



CORVUS REVIEW

FALL/WINTER

ISSUE 13

## COVER ART

## “In His Hat”

W. Jack Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of eight books including his latest, *The Caretaker's Son: Skip Savage Remembers Old St. Paul* ([wjacksavage.com](http://wjacksavage.com)). To date, hundreds of Jack's short stories and articles have appeared both in the U.S. and internationally. He is also an accomplished artist. Over a thousand of his paintings and drawings have appeared in books, magazines, and ezines. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

From an early age, I was identified as someone with artistic talent. I never reacted well to that and as a result have painted only in fits and starts throughout my life. Rather than become frustrated when things don't go my way, I now collaborate with my art...it has it's own voice and overwhelms my own sometimes. I've had more success and become more prolific with this attitude. However sadly, I've lost my Muse for the moment. The bitch flew out the window and never said goodbye. Maybe she'll come back someday.

EDITOR/MAGPIE  
JANINE MERCER

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Rose City Interlude

Dan Wiencek

Clipboards pave the streets, I hoard my spare change  
for the pigeons and decline to sign the kombucha petition  
for the fifth time in as many days

The rent's gone up thirty more bushels,  
they're feeding strip-club pizza to the poor and the  
lampposts' beards are out of control, a reckoning is due

So hoist a tall one, toast the fireflies, read  
out loud from the collected lyrics of Noam Chomsky

And without waiting for permission  
let's hitch a ride on a tandem bike,  
tires sighing on the pavement

and watch the whole city stand at the curb side,  
patiently waiting to cross





**Ghosts of You** is flash fiction and it pulls together stories from her Murdered Ladies series about seeking the lost and finding the person behind the sensationalism. It examines and subverts the tropes of mystery and crime storytelling in which the narrative always begins with the body of yet another murdered woman. They are mothers and daughters, teachers and students, lovers and wives, actresses and extras. They have been taken, but their stories still remain. This is how they set the plot in motion.

[https://www.amazon.com/Ghosts-You-Cathy-Ulrich/dp/1733244107/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=ghosts+of+you&qid=1574903157&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Ghosts-You-Cathy-Ulrich/dp/1733244107/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=ghosts+of+you&qid=1574903157&s=books&sr=1-1)

Bio: **Cathy Ulrich** is the founding editor of *Milk Candy Review*, a journal of flash fiction. Her work has been published in various journals, including *Black Warrior Review*, *Passages North*, and *Wigleaf* and can be found in *Best Microfiction 2019*, *Best Small Fictions 2019* and *Wigleaf's Top 50 Very Short Fictions 2017* and 2019.

Swaying to Potassium  
Thomas E Simmons

This here's a country for young men. The old  
Entombed in themselves, dried fruit for the bees.  
No greatest generation – not as bold.  
Memories smote, wrinkled brains; slouch; the teeth  
Stink, crack, fall out, Unlearned all summer long.  
That which shuffles, slips, drops. Then robes unsheathe.  
Caught in bingo: "Bingo!" We'll not ignore  
Hoary ships nor sweets' fleeting lost flavors.

Fossilized swains factor forgotten things,  
Mass tugged by a walker, "What a dim dolt  
To traverse dull linoleum." None sing  
For each song's been buttoned in turkey throats.  
Sailings done. Lassitude. Palliative wings...  
Nor any outings, but *Murder, She Wrote*.  
Sway us all, gasp, toast and now we see come  
Such tall thin glasses of potassium.

Slicked CNAs earning overtime pay,  
Pass the vapid mural in the lobby,  
Endorse pay checks; deposit them. Now leave  
And be thickened in your boyish chassis.  
Consume us. We're tired. Now: Be gone, we pray.  
Fairly fixed, stuck, our repeated stories.

They know little of us, nor care too much  
How we lived. Not now judge, nor attend us.

Once out from nature, we cannot recast  
Callow torsos – such unnatural things –  
Forms such as these were hatched miles in the past.  
Of thinning flesh with cotton coverings  
Which keep us, but not our cold backsides, masked.  
Or set upon a bench and snuffling.  
*Come* brisk, close-hauled staff of potassium:  
Witness this past, or passing, and be done.

Restaurant Work  
Nigel Ford

The last journey is soon done, it's quick and smooth, like a bayonet through your body, painless on the instant, painful on the withdrawal. His earring hurt, the bonus of a night scrabble over a bag of hash. Not hash even probably. More like home grown oregano. Any way you looked at it, he found no rise here. A bag of false pretences, he'd stole, and served him right, as he served up his crooked grin, his trademark you might say.

