

CORVUS REVIEW

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Applications
Morgan Boyer

Like leggings in the dryer, the mundane cycle
has left wrinkles in my soul. Stretching

Why do you want to work for ____?

Tell us about yourself.

for whoever's skin, I'm on but then they roll me
up & toss me inside a drawer for weeks in limbo.

What makes you stand out?

Write three multiple-choice questions.

Twenty applications later, I feel no closer to leaving
chains of chinchilla-brained children crying for a plastic ball

Describe your favorite restaurant to us.

Write three pitches for our website.

or another manager treating me like spoiled coffee, dumping
my soul out in the thirty-year-old trash bin next to the display

We'll pay one cent per word.

(That means \$7.50 - \$11.25 per article.)

of Marlboros sold at state minimum and then crumpling my
cardboard body up into a ball with her fists before tossing me
onto the dust pile neighboring the lottery scratch-off tickets.

Nightcall
P.M. Thomas

The blaring sound of my ringtone disturbed me from my sleep. With a disgruntled sigh, I reached for my mobile phone on the nightstand, catching a quick glimpse of the scarlet red numbers from the digital clock as I did. I was irked to discover that it was only two in the morning. I made my irritation clear to whomever it was calling me at such an hour as I answered “Hello?” in a rather grouchy voice. My annoyance didn’t last long as I heard the voice on the other end. It was a voice I never expected to hear again. She sounded upset, almost inhumanly so, as she shouted my name.

“Matthew!”

At first, I thought I was still dreaming. It couldn’t be possible that it was her speaking to me. The cold feeling that struck me made me realize that I was very much awake. “Jessica?” I said tentatively. “This can’t be.”

She began weeping uncontrollably as she began to recite words that were all too familiar to me: “Why don’t you want me? Why don’t you love me?”

I couldn’t reply. The fear that was causing my heart to race had now worked its way up to my throat and was keeping it closed tight.

“Why?” she asked before unleashing a hellish shriek that chilled me to the bone. I couldn’t listen to it any longer. With a sharp slap to the touch screen, I ended the call.

I was beyond disturbed by what had just occurred. All I could do was stare blankly at the screen. I was startled out of my trance by the chiming of the ringtone. I didn’t have the nerve to answer her again, so I did the only logical thing: declined the call and turned off the phone to prevent her from attempting to reach me all through the night.

Setting the phone back on my nightstand, I hid myself under the covers like a frightened child. This whole incident with Jessica was freaking me out. How could she be contacting me when she died last week? I didn’t want to think such a thing was possible, yet it was. She was haunting me for what happened between us on the campus grounds, but what choice had she given me? Jessica was in love with me, and I wasn’t in love with her. I had to be honest with her and let her know that she wasn’t the woman for me. It was better than leading her on and letting her believe that there might be a future for us. It was going to break her heart no matter how lightly I explained it to her, but how was I supposed to know that she would take the rejection as badly as she did? I just thought she would do what everyone does after a heartache: get over it and find someone else who would love her for who she was. The last thing I wanted was to hear from her friend that she had been found dead in her bathtub, wrists slashed with a suicide note written to me full of anger and sadness that we would never be together.

Suddenly my skin broke out into a cold sweat as I felt a chilling presence in the bed with me. I wanted to jump up and run as far away from her as I could, but she was one step ahead of me. My eyes widened in horrified shock as a pale pair of feminine arms with red fissures at the wrists slid out from under the covers and seized my shoulders. I couldn’t escape, try as I might. I was in her grasp.

“I love you. I want you.” Her voice was low and sultry as she kissed her cold lips against my warm chest.

I didn’t know how to feel; I was both terrified and slightly aroused at the same time.

“You like that?” she asked with a giggle as I felt the icy tip of her tongue gently teasing my nipple before sliding to the other. “It feels good, doesn’t it?”

I didn't want to do it, but I had to see the phantasm with my own two eyes. My trembling hands grabbed the covers, and, with great apprehension, I lifted them.

There she was, naked under the covers with me. She was kissing my stomach, slowly and sensually. Her pale face was mostly obscured by her long black hair, but I knew it was Jessica. I convulsed in horror and stimulation as she began to travel even lower down my body.

"J-Jessica," I blurted, "p-please, stop."

She did as I asked, her lips freezing a fraction above my underwear. There was a brief moment of tense silence from the motionless apparition. Then she began to weep, repeating the very same words she said to me on that fateful day: "Why don't you want me? Why don't you love me?" Her grip on me tightened as her sorrow quickly shifted to anger. "Why?" she shrieked in pain.

PTSD

Sherri Levine

In her twisted blue gown, she hangs like macrame on a swag hook. Pink bows and itchy wool tights—she swings her legs, shifting her gaze toward the windowsill. A gymnasium of flies take turns bumping heads against the window. She watches the surgeon below, with yellow goat eyes, insert a straw into her belly button—he blows gigantic soap bubbles, the kind you make with a wand in a sunny backyard. Like blowing bubbles through a straw into a glass of strawberry milk—popping and giggling and blowing again—wide spaces *between the walls* and floors, she hears her mother crying loud as a trumpet, her father blaming the mother. Things float past the girl—pink kittens, green frogs with long forked tongues—a hand-painted scene of corn and wheat fields, rows of crows davening on a street wire. She feels the first cool breeze after flashing heat. A tug at her belly, a yank, and tear, the surgeon bends down to release the tube with his teeth.

The Microbes
Dmitry Blizniuk

The river, lying on its back, admires the bridge;
it's as blue as the sky that admires Notre-Dame de Paris.
An innate flat-footedness of thoughts...
Your small house at the railroad looks like a raccoon
whose whiskers are made of stretched wires,
with curtains and the blue light of the evening screen in its eyes.
And life is a current,
life is like reading on your tablet in working time:
you have to hide the most exciting things from your boss,
have to put them off for later, or enjoy them stealthily
because of spies, overseers with dog's muzzles,
murdering well-wishers.
Freedom is King Arthur's sword.
Okay, you've managed to draw it out of a stone,
and almost sprained your wrist.
But what are you going to do with the royal freedom?
You can neither eat it nor drink it nor kiss...
And a mountain ash jumps on the fly
through the fiery hoop of the sunset
like a tiger made of orange beads,
reflected in the window of the passenger car.
Something hides between the seconds –
it's the microbes of a superior form of life.

(Translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian.)

Estradiol

Rose Knapp

Breasts peeking through the matriarchal veil
Divine hormones, divine sparkling pure feelings

Subtly singing in archangelic seraphic polyphonic
Choruses of the radiant feminine goddesses

Customers
Tom Barlow

The lady in line ahead of me in the coffee shop says, "Grande skinny toasted white chocolate mocha Frappuccino, with the dark roast, hold the sparkles and pearls, add shaved chocolate

and a salted caramel drizzle, in a Venti cup so it doesn't spill." She orders with the same bored voice she would use to tell her six-year-old for the hundredth time to leave the cat alone.

Meanwhile, I'm jonesing for a medium cup of just plain coffee, black, and forty-nine percent of me wants to scream like the film ingénue who trips over the hacked-up corpse of her boyfriend,

but fifty-one percent of me manages to hang onto decorum by a pinkie. Finally, I am permitted to make my unassuming order, which I now fear makes me sound like a first-grader who can't pronounce

his Celtic first name of Angwyn and so asks the teacher to call him Cole, which is his father's name, and the boy doesn't know his old man has already tarnished that name at Starbucks as the guy

with the half red tea, half iced Blonde-roast coffee with cold foam, and a single ice cube. When his dad voices this monstrosity, everyone in the place glances around to see if we all agree we have passed

the entrance to ridiculous. But no, this is just our fecund America, where shelves are jammed with Black Friday year-round and the

gift of the year is the Starbucks Coffee Kiosk for Kids, \$99.95, which allows little Cole to make a thousand different drinks and his mom is his first dissatisfied customer.

14B. What difficulties are you experiencing due to your disabilities?
 Ron Riecki

Panic attacks, headaches, tremors, isolation,
 nightmares, intrusions, anxiety, triggers,
 stink, pumping blue-fisted butcher blocks,
 dawn-dark, microphones in throats, wind,
 goddamnits, walking backward, shark teathed,
 knives again, cutting galore, post-goddamnits,
 anger force 1, bullet edging, spleen-powered sorrow,

comatose Tuesdays, disgusting squat racks,
 everything, rooms without heat, bubble stubble,
 warming scabs, boys and girls, talking-to-self,
 a limited number of attempts, mean muscles,
 dropping friendships for cars, stopping, starting,
 battleship night-terrors, blood-grief, slobber-buckets,
 meritorious unit commendations, hip drowning,

being dragged along the floor, being dragged along the ocean,
 sinkingness, frequent showers, an ache for scalps,
 fear of the letters PTS and D, trap-door suspicions,
 a case of the Ol' Hedda Gablers (as they say in Michigan),
 monkeysticks, facial drooping, facial drooling,
 a nice cup of tea, steep climbing up billboard ladders,
 infrequent urination, an inability to describe difficulties,

five gold rings, off-white privilege, a hatred of Aristotle,
 the inability to get hard during the Pledge of Allegiance,
 an affinity for creating my *Chopped* mystery baskets
 (typically involved Rocky Mountain Oysters and Sandpipers),
 a fish called Fight, rapid eye movement, ex-girlfriends,
 ex-boyfriends, evidence, a hatred of the sexual term 'head,'
 an exaggeration of crowning achievements, and an addiction to getting up.

