her phone rings as we observe the gallant knights in Arms and Armor. She glances over at me as I study a sword I could never wield, and picks it up.

"Hi." She's keeping her voice down, but her tone says, smitten damsel.

"I saved it in our shared folder."

So it *is* James-from-work. Dark wavy hair, piercing eyes, cleft chin.

"The client wants *what?*"

Here it comes.

"Oh, don't talk to me about late nights, I'm on vacation!" Pink-cheeked and breathless.

"See you next week." She hangs up.

"Everything OK?" I ask.

"Yeah. I'm in for it when I get back," she says.

"I'll bet."

I want to challenge him to a duel. I open my mouth to tell her I can't go on like this, but she lets me take her hand.

On our last day in New York, we tour Central Park and try to list all the movies and TV shows we've seen shot there. *Ghostbusters*, *Home Alone 2*, she says. *Enchanted*, I add. "I didn't even think of that one," she laughs, and her smile lights up the greensward – the Sheep Meadow, the reservoir, the zoo. I wish I could live in a photo of this moment.

I should say something. Weeks of nightmares. Paranoia. A consultation with a lawyer.

"Do you want to check out the carousel?" she asks.

"Sounds great," I reply.

We choose our places – she chooses a fleet steed; I sit on a bench, facing her. “You sure?” she asks. “You could take the horse next to me. You could compete,” she teases.

“Oh, I could never,” I say, as she peeks at a text on her phone, and beams softly.

She shrugs. “You’d just let me win, anyway.”

I consider all of the alternatives.

I’d rather this.

“That’s true,” I say, and off we go, round and round.

BIO'S

Joseph Giglio is currently an MFA student at George Mason University. He is often somewhere he shouldn't be looking for birds or ghosts, but never bird ghosts.

Kirstin Soper is an FSU English graduate from Florida. This is her first fiction publication.

Pat Ashinze is an Ibo-Yoruba hybrid. He writes prose, poetry and everything he can think of. His works have appeared and are forthcoming in Eunoia review, TERSE Journal, Pangolin review, Arts Lounge, Aayo, Dissident Voice, Ngiga, Chicago Lit, KAIROS, Kalahari Review etc. He was a finalist for the 2021 Stephen A. DiBiase International Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the 2021 World NTD Day Storytelling Competition. He won the 2021 Wingless Dreamer Midnight Poetry Contest. Pat currently resides in Edo, Nigeria.

Margaret Sefton's work has appeared in *Best New Writing*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *Danse Macabre*, *Atticus Review*, and other journals. She received an MFA in Fiction from Seattle Pacific University and lives in central Florida. She holds court on her blog "[Within a Forest Dark](#)."

Robert Nisbet is a Welsh poet whose work has appeared widely in Britain and the USA. He won the Prole Pamphlet Competition in 2017 with *Robeson, Fitzgerald and Other Heroes*. In the USA he has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize four times in the last three years.

Bernard Pearson's work appears in many publications, including; *Aesthetica Magazine*, *The Edinburgh Review*, *Crossways*, *The Gentian*, *Nymphs The Poetry Village*, *Beneath The Fever*, *The Beach Hut Little stone*. In 2017, a selection of his poetry 'In Free Fall' was published by *Leaf by Leaf Press*. In 2019, he won second prize in The Aurora Prize for Writing.

RC deWinter writes in several genres with a focus on poetry. She's also a digital artist and sometimes chanteuse. Her only claim to fame is a small but devoted Twitter following.

After several years in the military Kyra Enby came out as non-binary. They are an author of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They live where the Platte and Missouri Rivers meet with their wife and kids. They hold a BFA in creative writing from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and their work has appeared in *Menacing Hedge*, *Spank the Carp*, *Danse Macabre*, *The Door is a Jar*, and other journals and anthologies.

Mike Lee is a writer and editor at a trade union in New York City and the chief blogger for Focus on the Story. His work appears in or is forthcoming in *Corvus Review*, *BULL*, *The Quarantine Review*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and many others. A story collection, *The Northern Line*, is available on Amazon and other online bookselling outlets. He also was nominated for Best Microfiction by Ghost Parachute.

Amanda Quesada grew up under the scrub oaks of the Sierra Nevada foothills in California. As a late bloomer who could not read until the fifth grade, her first passions were drawing

and building elaborate worlds and cultures in her imagination. A passion for fantasy, horror, and self-examination produced a writer of high fantasy poems and epics, and horror stories taking place in California's Central Valley. She currently works in a place that thankfully doesn't interfere with her daydreams.

Callum Wilson is an MFA student at the University of Saskatchewan where he is working on long-form weird fiction inspired by multimedia works like collage and concept albums. You can find him on twitter @Normal_Aeons. He is also an editor/instructor for Wheat & Laurel Magazine, which is a literary magazine for young writers in Saskatchewan and Alberta. W&L can be found on facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/wheatandlaurel>

Isabelle Plauche is a sophomore at Northwestern State University of Louisiana. She is working towards an English degree with a creative writing concentration and has been published in the Argus literary magazine. She recently won the award for creative excellence for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Steve Bailey grew up in the Panama Canal Zone, went to school in Minnesota, USA, and taught history for thirty-two years in Virginia. For the last two years, he has been a freelance writer and has managed to get several stories published, which he listed on his website vamarcopolo.com. He also hosts a blog at <https://vamarcopolo.blogspot.com/> and can be found on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/sbailey62>

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Hollins Critic. Latest books, "Leaves On Pages" "Memory Outside The Head" and "Guest Of Myself" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in Ellipsis, Blueline and International Poetry Review.