At least he'd nicked a decent pair of trousers out of it. Nice fit, all wool. Made by Jaeger, brown and dull green check. Tasteful. He pictured behind him his wannabe partner, now standing by the roadside with his thumb out in his droopy drawers. He grinned. Serve the silly bugger right. And anyway, any instant was a lesson, a gift you might say, that was legion, that would teach him literally.

The minarets of the Empire Hotel at Torquay Bay rose into focus. A decent dump, they said on the rumours, no problems, come when you like, leave when you like. Fair doos. Dormitory style servant's quarters, bunk beds, boys and girls together.

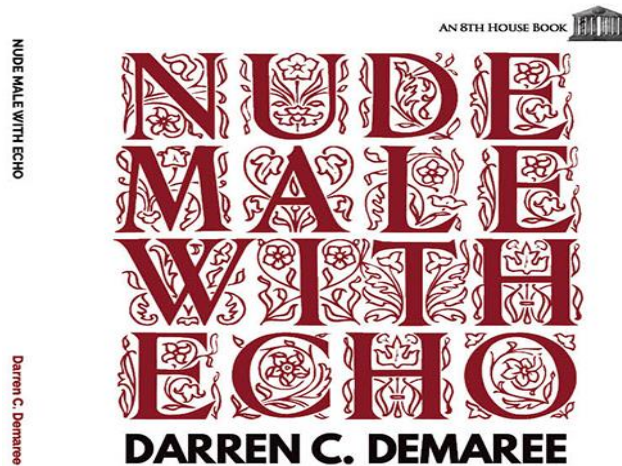
There was a nice-looking bint leaning just outside the door to the servant's quarters, leaning there puffing a joint.

'I'm off to work,' she said, 'I'm late.' She thrust the joint at him. 'You can have the rest.'

'See you later,' he said.

She nodded and was gone.

Not bad, he thought, lowering his baggage and leaning against the wall outside the servant's quarters, not bad at all. Pray to god she ain't got crabs, he thought.



Darren C. Demaree's collection *Nude Male with Echo* examines and challenges male vanity, power, and expectation. While exploring the place of his gender in this world, Demaree's attempt to expand upon the expectations of "what makes a man", while drilling down into the artistic framework provided by the body and aging provides a new landscape for these modern questions. *Nude Male with Echo*, Demaree's twelfth full-length collection, utilizes fresh language, energy, and abstraction to confront the typical arcs of his gender's role in society. These poems drag and batter "maleness" into what it is, a failing qualifier, and leaves us with the hope that it can be much more than what it has been in the past.

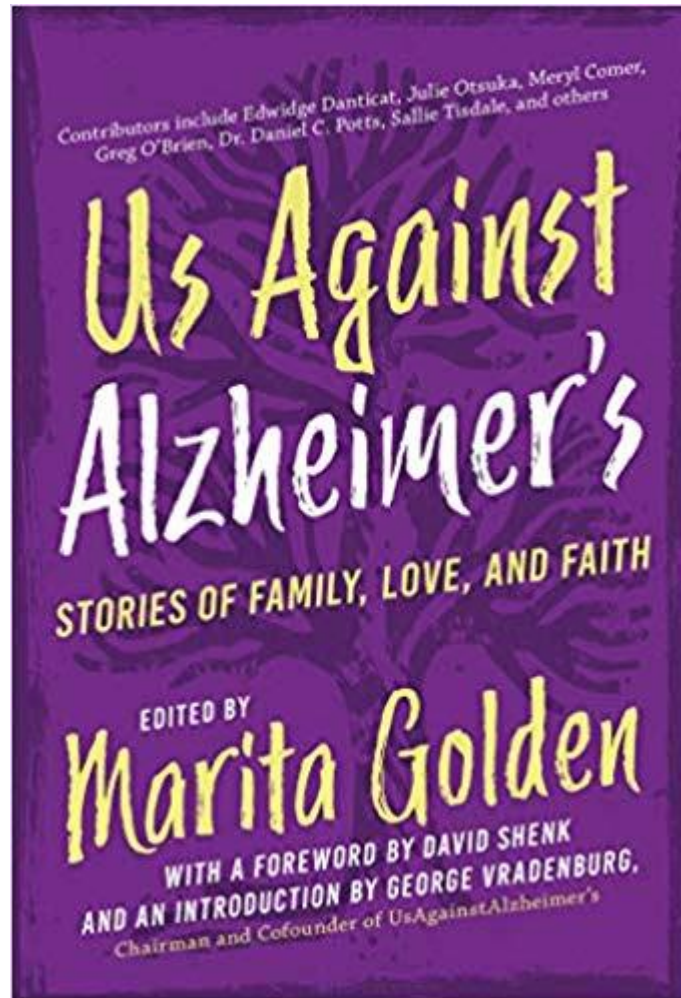
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The Return  
Jeffrey Zable