Ars Moriendi/ Funerary Diamonds
Lily Beaumont

It's kind of tacky but is what I tell
a friend, who laughs and says it is, yeah,

and she likes the concept too. Because
it's the kind of thing that makes you

think of women (always women) with
fuchsia nails and knock-off athleisure,

light bouncing from every facet
of their jaws, their collarbones, their

finger joints. All that squandering
of albedo: these women (always women)

should be cast loose across the Arctic
Ocean for temperature control, or turned

dim to conserve energy. Such are the legacies
you must consider when you're thinking

of becoming a diamond. But seriously:
tackiness. Has bad taste always been

discernible by its propensity to stick?
The Victorians might sympathize

with my aspirations towards compaction—
a jeweled death, rather than the loose

and liquid unraveling of cells. To my
friend, I quote Dickens: "I shouldn't like

to be dispersed, a part of me here, and
a part of me there, but should wish

to collect myself like a genteel person."
Thus, the epitaph for the tacky strivings

of the plebs towards self-containment, still
seeking the answer in glitter and bones.

Still To Be Processed
Tim Goldstone

No more urgent, secret lonely night-burials, so tense she could smell the cooling of the stars; and now, in this new country, inside the shelter of wooden pallets and tarpaulins, less than a hundred yards inshore from where the small group was finally able to avoid the patrol boats and land the dingy, the newly-orphaned girl's vocal cords creak and strain yet not a droplet of a word emerges. One ragged, fire-dried paperback between them all, she is coaxed to write her thoughts in its spare mottled white spaces that are shared amongst them all as much as the typed shapes themselves. And now, the muffled sounds of waves are accompanied by the rhythm of a soft lead point as she releases into the shelter's care: fear, mourning, sorrow, resilience, hope.

The Art of Jumping the Turnstile
Zachary Ginsburg

Metal bars grant access to those who pay. I did not. I had seen others do it before and followed their New York example. I was new, wandering through Crown Heights on a humid night in August 2018, the gold glare of street lamps guiding me through the quiet. The voices from the party played fresh in my mind: the fast-talking cinephile, the upbeat history buff working on an essay about my hometown of Chicago, and the laughter of my good friend, D. I had waved goodbye after the history buff broke out the ketamine—I felt alive enough without it—hugged D, and retraced my steps to the Manhattan-bound subway, and...there it was! Doors wide open, light pouring out, only the turnstiles between me and my midnight carriage. Knowing I had no money on my card, I decided to go for it and ran at the turnstile. When I jumped, my leg caught the metal bar, and I fell to the ground, entangled.

It wasn't until I got home that I realized I had cut my leg. The denim was darker than indigo in a line up my shin, and I picked up bandages at Duane Reade. No one at grad school knew because I wore pants, even on the hot days. The only witness was the round-faced station attendant, who had gawked at me through his plexiglass booth as I waved my hands in apology: "I'm sorry. I'll pay," I had said, hobbling to the ticket machine to put twenty dollars on my MetroCard.

I used to play a lot of soccer but at twenty-eight had done too much damage to my MCL to play in any serious sort of way. The turnstile had not affected it, luckily, but in general, I was a post-soccer person, and it showed. D, who knew me back when I was varsity captain, whimpered when I showed him the long red scar that still slithered up my shin a few months after my failed jump. A settled New Yorker, he invited me to stay at his boyfriend's place on Long Island for Thanksgiving. The trip was a welcomed respite from roommate tensions—I lived with an opera singer who often practiced while circling the living room. The small Long Island town was charming, and the people we broke bread with on Turkey Day were like New York characters I had read about in novels: a painter, an art history professor, a film director's daughter, and of course D and his boyfriend, J, who are writers. The following day, J drove us to Fire Island. The cold Atlantic wind whipped through the metal bars of an empty jungle gym at the beach entrance. We picked up shells, and D leaped over a large puddle. I stopped. "You can do it," D said in a coaxing voice, the kind he might use with the students he tutored. I jumped, using too much arm swing, and landed solidly in a pool of self-pity.

My attempt to jump the turnstile seemed to come with a karmic price tag. Six months after Thanksgiving, I got a one-hundred-dollar ticket for riding an express bus without paying the fare. Again, I was seduced by the open door, a bus about to leave, and no time to visit the ticket machine. When I got off at 86th street, two MTA cops were waiting. "My ticket's on the bus," I chirped and re-boarded to grab the small slip of paper I had been eyeing on the seat next to me. "This is for uptown," the woman in blue said, "you were going downtown." I begged her, saying I always paid—which was true—but the Gods of the MTA had already dropped the hammer.

After COVID hit the U.S. at the beginning of 2020, I noticed more people jumping the turnstile. The great fear meant less worry about cameras and cops masquerading as homeless people, waiting to throw off their rags and bust jumpers. Pre-pandemic, the jumpers were mostly young people with cool shoes and confidence. A feeling of inadequacy grew in me each time I saw the majestic movements of their legs rising, the bottoms of their sneakers briefly coming

into view, as they cleared the metal bars and landed on the other side with a little extra money in their pockets. During the pandemic, the age range swelled; I would see everyday commuters with their leather shoes and messenger bags leaping over. I remember one guy better than the rest because of his calm step-by-step approach. He did not run. He walked up to the turnstile as if about to pay, but instead of reaching into his pocket, he placed both hands securely on the sides, gathered his strength, and hopped over, both feet together. There were no big jerky movements, and it required no feat of athleticism. It was no more complicated than ordering a bacon, egg, and cheese.

A year into the pandemic, I was commuting daily to my job as an eighth-grade science teacher. On a rainy morning in March, I hustled down the escalator into the empty subway station to find that my card wasn't working. I tried every turnstile, swiping my EasyPayXpress, but there was no response, not even an "insufficient fair" message. I thought about buying a MetroCard and paying the new card fee, but why waste the money if the machines were probably broken? Screw it. I approached the turnstile and placed my hands on the sides. Without hesitating, I jumped, using my arms for an extra boost, and stuck the landing. No big deal, but after two-and-a-half years of trying to feel competent in New York, I couldn't help but smirk as I headed toward the train. It's true. Check the security footage. It was 63rd and Lex. My execution was flawless.

Dancing with my Dead
Virginia Smith

My dead don't come to me in the
stillness of church, forest, corpse asana.

On occasion, they appear on beach walks,
tucking their mingled atoms tight in the

tides, leaving as waves crest or
recede. Sometimes on a bike or car

ride they slip in next to me, chat about
what they hear on NPR, ask about

dinner. It's motion that conjures
them, I'm sure, plus music, so

time with my dead loves blends
ballroom, Broadway, street dance party.

Mother favored head bobbing, singing
"Onward Christian Soldiers" with the

coiffed and blazered women of Episcopal
Trinity. As counterpoint, I grab her

to join me on WRTI's Latinx night,
moving together in samba, smiling at what

hips can do. She reddens then fades from
me here, so I move quickly into my best

Julie Andrews' "I Could Have Danced All Night,"
ladies, not women, mother's life theme.

Dad moves in, bringing her back, crooning
Sinatra sexy to "Moon River," grabbing

my hand for a turn before slipping
into "I'll Be Home for Christmas." I step

aside as my parents foxtrot, whisper about
oranges for Christmas, WWII, their own dead.

Cousin Don takes shape with his husband, Bud,

a non-dancer, so I know Donnie, eyes starry
with show tune, glitz, will stiffly straight dance
with me to “There’s A Place for Us,” honoring
Bernstein, gay love, and the night we
streamed *West Side Story*, clinging to one
another and sobbing with Natalie Wood’s
Maria for our doomed darling, Tony.
Connie steps from the shade, bending low,
snapping her fingers a capella as she cool
steps toward me, our fifth-grade Sharks
and Jets bit, then fingers meet fist for
her rock star mic, shaking her hair
as she belts “Baby we were bo-orn to run!”
Our eyes lock, arms beckoning, reeling the
other in with that 70’s dance cliché. I want
return and hereafter: my 60’s Dad singing
Simon & Garfunkel, surprising Don about
queer *Oklahoma!* clubbing with Connie.
But my dead know better, jitterbugging
now in a circle, all of us trading partners
and grinning, singing “Ring Around the Rosie,”
then I am touching only my skin.