Salvatore Difalco is the author of BLACK RABBIT & OTHER STORIES.

Joshua Martin is a Philadelphia based writer and filmmaker, who currently works in a library. He is the author of the books *automatic message* (Free Lines Press), *combustible panoramic twists* (Trainwreck Press), *Pointillistic Venetian Blinds* (Alien Buddha Press) and *Vagabond fragments of a hole* (Schism Neuronics). He has had numerous pieces published in various journals including *Otoliths*, *M58*, *Don't Submit!*, *Ygdrasil*, *RASPUTIN*, *Ink Pantry*, *Nauseated Drive*, and *Synchronized Chaos*. You can find links to his published work at joshuamartinwriting.blogspot.com

Percy Metcalf was born and raised in a small town in Washington state. His work frequently features the topics of toxic family dynamics, disability, and his LGBTQ+ identities. They also have a passion for nontraditional structure in writing and love pushing boundaries of genre.

John Tustin's poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2008. fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Allan Lake, a stray from Allover, Canada, now writes poetry in Allover, Australia. Latest chapbook of poems, 'My Photos of Sicily', published by Ginninderra Press, 2020.

Tara Labovich currently resides in Ames, Iowa while pursuing their MFA. Their work circles around issues of identity, ancestry, queerness, and survivorship. Tara was a semi-finalist in Black Lawrence's chapbook competition, and their work has been published in journals such as Salt Hill, After the Pause, Ink in Thirds, Vita Brevis, Green Briar Review, Cipher Magazine, and leviathan.

A.K. Fetterolf is a writer and musician based out of Kansas Shitty Misery. He writes material that is sewn into the fabric of the human construct that usually floats in the back of peoples minds.

Jill Jepson is the author of two books, *Writing as a Sacred Path: A Practical Guide to Writing with Passion and Purpose* (Ten Speed Press) and *Women's Concerns: Twelve Women Entrepreneurs of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Peter Lang). Her fiction and nonfiction has appeared in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Porter House Review*, and *Aloha Magazine*, among other publications.

Mikal Wix grew up in the Melting Pot of Miami, Florida, of green-thumbed, hydrophilic parents. The city seeded insights into many outlooks, including the visions of a revenant from the Caribbean closet. He studies literature and anthropology and has recent words in the *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Beyond Queer Words*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Hyacinth Review*, & works as a science editor.

Joe Oppenheimer is a professor emeritus at the University of Maryland. He taught mathematical social science. In 2010, he retired to write fiction, poetry, and plays. The themes of his writings reflect his old research concerns: social justice and collective action. He has won some local prizes, and has published some poetry, plays, essays and fiction. He has also self-published a novel and books of poetry, children's stories, and other prose. He has also taught for the Osher Life Long Learning Institute and assisted a writers' group in a homeless shelter in Silver Spring, MD. A writers' workshop at the VA hospital in DC which he established and co-directed led to a volume of the group's writings. Much of his work is available on his website <https://joeaoppenheimer.wixsite.com/my-site>.

Mary Ann Honaker is the author of *Becoming Persephone* (Third Lung Press, 2019). Her poems have appeared in *Bear Review*, *JMWW*, *Juked*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Rattle.com*, *Sweet Tree Review*, and elsewhere. Mary Ann holds an MFA from Lesley University. She currently lives in Beaver, West Virginia.

Christian Ward is a UK-based writer who can be recently found in *Red Ogre Review*, *Discretionary Love* and *Stone Poetry Journal*. Future poems will be appearing in *Dreich*, *Uppagus* and *BlueHouse Journal*.

Karina Kupp is a writer, musician, and software developer. Her work is forthcoming in BULLSHIT LIT and Train River Publishing. She can often be found creating yet another

Spotify playlist, taking a spontaneous trip to the other side of the world, or thinking about her next startup idea. She currently lives in Poland with her husband and a very adorable cat. Follow her on Instagram @mutedpoems or Twitter @karinakupp.

Cyril Wong is a poet and fictionist in Singapore. His last book of poems was *Infinity Diary*, published by Seagull Books in 2020.

Tim Hildebrandt is a lapsed artist and a former combat veteran. He has an unused art degree and lives in the Midwest after traveling the world for too many years. Tim has been published in *The Boston Literary Magazine* and others and writes terrible stories according to nearly a hundred rejection letters.

Sometimes Doctor, always writer, Mike Hickman (@MikeHicWriter) is from York, England. An artistic associate for theatre company, Off the Rock Productions, he has written and directed numerous plays (stage and audio) including a 2018 play about Groucho Marx and Erin Fleming. Since 2020 he has been published in *Agapanthus* (Best of the Net nominated), *EllipsisZine*, *the Bitchin' Kitsch*, *the Cabinet of Heed*, *Sledgehammer*, and *Red Fez*.

Linda McMullen is a wife, mother, diplomat, and homesick Wisconsinite. Her short stories and the occasional poem have appeared in over one hundred fifty literary magazines.

Mozid Mahmud is a poet, novelist, and essayist based in Bangladesh. Some of his notable works include *In Praise of Mahfuza* (1989), *Nazrul – Spokesman of the Third World* (1996), and *Rabindranath's Travelogues* (2010). He has been awarded the Rabindra-Nazrul Literary Prize and the country's National Press Club Award, among others.



Untitled Concrete Sculpture