When the ticking returns in my head,  
before the bomb goes off and I drop to my knees,  
there is often a syntax of space.  
And beyond the chairs with broken legs  
and seats that are charred to the bones,  
there are muted colors burning the i's in the word Mississippi.  
Not to forget the flailing roosters in the bubbling cauldron,  
conjuring up words to sustain themselves for a bleaker tomorrow.  
Being a patient in an insane concoction of a world  
is really nothing more than the melting of gold into dollars,  
for when birds are vomited from the throat of time,  
only then will we know why the worms keeps dancing,  
said the corpse to the undertaker in passing. . .



This ground breaking anthology presents forty narratives, both nonfiction and fiction, that together capture the impact and complexity of Alzheimer's and other dementias on patients as well as their caregivers and family. Deeply personal, recounting the wrenching course of a disease that kills a loved one twice—first they forget who they are, and then the body succumbs—these stories also show how witnessing the disease and caring for someone with it can be powerfully transformative, calling forth amazing strength and grace.

The contributors, who have all generously donated their work, include Edwidge Danticat, Julie Otsuka, Elizabeth Nunez, Meryl Comer, Greg O'Brien, Dr. Daniel Potts, Sallie Tisdale, and Nihal Satyadev. Reflecting the diversity and global nature of the dementia crisis, this anthology is published in collaboration with UsAgainstAlzheimer's.

[https://www.amazon.com/Us-Against-Alzheimers-Stories-Family/dp/1948924145/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=103S3RZITM3VR&keywords=us+against+alzheimers%27s&qid=1574903077&s=books&sprefix=us+against+al%2Cstripbooks%2C159&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Us-Against-Alzheimers-Stories-Family/dp/1948924145/ref=sr_1_1?crid=103S3RZITM3VR&keywords=us+against+alzheimers%27s&qid=1574903077&s=books&sprefix=us+against+al%2Cstripbooks%2C159&sr=1-1)

Joe Oppenheimer's piece "Charlemagne" has been anthologized in Us Against Alzheimer's. It was featured in the Fall 2016 issue of this literary journal.

On Television  
Jeffrey Zable

I believe that people who have made it that far  
have something special that most of us don't.  
Otherwise why would they be there! The eye  
of the camera is highly selective, only focuses  
on what it's attracted to, only what will make it  
look good to others. Let's face it, cameras want  
to create names for themselves that will live beyond  
their lenses and levers. When I watch those who  
have made it, I always feel awe, mixed with envy,  
unable to figure out why I am never chosen, why  
I am always watching others receive all the glory.  
It's something I've had to live with all my life, and  
will continue to live with until the screen goes dark.