Jazz Mambo
D. Larissa Peters

Hypnotized by quick fingers
on the moving bass
The listeners can just the piano
Trickling
in
and
out of ears
spaced between
the pound of the
deep notes.

Enter trumpet, saxophone
Per
cuss
ion

Echo
Echo
Echo
Tap
Tap
Tap
Beat
Beat
beat
Trickling
melody,
light fingers
Even on bass strings

Mam-Bo
On-o-ma-to-poe-ia
Cha-cha
Cong-go
Jim, jim, jim bay bay
Bay
Cha
Mam-Bo
Hyp-no-tized by the
Light feet
Heavy beat
Quick, quick, quick fingers on keys
On strings

On listeners
On watchers
Watch-ers
Watch
Hypnotized
 Hypnotized

Hypno-
-tized ...

...

When Tongues Relax and Loosen
Robert Nisbet

It was very hot, ninety all day,
and when they sat that evening
in the pub garden, by the river,
a good meal and a few drinks in,
the tongues relaxed and loosened.

Turned first to Albert, uncle to several,
grandfather to a few, to one a godfather.
Salt of the earth, old Albert,
salt of the earth. (This was unanimous.)

Had his little ways, mind. Oh hell yes.
What was it they used to say - suffering?
Suffering fools? Suffer fools gladly.
Not Albert. Called a fool a fool.

Oh yes, he could be blunt, old Albert.
Bawled me out once, said a niece,
quietly. Pause for recollection here.
(Unanimity waning a little.)

Oh yes, his own man, liked his tippie,
liked his creature comforts, you might say,
his little bit of nookie on the side.
(Thud. Unanimous approval gone
and the talking stilled for a while
as the breeze rippled across the river.)

Wonderful woman, Edith, though.
Lot to put up with, if we're honest.
Al's business did well enough but still...
Salt of the earth, old Edith,
salt of the earth. (Unanimity again.)

She was old Albert's rock and stay really.
That's for sure. He was lost when she'd gone.
Lost.

Letter with Expiration Date
Jason Schreurs

The Greyhound feels like it has seized shocks and wheels made from cinder blocks. The letter sits in my lap, hopping along with the bus's rumble. I can't read it. Heading back home wasn't the plan; the letter was supposed to be mailed from the city. I picture myself hovering in front of a mailbox at a busy intersection, door flap hanging open like a metal tongue, my hand a clenched claw that can't let go.

High school graduation is in my Chevy Sprint's rearview and college is on the horizon. I'm leaving a stifling town I hate. By the end of Grade 12, I'd reached my tipping point; everything and everyone made me cringe. One exception. I've been infatuated with her since Grade 11, and it takes me until the day before I leave to sit down and attempt a suitable proclamation. The letter I write is my plea—permission for teenage love from afar.

I'd never heard of an accelerator cable until I had to. I'm on a stretch of highway when I feel a snap under the gas pedal. The Sprint's tiny engine revs so hard my anxiety convinces me I'm going to burn alive. I turn off the ignition, guide the smoking car onto the shoulder, and sit motionlessly. The envelope rests on the passenger seat, unharmed.

My hands shake from infatuated nerves and the Greyhound's rumble. I near my stop and the lump in my throat taunts me. *This is a huge mistake. What are you doing?* I'm supposed to be in my new apartment in Vancouver, preparing for my courses on Monday. Instead, I'm back home pouring over the blue-lined notebook pages splayed out on my bed. The letter is ham-fisted, misguided, and corny. It reads like failed poetry appropriated from love song lyrics. I have no recollection of writing this trash. Rip into shreds and pretend it never happened.

I have a night to sleep on it and I don't sleep. I pull the letter from its paper peel and read it again to the dawn light creeping through my window.

I scour the words, focusing on the embarrassing bits. The pages are full of them. I'm unconditionally doomed. This letter needs to be destroyed. My eyes are clenched as I plead for inspiration, then my hand relaxes and the pen in it starts to move. The tip flows on fancy paper with tiger lilies, her favourite, in the top right corner, a serendipitous treasure scooped from the top drawer of my mom's sewing table.

The words I scrawl are simple, almost laughable. My original letter was 12 pages long. What I write are 22 words.

Two decades later, I'm reaching for a box of letters on the top shelf of our bedroom closet. The box that was hurled onto our bed when she left. "You fucking keep them," she said.

I pull it down and dodge the dust floating from its lid. I sit on my bed, the bed we shared for what feels like an eternity; before love disintegrated into clenched teeth, silent screams, and a soul-wrenching separation agreement. More than 20 years together didn't dull the sting of a prolonged, messy parting, a sludgy moat overflowing on either side.

So many years a perfect couple that behind closed doors was a perfect storm. So many letters exchanged in those first few months of our long-distance, teen romance. So many last-ditch attempts to save our marriage. I fooled myself into thinking I could quell the slow sickening of two hearts pumping compromised blood. Our love kept us locked in anger and hurt, the years blurring and deteriorating.

I pry open the box like it's a sarcophagus. I remove the letter from the paper vault that kept it in solitary confinement. I stare at my child-like penmanship. My eyes water as I try to focus on an angsty love note, the kind someone passes between desks in a classroom.

The letter is scrawled in words from another life. *I've loved you since that day we were looking at pictures together on the couch and you brushed my leg with your hand.*
I want to burn it.

Walking From Home
Norbert Kovacs

Every day, I go out in my jumper and sweatpants (or shorts) and walk around my neighborhood. I keep an easy pace, never hurried. The act is simple, one foot before another. Yet I find it becomes much more. I feel the air touch the edges of my skin. I know if that air moves even when it is silent. I see the green lawns the air buffets and feel the limit set by the boxlike homes that they border. I gauge the blue depths of the sky that rises over those homes.

Soon before me, as I go, come the varied faces of neighborhood people. We draw near as we become aware of one another. I note their hair and posture; they scan my face and body. I feel how we are living, breathing people, much unlike the quiet grass and stone on the nearby lawn. I meet people I know as friends. We receive a spark on recognizing each other, and it comes through in our familiarity. We raise hands in greeting; our legs cut in and out as we walk beside each other. Where we stop, our words step forward verbally much as we had done walking the street:

"Looking okay."

"Thanks. You been busy?"

"I'm remodeling. Re-do of the basement."

"Redoing it into...?"

When I go on, alone, the sun is before me on the sidewalk. I move from one patch of it to the next, seeking the light to be sure I do not step in any dirt or puddles. Then, I raise my head and see the tree branches high over the pavement. Their many, green leaves splay in a great net and press a pattern of shadows on me. My imagination stirs as the shadows ripple. I think of the numerous leaves growing on the trees. I imagine that the leaves of one express the idea of one tree, the leaves of another a second, and that, all together, they may speak to a greater idea, some unity among the trees. However, there seems always more to the leaves and their shadows than I can catch. Each shift they make in the breeze tells me as I walk. Sometimes in the boughs of the shadowed trees, I hear birds sing. They make their songs and repeat them over and again. I listen, believing I can learn why the birds do. I pass from one tree to another, hoping for the trill or whistle that will explain. I walk the neighborhood, hearing the birds and the quiet, enjoying shadow and sun, and feel the events come and go with a rhythm, the way a pulse beats.

Then, I walk another block. I cross a street, turn, and discover that I am lost. I do not remember these homes or this street; I do not recollect the lawns. Still, I am not worried. I have a sense I know this strange place in my city. I believe I must have seen its pale gray duplexes, the brick that fronts its apartment buildings. I wander idly, wrapped in satisfying calm. I don't understand the reason for my easy mood. I come to think *I* may not feel as I do but only *imagine* someone who does. It is like I see myself out of my body. Peculiar as that sense is, it does not trouble me; I walk along calmly. I think I can get a good idea of my new environs as I go. I feel as if I am supposed to try.

The streets seem quieter, the activity on them slower than it should. Cars flow almost silently up to intersections and turn onto other streets. Pedestrians pass in baseball caps and jeans at a leisurely pace along the sidewalk. I cannot say much of importance on the traffic passing, the people entering and leaving the small stores. I would have to know the place better. However, I take in the scene without complaint, following one street, meeting a fresh face, crossing onto a new block. If a window casts a weird eye, I look through it, curious to see all I can.

Soon, I come to familiar elm trees; their bark has whorls and bumps that I know. I recognize an apartment building, a restaurant, a post office. Then, I walk up the street and realize it's the one where I live. I have crossed a large swath of the city and returned to my neighborhood without suspecting it. This happens many times when I go walking: I get acquainted with where I hoped to go and a little more with where I hadn't, then come home. I have learned to value the mystery of the event. I gain in health, grow leaner and relaxed, pursuing my regimen through all the turns of street and avenue it leads. The variety in my walks never bores me.

February 24, 2021
D.S. Butterworth

Now it's as if light from this screen
does the work of a face, words
rising from an unconscious
sea of numbered electrons
and codes describing how
to build a photon. A year
after your death what's missing
becomes clearer even as
the feel of your presence grows.