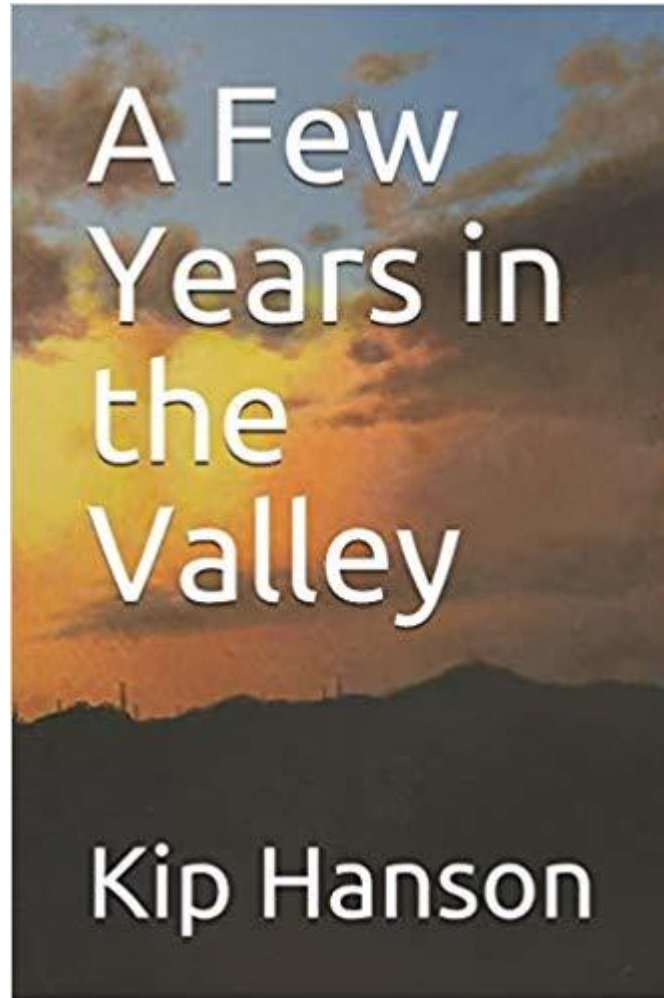
Orange Soda  
Will Reger

I am drinking an orange soda,  
which is bad for the diabetes,  
but it goes down hard-cold and hurts  
in a way I love to be hurt, sweet cold  
at the back of my throat that goes up  
into my head, the taste of being  
alive and happy.

I imagine what this bottle  
would mean to a Syrian child  
who did not have time to buy  
a bottle for himself or his sister,  
who did not have time to get home  
before bombs hit and gas  
filled his throat and lungs.  
I think of this beautiful child  
gasping in the mud of his street,  
like a landed trout, his eyes  
wide with dying.

That boy should be up, smiling,  
running on a sunny day in the street,  
hand in hand with his sister.  
He should be going into a shop to buy  
two bottles of cold orange soda,  
and they should drink them by the wadi  
that runs with fresh spring water.  
He should say to his sister how the fat  
shopkeeper wears a tent for his *didashah*  
and she will laugh outrageously and snort  
orange soda through her nose,  
and he will spray a little and laugh  
so hard he cannot get his breath.

How wonderful to drink orange soda,  
how like drinking the morning light.  
But he gasps so desperately he tears  
himself open and I see him in the photo,  
spread out in the mud, and I cannot  
not remember he never finished his drink.  
In my reverie he never finished,  
but there he is dying on my phone. I cry out  
to no one that he can't go until he gets  
to finish his bottle of orange soda.



"A Few Years in the Valley: Tales of Suicide, Old Dogs, and Blueberry Muffins is now available on Amazon in both Kindle and paperback. It is a collection of previously published short and flash fiction stories, a number of which talk about suicide and other dark topics (some fun stuff in there too)."

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1081856971/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_image\\_o01\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1081856971/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_image_o01_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)



Gabble-Gabble  
Will Reger

The ancestors behind me gabble-gabble  
in Dansk and Svensk and German, high and low.  
All their earthly days have been ploughed under.  
“Death is nothing but a complication —  
Why,” they shout, “are we being forgotten?”  
Gabble-gabble, the ancestors behind me  
want to enter my dreams, not as strangers,  
but with name tags, “Let everyone be known!”  
In Dansk or Svensk or German, high or low,  
as if my head was for them a public lounge,  
my nights a time to lodge their loud complaints  
now their earthly days are overturned.  
“I’m little more than lightning in the meadow—  
What will you do when I, with you, am shadow?”

Absconding  
Ken Allan Dronsfield

We can only be what we give

Our self the puissance to be.

Just being yourself in life

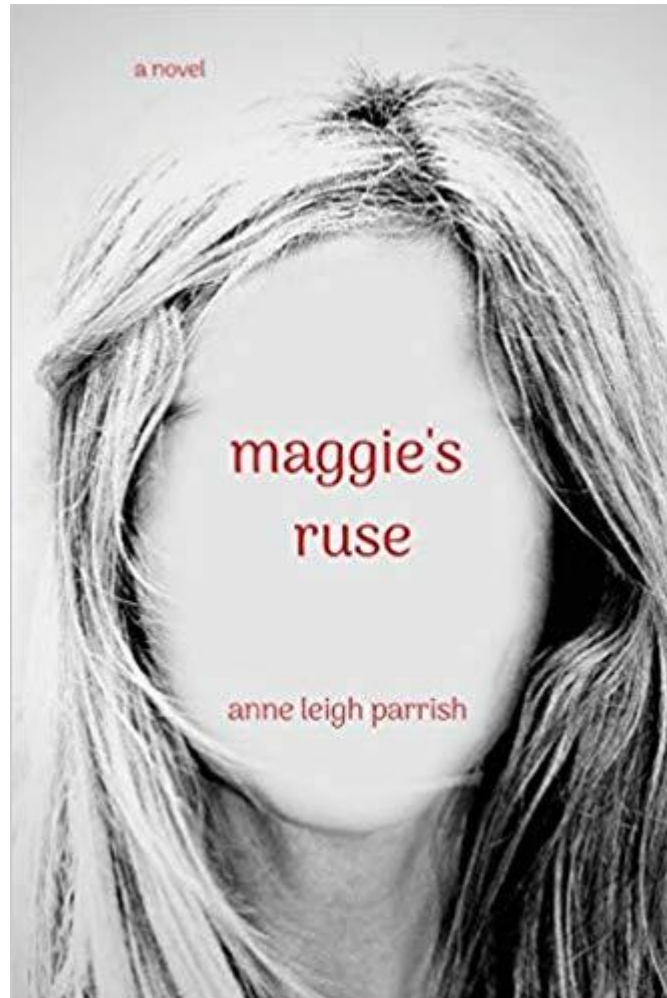
can be rebellion enough.

Surviving daily storms

we exist and thrive.

In the deep cave.

We abscond.



Maggie and Marta Dugan are identical twins. Their relationship has the usual sisterly strains, until home alone one afternoon, Maggie masquerades as Marta when a friend of hers drops by. The ruse is quickly discovered, a rift between the sisters ensues, and they go their separate ways. But living apart is hard; real independence harder still. Will they come back together? How long until each realizes she needs the other to feel whole?

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Homecoming  
M.M. Adjarian

Oceans cover three-quarters of the earth, the scientist says. They breathe: carbon dioxide in, oxygen out. They cool the earth, hold it in balance. Life could not exist without them.

But you know they are more than this. For two decades & two years & never more than a few miles from the Pacific, you grew, tough & wild as seaweed. The mother who bore you from the wetness of human love held you at bay like boulders from a broken cliff; & so you hugged the curves of the California coastline like the only mother you had.

You looked & saw your reflection in that Pacific mirror. You didn't know it. How could you? Change seemed slow as geologic time: & you had no words for how it felt to push your feet into the soft slowness of sand, throw your body into the frothy white rush of shoreline breakers, feel the shiver in your nostrils of cool salted iodine. As it was, you barely understood the dazzling insistence of sunlight on water, or the Zen dance of sanderlings following the rhythms of moon & tide to search for food.

So, what do you tell the scientist when you speak of returning to an ocean from the Texas prairie, its only memories of the sea Palaeozoic fossils in the ground?

That your blood holds one-third the salts of the ocean. That everything inside you – your brain heart lungs muscles & the even salted calcium of your bones – contains water. And that homecoming to an ocean you took in with your first breath is the joy of matter meeting itself, the joy of cells in your sea-stunned body leaping forward to embrace the infinity that made them.

Playing for Keeps  
Hannah Smart

I

Two kings sat in silence in a throne room, playing chess. Outside, the sky was filled with the dim glow of an impending dusk. Their hands rested on their respective chins, stroking their beards as they stared, glassy-eyed, at the marble board in front of them. Every now and then, one of them would remove his hand from his chin to move a piece, and the room would echo with the *clink* of marble-on-marble, but if one were to glance at them for a mere few moments, it would almost appear that they were dead.

II

Claude Smith of Kent had begun to feel sick. He couldn't quite place the feeling, but an intangible cloud of doom hovered over him. He had no recollection of events that had happened just days prior. He felt as if he were approaching some untimely demise. He needed to get some fresh air, he decided. One was bound to feel clammy if he stayed cooped up inside all day. The more he stayed inside, the sicker he felt, but the sicker he felt, the less he felt like leaving his chamber. It had become a vicious cycle that was nearly impossible to break.

III

The King of England had taken the lead. He had moved his bishop into a position of attack, both the bishop and the King of England now eyeing the enemy king menacingly. The King of Norway's hand sweated, clammy against his scruffy beard, as he took one glance from the bishop to his king. He castled his king, the *clink-clink* of his pieces filling the air.