There's nothing in this
wind hasn't told in its
stories long ago. When we
watched movies of your
childhood, for instance,
with your mother who
never had your losses.
Once something has come
to be, either it always is
or already never was.

That's about the feel of it.
Red tricycle, cinder block
puddles. The letter we found
when we sold the house
was already born into the world,
those feelings preceding us
even where we never saw
their face hides your love.
The day you died only one

had died from the virus,
now one year later over half
a million. Maybe you too.
We already always were
or already never came to be.
Like the nation itself. Like
memory. Like you,
shifting yourself in the corner
of the cupboard full
of shadows and gleaming
porcelain figurines
made from dust
just like yours.

Uncle Win Visits
Mark Jabaut

Uncle Win would not stay dead. In life, he had been the overweight, uninspired younger brother of my father, but in death, he had become a dynamo. He kept grabbing at life like it came with a pension and full health coverage.

We had buried Uncle Win at St. Stanislaw's the previous June. He had collapsed in the yard while mowing his lawn – the first time that year, although the grass had been long since late April – and had not made it to the hospital alive. Aunt Mary had left him some months before, causing Mom to pronounce that Win had died of a broken heart, even though the autopsy revealed the organ had probably been enlarged to the size of a meatloaf for years.

Three times since that June burial Uncle Win had shown up unexpectedly at the family Sunday dinner table, smelling slightly of damp earth and worms but otherwise, none the worse for wear, and joined in the meal as if nothing had happened. The reactions around the table were varied: Mom looked shocked but determined not to appear so, Aunt Celia turned grey and mumbled through the meal, and Dad appeared not to notice. I found myself fascinated, as would most nine-year-olds.

The first time it happened, I was too surprised to do anything but concentrate on chewing my food without biting off my tongue, and Uncle Win left before I could recover my wits to question him. The second time he joined us, I excused myself from the room after dinner when Uncle Win went outside to smoke a cigarette. He smiled when I came through the screen door.

“Uncle Win, what are you doing here?” I asked.

He smiled wider, but his eyes swam with confusion.

“Sunday dinner, of course,” he said, tapping ash onto Mom's tomato plants. “I wouldn't miss your mom's chicken for anything.”

“Yeah, but,” I began, but Uncle Win's eyes clouded over, and I lost my nerve to continue. He left the house after the cherry pie, and walked down the street toward the sunset, like some cowboy in a movie, except, of course, dead.

The next time Uncle Win showed up – about a month and a half later – I was determined to find out what was going on. Even I knew that deceased relatives should not be showing up for Sunday dinner. When we went into the dining room, there he was again, in his usual seat, smiling at the rest of us and playing with his fork. Mom and Aunt Celia immediately began talking loudly about the weather. I decided to get the family's views on this mystery.

“Dad,” I said, “Uncle Win is here.”

Dad looked up from his plate where he had just placed a small mountain of mashed potatoes strategically between his chicken and corn and furrowed his brow in annoyance.

“Yes, son,” he said. “It's Sunday.” He reached for the gravy. Uncle Win smiled nervously. He was never happy to be the topic of conversation.

“Yeah, but,” I said, “Uncle Win is – “I struggled with a way to phrase it that would not hurt my uncle's feelings. “We buried him three months ago. Doesn't it seem odd that he would be here, now?”

“Mind your manners, Phillip,” said my mother.

“I'm not being rude,” I said, feeling exasperated. I decided to change tack. “It's great that Uncle Win is here. I'm – happy to see him. But— “

Uncle Win began squirming in his chair. He smiled weakly at his plate. I finished my thought.

“He’s dead.”

“Phillip, we don’t say things like that,” said Mom.

I looked from her to Dad to Aunt Celia, hoping for some sign of understanding, some acknowledgment that the laws of the universe, as they had been explained to me, had gone awry.

“Please pass the rolls,” said Dad. Uncle Win seemed to relax, and he attacked his chicken as if he hadn’t eaten in a month. He finished the potatoes and all of the corn and ate four rolls with butter.

After dinner, Uncle Win again went outside for a smoke. I followed. He watched me exit the house with a look of resignation.

“You’re a one for questions, aren’t you?” he said.

“Uncle,” I said, “this isn’t personal. I mean, I’m not trying to be rude. But when Grammy and Grandpa died, they stayed dead. So did Mrs. Mueller down the street.”

Uncle Win scratched at his arm and glanced up at the porch ceiling. He took another drag on his cigarette before answering, and the smoke ushered his words.

“Phillip,” he said, “there are things in life, and death, that no one can explain. I don’t know why I show up here every few weeks. I can’t solve it.” His voice began to waver, and he took another drag. He looked through the window into the dining room where Mom and Aunt Celia were clearing the dishes and sighed.

“It’s scary. It is. And I can see how it would be confusing to a boy of your age. I agree, it’s not the natural order of things. I just – wake up here, sitting at the dinner table. No explanation. I find that, if I don’t think about it too much, it’s less upsetting.”

He flicked his dead cigarette into the garden and pulled another out of the pack in his shirt pocket.

“Where do you get your cigarettes?” I said.

He stared at the pack in his hand. “Another of life’s mysteries,” he said. “Do you want me to stop coming around?”

“No,” I said. “No. Could you – do that? Stop coming?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t think it’s anything I can control.” He tilted his head at me and squinted against the smoke issuing from his mouth.

“Let’s go in for pie,” I said.

Uncle Win smiled.

Tahamina / Janis Ian
Shaun Loh

Disheveled low pony because an Ariana one hurt.
Eyes bald, though smoky with caffeine-sedated circles.
“You’re not like the other girls,” I muttered by your ear,
and we gagged, for we sounded like *that* couple.

Recess warranted our perpetual rendezvous, but not
that clandestine. No one cared about us anyway.
Cavorting with self-deprecation we arrowed our flaws.
You the *fat girl* no boy wanted, I that *faggot*.

One day the geeks will inherit the earth, you declared.
My manicured pinky entangled with yours. A boy who
celebrated Barbie and a girl, who unrequitedly loved her.
Builta fortress of a dollhouse, alone against the world.

Let Me Tell You About My Blind Date
John Grey

Her smile wasn't working.
The best she could do was a scowl.

And not even when the wine arrived.
did her eyes sparkle.
They were like
two brown murky ponds,
kept away from the light
by mangrove eyebrows.

Her face had a yellow color
like what happens to old newspapers.
And her hair, though combed neatly enough,
became more of a nursing home
for her bored fingers.

Her cheeks were smeared
like she'd made up in a hurry.
And her lips seemed purposely
thin and uninviting.

She looked like someone
from a woman's prison
on work release.
Surviving a dull date
would look good on her record.

At least, her appetite
was up for the occasion.
She downed appetizer,
fat steak and fries
and a generous portion of dessert.

She was so thin
that I wondered where it all went.
For three long hours,
that was all I wondered.

Southern Sonnet No.1
M.V. Reisinger

A mellow burst of music leaves the taste
of a greasy pork part harmony on my veins
and like a fried fish, chicken n' tater buffet,
a bluegrass song can stay with me for days.

Within these hills and valleys, there's a culture
that's frowned at for its double-negative dialect
which pours into the air like gravy. Ready for rapture,
oh baptize me in butter, 'cause surely I am blessed

to live beneath the surprise of a big orange sky,
in the land that lays between the Mississippi
and Atlantic. An Appalachian edge I ride
on through the clouds of smoky mountain majesty.

Somewhere within the black coat outside of me
beats the thumping bear heart of Tennessee.

MonkeyShines: An Unlikely Event
Lawrence Morgan

India in 1971 was for me a place of great mystery and remains so today. On my visits, I occasionally experienced events that are difficult to explain rationally, but this is not one of those. This is a story that was told to me by a wild-haired Scotsman I met in Kandahar; he was heading west, I was heading east, and we met one night in a dismal hotel, both of us escaping the oppressive heat by climbing up onto the flat roof where the squat toilet was bizarrely located. I was suffering the pangs of dysentery and was more or less tethered to that vicinity, and he was surreptitiously relieving a black-market bottle of whiskey of its contents. We gazed across the mud rooftops and exchanged pleasantries. He was the very first traveler I had bumped into on the road coming back from India. I fired up a joint, we shared his whiskey, and he recounted the following story.