IV

Claude Smith had been raised in a wealthy Catholic family and hoped to die a wealthy Catholic bachelor. He had become educated at a university in Rome, where he had become fluent in Latin, and after returning to his home country of England, he had filled the important role of advising and instructing the king in both military and spiritual matters. Though making himself useful to the state was, in a sense, his duty, he had never felt more useless than at this very moment, as he forced himself out of bed, his covers askew and his hat standing upright on the pillow next to him, and stepped out into the chilly night.

V

A smile passed over the face of the King of Norway. The King of England's eyes widened. The King of Norway repositioned his elbow, now tingling from supporting the weight of his head, on the table, before taking his hand off his chin once more and moving his knight. "Check."

The King of England hesitated, for he and his opponent had seen the same thing—as soon as he moved his king to safety, his bishop would be left undefended.

For the first time, the King of Norway did not appear dead nor glassy—instead, his eyes twinkled brightly in a way that reflected on his skin. His whole face appeared to twinkle.

The King of England winced and moved his king, and the King of Norway immediately swept in to take his undefended bishop.

VI

Claude felt a sharp pain in his chest, as if something had hit him. He collapsed to his knees, and there was a *squish* as his knees hit the muddy ground, and then another, much



louder *squish* as Claude fell, face first forward, dead. He would never know what had come over him.

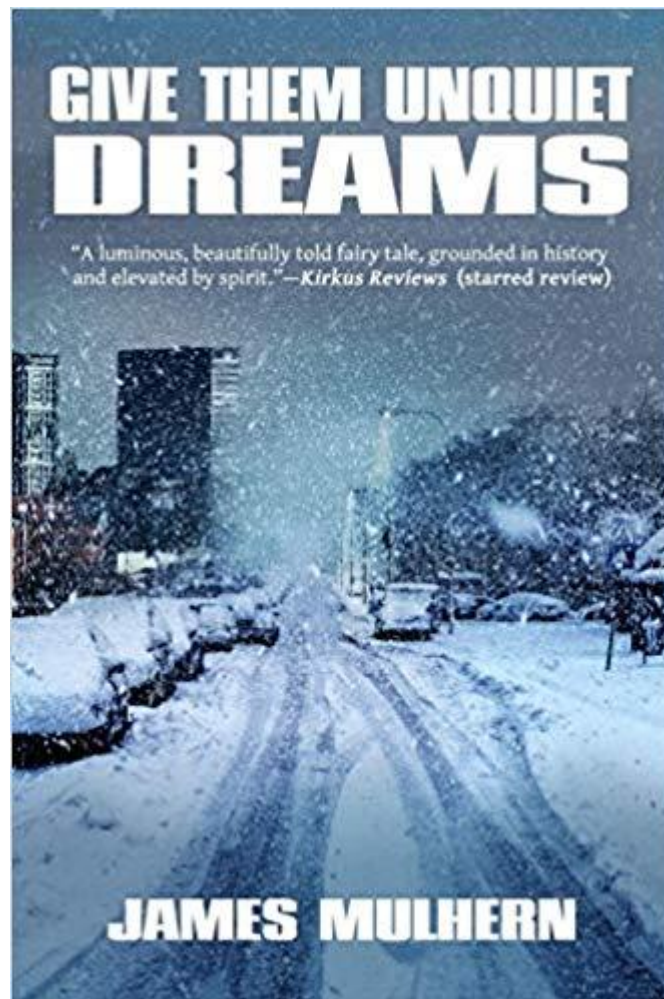
## VII

The King of Norway had taken the clear lead now, and the King of England could not catch a break. With every “check,” the King of England was forced to move into a more uncompromising position. It was as if, as soon as his bishop had been taken, the King of England’s entire strategy had fallen apart, forcing him to focus on nothing but self-preservation. Finally, with only one place left to go, he moved his king into the corner.

The King of Norway hesitated, unable to hide the smirk on his face. The King of England was sweating even more profusely.

“Checkmate.”

The King of England’s breath shortened, and he clasped his hands over his chest. Sweat still beading on his face, he slid out of his chair and hit the floor, his head bumping the table and rattling its pieces. He slumped, unmoving, onto the ground, his eyes as dead as the marble of the chess pieces in front of him. All the while, the pieces on the table continued to wobble with the inertia of his final movement. One piece fell over. The King of Norway picked up the fallen piece, and, holding it out in front of his face with a childlike curiosity, he examined the King of England’s king.