“I was on a bus, you see,” he said. “A local bus.” He shook his head and shuddered at the memory. “We were heading towards New Delhi, going quite fast, and suddenly the driver swerved to avoid a bullock cart on the road. The bus rocked from side to side, overloaded on its roof with people and animals and baggage, and it slowly toppled over, still grinding forward. Sparks, smoke, screams...I had no idea what was going on. I fell into the aisle when it finally squealed to a halt, and injured passengers were squirting out of the broken windows, all screaming. Somehow as I fell I bit down on my shirt and ripped off a piece of it with a wee button attached. I inhaled this swatch of fabric and the button lodged in my throat, and I began to choke. I couldn’t move, maybe shock had set in, and I couldn’t breathe. The bus was on its side, and everything was topsy-turvy. I peeked out of the broken window and saw a troop of monkeys with gleaming eyes watching the whole scene unfold. They were crouched on a rocky outcrop just a stone’s throw from where the bus had smashed into the embankment. I rolled myself onto my belly and squirmed over broken glass toward the front, choking and wheezing but getting no air. From the corner of my eye, I saw the monkeys approaching the wreck, led by a gigantic male. By then I think I was the last passenger still on the bus, and I was choking to death on that bloody button.

The big male bounded through the smashed windscreen and took a look around, no doubt hoping to find a few snacky bits abandoned by the fleeing humans. He hopped up onto the seatback in front of where I had been sitting, and then he launched himself into the air, landing with all of his weight onto the middle of my back. The wee button and strip of cloth from my shirt popped out of my throat into my mouth, and I sucked in a huge breath of air, which scared the monkey half to death and he leaped away, bolting out of the windscreen. He had done the Heimlich maneuver on me, for god’s sake. A bloody monkey. So, I decided that was it, I’m heading back to fucking Glasgow.” He pulled a tiny swatch of cloth from his shirt pocket and showed me the button dangling by a thread from its centre. “See that? I kept it. And that shirt was tailor-made for me in Bombay, too.”

I took another swig of whiskey and passed the bottle back to him. “Far out,” I said.

Reflections On a Dot
Vern Fein

Whenever I see we are
one
of millions of galaxies,
I feel like a dot of a dot of a dot.

No feelings or memories in galaxies.

No galaxy married the most beautiful other dot in the world,
birthed three other dots with that dot,
stood looking out at its own raging, blue ocean,
sad that one dot spoke terrible things about another dot,
voted for one dot over another,
wondered why one dot only ate vegetables, another meat.

Or was horrified when a dot crashed his car into another dot,
gazed at the big white dots in the black sky,
amazed as dots created music, paintings,
poems, novels, sculptures,
scorned a dot of a different color,
warmed to a dot rescuing a dog,
felt the distant dot of a red, pulsing sun.

Or marveled as a dot explored an unknown sunset-soaked vista,
spied one dot stealing from another,
shot a basketball through a dot on a pole,
cheered when a dot carried a picket sign,
exclaimed when a dot danced with lotto winnings from dots on a ticket,
cried as one dot adulterized a dot's dot.

Or scaled the dot of a mountain,
lauded a dot for the sonnet she wrote,
screamed as a drunken dot jumped off a bridge,
contemplated dots supplicating, genuflecting, meditating,
surveyed a placid, green lake with an egret dot,
loved a dot petting a swan, another petting a bull.

Or dropped bombs on other dots.

Or looked up, realized
had one of those dots
left her other dots far too early
we would look up at those other galaxies
and wonder if that dot
was somewhere out there.

No Choice
Jeffrey Zable

I'm no longer swimming to save my life,
but I am listening to the great sages of the past:
Felix the Cat, Bullwinkle the Moose, Tweetie. . .
I listen to them and feel some semblance of hope
that the world will turn out okay and that just because
I'm going to die, doesn't necessarily mean that life
has no meaning. In fact, I believe that someone
somewhere will pretty much carry on with a composite
of my general mentality and that in a thousand generations
my thinking will become so refined that those of my kind
will have no choice but to listen my every word. . .

Whatever Happened to That Leg Anyway?
Harris Coverley

I was thinking last night
about poor ol' Rimbaud

lying in that bed in the *Hôpital de la Conception*
his right leg chopped off at the knee

the heat nibbling at the sweat on his tired flesh
his yellow eyes searching in the stucco for some hope

perhaps even attempting to reach for a pen
to write his first verse in twenty years
and not being able to find one
and the desire later failing to return.

great art slips through mankind's fingers like atoms of dust—
a wayward pen at the wrong moment
the buckshot in the skull of Hemingway
the carbon monoxide in Toole and Plath
Nathanael West killed the day after Fitzgerald went
after running a stop sign.

some other writers die thirty or forty-odd years
before their bodies do...
it's a damn shame, but they do.

Flipped Candy Kitty Snow Seal
Iván Brave

Ryan pulled back to Rick and me and popped the pill in his mouth. “I’m not a big fan of ecstasy,” he said. “I prefer speed.”

“Why?” I asked.

“It’s better. I like to dance and be awake. Ecstasy by itself is too...” Ryan shivered. I got worried.

Six to a twelve, one half-dozen blim-blam, this that and the other, or had they ever...? Rick threw his arm around my shoulder.

“*I just took some ecstasy,*” he sang. “*Ain’t no telling what the side effects could be,*”—Alex turned around and joined him— “*All these fine bitches equal sex to me, plus I got this bad bitch laying next to me,*”—Rick pulled Alex and me by our necks with both of his arms; we repeated the lines over and over—“*I just took some ecstasy*”—until we ended up outside the five-story club—“*Ain’t no telling what the side effects could be.*”

“Ain’t gonna sit back on no couch! *Rubber on,* man, this line’s long.”

“My, my, have a look at the queue,” Ryan said.

“The only line I wanna do is of that powder,” Rick said, elbowing Jin and eyeing his pockets... but by then Jin had already pulled out a bunch of spitballs full of stuff and started handing them out. Jin, fanning a dark cloud over his head; Jin, squinting his green-sand-dune eyes behind glass spectacles; Jin, chanting with wise-shaman words, said: “Moving fast, no problem, here, look, take this while you wait.” The line moved. Moments slurred, the usual, all over again, nothing dull, everything new, especially the buzz, the ringing between your temples like tubular bells inside our eggnog heads, goosebumps on our arms, each bump a raver dancing on our arms, while deep inhales cracked the lactic spinal acidosis in our backs, our pupils liquefying the foreground, blotches of acrylic paint, dilated ecstasies, the wonderful, colorful psychedelia of our minds—and in the name of the late, great Super Mario: Here we go!

“This is some good ex,” I scream-whispered into Jin’s ear, as he took a deep drag off a cig, each cold syllable rising my throat like a mirage. He spun his head without moving any other part of his boney body.

“You can taste the ex?” he asked, taking another deep drag.

“It’s sour,” I said, squinting hard and puckering. “I heard it was sour.”

“I’m surprised you can taste it,” he said, taking the last hit of his cig and popping a fresh one out of his shirt pocket. “I am not exactly sure what is in it, myself. But most definitely a cocktail of some sort. I had asked the dealer in Vienna to give me as many powders as possible and mix it so I could cross the border.”

I felt a shock breakthrough our haze of drugs as an electromagnetic pulse. Everything became sober for a minute. Then the haze crept back up.

“What do you call it?”

“A flipped candy kitty snow seal.”

“Crazy.”

“Yes, yes, quite.”

The Shakespearean sonnet about my dog
Paweł Markiewicz

You hound are a starry night over fog,
Fallen in love with the Epiphany.
The moon may be mine! Told the moony dog.
With you tender garden – is so dreamy.

Bewitchment of stars, your ability.
Your hunting is a dearer observation.
A moonlit night is your eternity.
May the soft ghost be in adoration!

Roses awoken in glory – starlet.
You can taste, listen and feel them galore.
Enchant the nectar-like druidic glade.
It was drunk from Ovidian amphorae.

Be, you dog, a heart-shaped meek poet!
Broken wings of loneliness are dead.

City Viewpoints
Ed Ahern

The view from planes is a pinhole camera
looking down onto topographic miniature.
The view from trains is ass-ended humanity,
factory facings, and backyard dumps.
The view from limos is sly voyeuristic,
tinted glass shielding leers and gawks.
But the view from buses is curdling,
street corner trash and sullen walkers,
glares of anger and annoyance,
blares of clotted traffic, all while
cramp-seated in rear toilet miasma.

Permanently
Susan Goodman

A ginkgo waves outside my bedroom, its brethren having survived the atomic bomb, and 1,500 years of imperial history.

In my dream, I try to deliver a plate of slender pancakes in a tall store with tightly packed aisles.

Ginkgo tolerates heat, pollution, salt, and confined urban spaces. Wikipedia says it *establishes* easily.

In the dream, I pull on a pale green jacket. Stitched in the lining, a label names a painter known for flattened forms and distrust for abstract spontaneity.

Establish is to place something permanently.

I remember how greedy my mother was, in the end, for paper-thin Swedish pancakes, asking me to make them over and over.

The female ginkgo is called Golden Girl because of the brilliant yellow it turns by fall. At full maturity, it still grows.

My name wakes me up inside the dream.
I throw back the light green covers.

Fragments of left-over abundance
Kate Sweeney

When I have no place to put my grief, I leave it everywhere.
Out the window, there are empty basins, dry mountains, an extra-large reservoir.
This morning, an earthquake. The kids call it: dry-socket | earth carcass.
Spent twenty minutes in the kitchen, thinking about your hands pulling my ass toward you.
When we moved, I carved our names into the soft cement out front of the apartment.
Ran past a flattened squirrel, brain coming out of his mouth, took a picture, feel broken.
Tried to experience things, branded a light pink falcon into my thigh.
Let a series of blurry men fill me with semen, nothing left but the smell of low tide
Left all of my hair matted to the shower wall, tried to clog the drain.
Woke up in a pool of my piss, 7 hours late to work.
Stole a sharpie, drew your hands folded over my hands, and lied about it.
Is this what finally binds me to you? The bird or the road or the walk?
You said the color of juniper is the same as desire:
That winter we ran a task force and you sucked me into the earth.
That time you made everyone in the room disappear without using words.
There is no sunlight without your face.
The magnetism of a city, at night.
A tee-shirt worn down to the threads.
The olive tree in the yard that doesn't bear fruit.

Crumpled Paper
Linda Imbler

Every heartache's gleam seems dim,
compared to the one you have at this moment.
Your grief being cultivated on the fertile ground
of this thin, smooth, pulped wood.

Marked by your pain,
as you contemplate the meaning
of the deep marks upon the page.

Sorrow now found only in distance,
lies, and your misleading imagination.

Anguish is transitory.
This once bad reality,
you can toss away.
You, feeling the casualness
of this now crumpled paper.

The Poe-ster
Judy Klass

CAST OF CHARACTERS

STUDENT: This is a college student who tries to act cocky and confident. But he is agitated, and in pain over his recent breakup. Plus, he's probably read the poem "The Raven" one too many times ...

THE POE-STER: This is someone off-stage (or else a pre-recorded voice) providing the voice for a talking Edgar Allan Poe poster.

SCENE

A student's dorm room.

TIME

The present.

AT RISE: **STUDENT** sits at a desk, college textbooks and anthologies strewn everywhere. There is a toaster on the floor, and hung above the desk, or on the far wall, is a large poster of Edgar Allan Poe, looking directly ahead, his right eyebrow drooping down and his left mustache seemingly longer than the one on the right. **STUDENT** turns to the audience and explains:

STUDENT:

Once, when I was wildly cramming
I stayed up late, textbook slamming
Scared that soon I'd be exam-ing,
Sweating fear from every pore,
Poring over long-neglected
Poems, I sat there, tense, dejected,
Disaffected, disconnected
From the dreams, I once lived for
From the English major dreams
Of scholarship I once lived, for
Now, each reading seemed a chore.

(He rises, paces)

I lived in a senior's single
Room and had no wish to mingle
With the gamers and the freaks
Who liked to party on my floor.

I hunched over books I hated –
And though I was medicated
Adderall had not deflated Memories of Eleanor,
Of the lovely, smart, and wicked

Funny girl named Eleanor
 Whom, I'd lost forevermore.
 (Indicates what his room holds)
 My room held a desk, chair, toaster,
 Bed – and, on my wall, one poster
 Of poor Edgar Allan Poe
 Who looked like quite a sad señor
 Lopsided mustache, brows and features
 Marked him as one of those creatures
 Clucked over by English teachers;
 His eyes were a metaphor
 For the haunted soul within,
 His whole aspect a metaphor
 For bleakness that was quite hard-core.
 (Shakes head, opens book, tenses)
 Then my thoughts were all abducted
 From a text half-deconstructed;
 All at once, I heard a voice,
 A summons I could not ignore!
 Its soft power was insidious
 And its pathos was perfidious
 And it echoed like a hideous
 Wave that roars upon the shore,
 As it whispered:

(A voice seems to emanate from the Poe poster, deep, hushed, reverberating, compelling:)

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

I jumped up and nearly stumbled
 Terrified, and halfway humbled
 (Uncertainly, to his dorm room, not to the audience:)
 “Haha. What's the joke?”
 I mumbled,
 Casting my eyes at the door.
 It was locked, the hallway thumping –
 Some kid had the Emo pumping.
 Out there, I sensed, I would find
 No creepy interlocutor
 Who had murmured:

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

(Still glancing around)

Not the bed, and not the toaster ...

Trembling, I turned toward the poster

Meeting Poe's sad eyes with mine:

This man who gave us mysteries, gore,

Short fiction, weird tales, criticism,

Life seen through the ghastly prism

Of the death of his young cousin/bride

And who, then, let outpour

Raw grief, and dark despair galore.

“You can't talk. I must be tripping,”

I said, and I felt like ripping

Him down - he was just a gargoyle

Clashing with my cell's décor.

“By the morning, you'll be silent;

This is just a weird and violent

Symptom of that stuff I took

To concentrate, instead of snore.

I'll lay off those pills, and soon

I'll be clear-headed, like before.”

Quoth the poster:

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

“Damn.

It's weird how you're both grave and graven,

Glaring at me like a raven.

My room here could be a haven;

You make it a big eyesore.

So, you lost your love to TB?

How sad, but, pal, you're not like me!

I'm young, I'm not an alcoholic

Don't think I still miss that whore!

I'll find some new girl, or twenty

I hook up and get laid plenty

I'm already moving on –

I've half-forgotten Eleanor!”

Quoth the poster:

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

(Shouting at POSTER)

“Cut that out! I've had an earful!
Do you think I still get tearful
Just 'cause she believed in me
And we two had a great rapport?
Why'd she have to get so bitter?
Like I broke her heart, or hit her?
I flirted with her friend! Big deal.
I didn't even get to score!
I'm past that bitch, I'm free of her
And all 'romance' that feels like war.”
Quoth the poster:

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

(Shouting at POSTER)

“Just shut up! Don't try to bait me
Your loser life does not await me!
Wave that word like it's a red flag –
Taunt me like a matador!

Yeah, bull! You baggy-eyed, depressing
Picture, now you've got me stressing
But hey, maybe it's a blessing,
Curing me of Eleanor!”
Quoth the poster:

POE POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

STUDENT:

And that image, safe from tearing
Down, still hangs there - still is staring
Out at me, with Poe's eyes
And the noose-like necktie that he wore
And I know I've lost the only
Girl, I'll love, and I'll live lonely

And the disconnect I felt from all
Poe's pain and horror, heretofore
Shall protect me –

(STUDENT and POSTER speak together, in the same hushed, wondering tone)

STUDENT AND POSTER:

“Nevermore.”

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

The Hput
K. Marvin Bruce

There is only one other person alive who knows what a hput is, and that's why I have to kill her. I know a hput when I see one. I know how important they can be.

Some hputs are accidental. Others decidedly not so. When I find one of the accidental varieties I stop and stare. I can't help myself. The wonder wells up and undreamt-of possibilities squirm in my mind like a bait shop at midnight. What secrets might it hold?

I saw my first in high school. I'll never forget it. I knew I'd return to it often. Greg Dickie knew about it too. That's why I had to kill him. I had no choice, you see. There was no other way. Lindsey Szmyd was with me when I first discovered it. It was something we shared, like a sweet, guilty secret between young people falling in love. Then Greg walked in at the wrong time, saw the hput, and sealed his fate. Lindsey and I had figured out how to use it. Thing was, if anyone else knew about it, it would be worthless.

You can't lock doors in high school. Not unless there's a lockdown. And all the doors have windows, just when you need a bit of privacy. That's what hputs are all about.

Figuring out how to kill another teenager was tricky. It's not that I didn't like Greg. He was a friend, of sorts. He was the only kid I knew in high school who could golf like a pro. Was accepted to college on a golf scholarship—who knew there even was such a thing? But he knew about the hput, and I couldn't let that continue.

Steed Keneer wasn't the kind of guy I'd think to hang out with. He was big. An athlete, but not the college-bound type. Rather the kind of sports star who hangs out in a small town after graduation and slowly falls apart like the cars he'll work on in his greasy garage. The girls were all impressed by him. What does the editor of a small-town high school newspaper have to offer? Lindsey liked me, and that's why I had to get Steed's help. I couldn't kill Greg by myself.

You're probably already judging me. Don't. You can't understand because you don't know what a hput is. Steed certainly didn't. He was the kind of guy who just took what he wanted. To become his friend, I had to let myself be bullied. He liked to hit and throw punches he'd pull at the last second just to see me flinch. Some things are so important that they're worth bruises and wounded pride.

There was a sense of urgency about it. Greg might tell someone else about the hput before I could stop him. He knew that nobody else knew about it. Except Lindsey and me. Why would he tell? Because it was a secret, and he knew. And I couldn't live with anyone else knowing. If you take nothing else away from this account let it be this: hputs are important. And dangerous. And they're worth killing someone for.

Steed wasn't exactly smart, but he had flashes of brilliance. I would never have thought of taking Greg out to Montag Farm. The rumors about that place had all the parents in town scared to death. Ever since Gabriel Deakle went out Dancing Ridge Road alone one weekend and never came back. It was like suicide by vampire—he'd known the danger. Steed figured we could get Greg to go out there with us, secretly. Hputs, you see, are all about secrets. If nobody knew he was with us, how would they even suspect? Steed didn't know about hputs, though. I never mentioned them to him.

Does this make me a murderer? Greg had discovered what I wanted, needed most. It was too much power. Because he knew about hputs, he could control me. Emotions ran strong, trailed distantly by reason. My longing was fatal, and he'd seen it in the hput.

Lindsey had caught the attention of Mrs. Dominica, our English teacher. Junior year she asked her to edit *The Knight's Roundtable*. Lindsey insisted on me as a co-editor. It was just a photocopied small-town school newspaper, but Lindsey knew my dreams of publication. How nothing else could ever matter so much. Putting us in that cinderblock room together led to the discovery of our first hput. We quickly learned to use it.

Lindsey would go after the real stories while I handled the creative part. Like the alphabet of nouns and adjectives. Every week the *Roundtable* ran an A-to-Z list of different words, followed by a student or school event that represented it. "State record," for example, followed by "Steed Keneer." I gained some notoriety with "Xerox" followed by "Xerox." That was the year they replaced the last of the mimeograph machines with their hallucinogenic purple ink.

The *Roundtable* published my first short stories. This wouldn't have been possible without the hput.

Greg never came back from Montag Farm. The lure we used to get him to come along guaranteed he'd never tell his parents who'd invited him. We met beneath the bleachers. Walked to Steed's 4-by-4 parked well away from the school. Far from where anyone knew the Dickies. No one would ever know.

The years wash over me like the lapping waves on the Jersey shore. They keep coming, even now that Lindsey's gone. You can't stop the ocean. The world spins far too fast at times. But even here, more an institute than a prison, I found a hput. If you're reading this it's because she has discovered it too. I cannot tell you more, for your own sake. But the woman who found the hput must die. I've had plenty of time to think in here, and I know just how to do it. Only the hput will know.

The Devil Is Singing at The Bodega Tonight
Joe Sonnenblick

Half of my bathroom light is out
Is it electrical or emotional?
My hallowed ground,
My thinking lab is almost a ghost tunnel
Coldest air, flowing dresses.
They are all here to watch me shit,
New ideas sans. That luminosity, furiousness, left blithely smirking
You will not defeat yourself,
Yourself, defeated, wiping.
What was that thing I said?
Damn, what was that thing I was supposed to do?
Distracted again by technology
A violent prism,
There is no more light in that bathroom,
There is my newly cold grandmother reading The Haggadah.
It's August,
My birthday is tomorrow
My flesh is tomorrow
My joyousness is tomorrow
Covered wagons looking for jewels.
Jasper. Yashepheh.
Nothing in this dirt but black and white hands,
Building a country together.
There is no more light still in that bathroom
Anstalten Kumla or Brooklyn, NY?
I haven't learned anything new since I was out of college,
The school of steel reserve, colt.45, crazy horse.
In session,
Thriving.
All the words I've written have lead me to be a clipper of coupon
I finally had a woman fix my bathroom light,
A man of some import, sex appeal, and taxing aggression.
Typing/Scribing/Copying/Reordering alphabets
Bowel movements on the living room floor,
In the meantime.

The Party
Kate Faigen

When Sam's parents told him they'd be gone Friday night, he knew what he had to do. He watched their car pull out of the driveway and promptly got to work, buzzing with purpose. This was his chance to prove himself—maybe the last. So he took a trip to the store for red cups and a few packs of Marlboros, making his first legal cigarette purchase with trembling fingers.

Back at home, Sam set the plastic bag in the corner of the kitchen, next to the basement door, and surveyed the liquor cabinet. Bottles of scotch and whiskey were coated in dust, blurring the amber color he had only seen in movies. He grabbed something ending in Creek and brought it to the kitchen table, where he wiped it off with a paper towel and wondered what exciting occasion his parents might be saving it for.

Though he had his plan in place, the thought of failure made Sam queasy. He distracted himself with loud video games—machine guns, explosions, screams—hoping that the voice in his head that toggled between *you suck* and *loser* would mute itself. But when the moment suddenly materialized like a doorbell in his mind, a fresh sense of confidence zipped through his veins like a current, eating particles of fear in its path. It was time for the party.

In the basement, he cracked the red cups in his hands before he poured the whiskey, placing them strategically throughout the room—on the coffee table, the couch, the shelves. He crumpled cigarettes and scattered them across the carpet, smearing ash beneath his sneakers. For good measure, he deployed bags of chips from the pantry, cans of soda, and napkins disguised as an effort to clean up. Then he went back to his room, got into bed, and waited wide-eyed until morning.

From under the covers, at 10 AM sharp, just as they had promised, Sam could hear his parents come inside the house. But what he couldn't see, when they walked slowly toward the open basement door, was the way his mother bit her shaking lip, her eyes brimming with tears. She scanned the gloomy basement with a pang in her heart, remembering Sam's 8th birthday in the backyard when no one showed up, balloons swaying in the cold. She remembered how he winced in shame when they asked if he wanted friends over, year after year before they knew to stop.

They decided to punish him. Two weeks without video games and absolutely no parties for the rest of senior year. They made it convincing, raising their voices to a new decibel while pacing his bedroom in disbelief. They shut his door forcefully, pausing outside of it in hopes that they could sense him smiling against his pillow. They did it because they loved him. They did it so he wouldn't know.

Mind The Gap
Kenneth Johnson

It was called out of bounds.

 He reluctantly retreated
behind an illusion of pigment-changing cells
 drifting at the mercy of currents,
an endless invertebrate cycle of
 self-fulfilling prophecies
 pulsing along,
navigating recurring indecipherable
 images flashing
in panoramic life review.

He'd been there before many times,
 red blood cells choreograph
a complex dance of fresh nutrients and oxygen.

 They help form collagen,
without instruction or cultural context,
 wordsmithing, or busking.

 Why mind the gap?
After all, words did not inform him,
 language was
nothing more than an inconvenience.

Bios

Morgan Boyer is the author of *The Serotonin Cradle* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and a graduate of Carlow University. Boyer has been featured in *Kallisto Gaia Press*, *Thirty West Publishing House*, *Oyez Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, and *Voices from the Attic*. Boyer is a neurodivergent bisexual woman who resides in Pittsburgh, PA.

P.M. Thomas is an author and screenwriter who has always had a true love and a true passion for the art of cinema, storytelling, and art in general.

Sherri Levine is a poet living in Portland, OR. She won the Lois Cranston Award and First Place in the Oregon Poetry Association Contest. Her poetry and other writings have been published in *Poet Lore*, *Calyx*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *The Sun*, and others. Her full-length poetry book will be published in the fall of 2020. sherilevine.com

Dmitry Blizniuk is an author from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *Magma Poetry*, and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of "The Red Forest" (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. Member of PEN America. Poets & Writers Directory: http://www.pw.org/directory/writers/dmitry_blizniuk

Rose Knapp (she/they) is a poet and electronic producer. She has publications in *Lotus-Eater*, *Bombay Gin*, *BlazeVOX*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Fence Books*, *Obsidian*, *Gargoyle*, and others. She has poetry collections published with *Hesterglock Press* and *Dostoyevsky Wannabe*. She lives in Minneapolis. Find her at roseknapp.net and on Twitter @Rose_Siyaniye

Tom Barlow is an Ohio author of poetry, short stories, and novels. His work has appeared in journals including *PlainSongs*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Voicemail Poetry*, *Hobart*, *Tenemos*, *Redivider*, *Aji*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The Remington Review*, *Aurora Review*, and many more. See more at tombarlowauthor.com.

Ron Riecki's books include *My Ancestors are Reindeer Herders and I Am Melting in Extinction* (Apprentice House Press), *Posttraumatic* (Hoot 'n' Waddle), and *U.P.* (Ghost Road Press). Riecki co-edited *The Many Lives of The Evil Dead* and *The Many Lives of The Twilight Zone* (McFarland) and *Undocumented* (Michigan State University Press), among others. Right now, he's listening to Robert Johnson's "Kind Hearted Woman Blues."

Lily Beaumont is a freelance curriculum and study guide developer currently living in Central Texas. Her creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in publications including *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Ligeia Magazine*, *Right-Hand Pointing*, and *Prolit*.

Tim Goldstone's material is published or forthcoming in numerous print and online journals and anthologies, ranging from *The Mechanics' Institute Review Anthology* to *The Mambo Academy of Kitty Wang*; *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* to *Anti-Heroin Chic*. Prose sequence read on stage at *The Hay Festival*. Scripts broadcast on TV and radio. Material included in *BBC*, *Waterstones*, *The Royal Court Theatre*, and *Sherman Cymru Theatre* websites. He has roamed widely, including throughout the UK, Western and Eastern Europe, and

North Africa, and currently lives in Wales where he disappears into marshland with a rucksack and a rescue dog. Surfaces on Twitter @muddygold

Zachary Ginsburg is a writer and teacher from Chicago and a graduate of the Creative Writing MFA program at The New School. His fiction and author interviews have appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Public Seminar*, and *The Writing Disorder*. He lives in New York and is currently working on a novel.

Virginia Smith spent too many years grading college student essays at 5 am, driving her sons to soccer and hockey across too many states, walking too many dogs, and cooking thousands of dinners while she drank just enough wine. She now sleeps past 7, reads and writes, bikes and hikes, cooks and bakes, and shelters in place for too many months. She is quite content to abandon academic writing for poetry and to bake cakes and pies rather than wash too much boys' laundry. She loved college teaching and motherhood as much as she now delights in sleeping in and making poems.

D Larissa Peters grew up in Indonesia and has been somewhat of a nomad. She just moved to California after living on the East Coast for over 10 years—in the middle of a pandemic! This is only one of the many cities she has lived in the last 40 years. Her poems have appeared in *Adelaide Magazine*, *The Plum Tree Tavern*, *Rabid Oak*, *Pangolin Review* and has a few forthcoming pieces elsewhere.

Robert Nisbet is a Welsh poet whose work has appeared recently in the USA in *San Pedro River Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Third Wednesday*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, and many others. He has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Jason Schreurs is a writer, punk rocker, and mental health advocate. He hosts the podcast *Scream Therapy*, which is also the title of his forthcoming book, about the link between punk rock and mental health. Jason lives in Powell River, BC. Learn more about him at jasonscreurs.com

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D. S. Butterworth teaches literature and creative writing at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Algonquin Books published his creative non-fiction book, *Waiting for Rain: A Farmer's Story*. Lost Horse Press published his books of poems, *The Radium Watch Dial Painters* and *The Clouds of Lucca*. His new book of poems, *drunken man on a bicycle*, is forthcoming from the University of Washington Press.

Mark Jabaut is a playwright and author who lives in Webster NY with his wife Nancy. Mark's play *IN THE TERRITORIES*, originally developed via Geva Theatre's Regional Writers Workshop and Festival of New Theatre, premiered in May 2014 at The Sea Change Theatre in Beverly, MA. Mark has authored several short plays performed by The Geriactors, a local troupe of elderly performers. Mark's fiction has been published in a local Rochester magazine, *POST*, as well as *The Ozone Park Journal*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Spank the Carp*, *Uproar*, and *Defenestration*. Visit www.markjabaut.com.

By day, Shaun Loh is the Editor-in-Chief of his school newspaper, Raffles Press. By night, he reads and writes confessional poetry religiously. His works have been published in *Amber Poetry* and *An Atelier of Healing: Poetry about Trauma and Recovery*.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Orbis*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Connecticut River Review*. Latest books, “Leaves On Pages” and “Memory Outside The Head” are available through Amazon.

M.V. Reisinger resides in Southern Colorado's San Luis Valley where he is currently taking a break from teaching writing and literature to work as an early career writer. He holds a Masters degree in Literacy from Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and a BA from Northern Arizona University with a minor in creative writing. His published work has appeared in *Lumberjack News*, *Bomb Fire* (forthcoming March 2021), and *The Circle Book 2021: A Conejos County Anthology* (forthcoming April 2021).

Lawrence Morgan's work has appeared in *Memoirist*, *The Corvus Review*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *The Lowestoft Chronicle*, *As You Were: The Military Review*, *Rope and Wire*, *The Dirty Pool*, and he will soon have a story published in the online publication *Close To The Bone*. He was awarded the *Memoirist* biannual prize in April 2020. You can read more of his work on his website: www.farflungfiction.com.

A retired special education teacher, Vern Fein has published over one hundred fifty poems on over seventy sites, a few being: **82 Review*, *Bindweed Magazine*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Bombfire*, *Young Raven's Review*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, and *Corvus Review*.

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher and conga drummer who plays Afro-Cuban folkloric music for dance classes and Rumbas around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, fiction, and non-fiction have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies. Recent writing in *Former People*, *Ariel Chart*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Pensive Stories*, *Beatnik Cowboy*, *Untitled Writing*, *The Nonconformist*, *Misery Tourism*, *Uppagus*, and many others.

Harris Coverley has had verse most recently accepted for *Polu Texni*, *Spectral Realms*, *Scifaikuest*, *Artifact Nouveau*, *Ordinary Madness*, and *Scarlet Leaf Review*, amongst others. He lives in Manchester, England.

Iván Brave lives and works in Houston, Texas. The featured story is a cut from his first novel, available on Amazon. Discover more @ www.ivanbrave.com.

Paweł Markiewicz was born 1983 in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is a poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poems. Paweł has published his poetry in many magazines. He writes in English and German.

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty-odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had over three hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. Ed works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories*, where he sits on the review board and manages a posse of six review editors.

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Susan Goodman is a lifelong New Yorker who has published poems in the *Columbia Review*, *Barrow Street Journal*, and *Nixes Mates Review*, among others. She was a recipient of The George Edward Woodberry Poetry Prize at Columbia University.

Kate Sweeney has poems in *Feral: A Journal of Poetry and Art*, *SWWIMM Everyday*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Shore Poetry* & other places. She has poems forthcoming from *Ethel Zine*. Kate is Marketing Director for *The Adroit Journal* and currently resides in Los Angeles.

Linda Imbler has seven published poetry collections and one hybrid ebook of short fiction and poetry. She is a Wichita, Kansas-based author. Learn more at lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com.

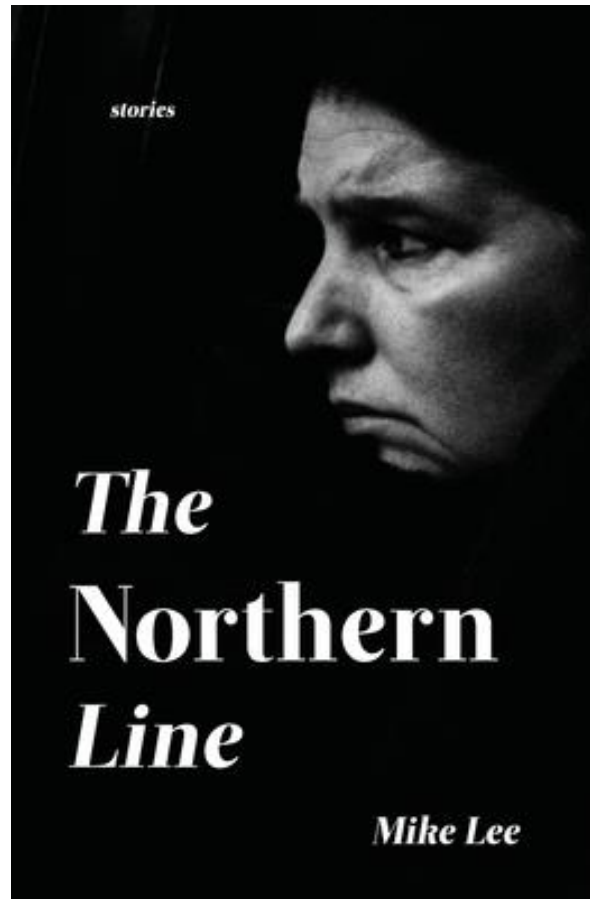
A few of Judy Klass's short plays have been podcasts. Three of her short plays are published, each as a stand-alone script, by Brooklyn Publishers, and others have appeared in magazines like the *Rockhurst Review* and the *Seven Hills Review*. One is in press in *The Best Ten-Minute Plays 2021* with Applause Theatre & Cinema Books. You can learn more about her at www.judy-klass.com

K. Marvin Bruce is a former Magpie who has published 28 fictional stories and has won three awards. He works in publishing and has never killed anyone.

Joe Sonnenblick has been featured in such publications as "The reject" and "Citizen Brooklyn". Joe is pleased to have been selected by "The Flea Bitten Dog" for their 7th issue which was published in September 2020 and published through "In Parentheses" for their 6th volume of poetry which was released in October 2020. Joe has been a featured reader up and down the east coast and at The Poets House in NYC.

After traveling to the exotic land of Ohio for an English degree, Kate Faigen moved home to Philadelphia, where she works as a copywriter and enjoys writing short fiction.

Kenneth Johnson is a visual artist, writer, and educator born in New Orleans now living and creating in Southern California. His poetry can be found, or upcoming, in *Carousel*, *Written Tales*, *Bein Bua Journal*, and *Subterranean Blue Poetry*.



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About The Author

Mike Lee was raised in Texas and western North Carolina. He lives in New York City, where he is an editor, writer and photographer for a trade union magazine. Lee has published numerous stories in his career, notably in Ghost Parachute, trampset, Lunate, along with many others. An accomplished photographer, his work has been featured in several gallery exhibits and published in two print portfolios in Europe. He also blogs for Focus on the Story.