Fourteen-year-old Aiden wants to free his mother from McCall's, a psychiatric institute outside of Boston. He's certain she's not schizophrenic because he also sees ghosts. His grandpa, whose spirit visits at night, tells him he must rescue his mom from "that shower of savages" at the hospital. "Like you, she has second sight. Your grandmother's ma also had the gift. She was demonized, and we can't let that happen to your mother." Aiden enlists the help of his nana's friends, his brother Martin, and a cat named Arthur. Aiden has the foresight to know that everything will turn out okay, even though bad things may happen. They always do. Nana's advice that life demands we "keep calm and carry on" propels him as he is challenged by tragedies, unexpected twists of fate, and the spirit world.

[https://www.amazon.com/Give-Unquiet-Dreams-James-Mulhern/dp/1082240621/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=2ORL6SOH5TULC&keywords=give+them+unquiet+dreams&qid=1574903318&s=books&prefix=give+them+unqu%2Cstripbooks%2C168&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Give-Unquiet-Dreams-James-Mulhern/dp/1082240621/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2ORL6SOH5TULC&keywords=give+them+unquiet+dreams&qid=1574903318&s=books&prefix=give+them+unqu%2Cstripbooks%2C168&sr=1-1)

[https://www.amazon.com/James-Mulhern/e/B00HS4D2AQ/ref=dp\\_byline\\_cont\\_book\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/James-Mulhern/e/B00HS4D2AQ/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1)

Dinner at the Ritz  
Nancy Bourne

I sit in a restaurant facing a man I met online, in a room packed with 30 somethings, all talking at once. It's not exactly the Ritz, but what passes for top-of-the-line dining in this county of overpriced houses and over paid professionals, where I live. The man's name is Hunter and he's slurping raw oysters, at the bargain price of a dollar a piece, available for patrons who show up before 6:00 in the evening. Which we did. I've been experimenting with computer-arranged "dates" ever since my husband of many years left me the house, while he took off with his nurse practitioner. I'm lonely. I admit it. And this guy looks promising. Red hair going gray, neatly trimmed beard. Owns a small business, something about cameras. Loves to travel. And he's my age, forty.

I'm poking into shells with a small fork, digging out garlicky snails, when I hear someone say, "911." I put down my fork and look around. The diners are shouting at each other over the roar of conversation; short, dark-skinned waiters in white coats rush here and there with trays of shellfish; Hunter picks his next oyster out of the mound in front of him. The noise is deafening.

A woman's back is in my line of vision. It looks like she's slumped over on the table. Her companion, also a woman, speaks into a cell phone. I put down my snail tools. A pudgy man with a pointed beard and a shaved head approaches the table. The maître d? He leans in toward the woman on the phone.

Everyone continues to shout and eat.

The maître d' turns toward the table next to the woman in distress. The man at that table looks up and nods to the maître d. Then he and his wife and two teenaged girls grab the coats and sweaters arranged on the back of their chairs and leave the room. Two waiters move their table to the side. Why does no one but me seem to notice? Meanwhile, the woman I'm watching remains motionless.

"Something weird's going on," I say to Hunter.

"Mmm?" His mouth is full of oyster.

Suddenly waiters are everywhere, pulling empty tables away from the slumped over woman, clearing a path through the restaurant to a padded bench along the wall, where people are seated, café style, at small round tables. They pay no attention.

I catch the words "misogynist asshole," coming from nearby. Complaints about a husband? A boss?

A door to the outside opens next to our table, flooding the room with freezing air. Out the window red lights are flashing. Waiters rush in and out of the room.

A young woman in a red silk blouse who is seated on the padded bench slides to the right, leaving an empty space. She never looks at the maître d or at the three waiters who are carrying a body through the cleared space in her direction. Tables are shoved aside. I watch the waiters lay a slumped form full length on the bench. Patrons pick through their food without looking up, laughing and shouting. The motionless woman's companion remains in place, still holding a phone to her ear.

In come the firefighters, in full rubber raincoats and hats, carrying a stretcher. The diners do not look up. The firefighters march across the room to the padded bench and huddle around the supine woman. Measures are taken, hidden from my view. Minutes pass. Waiters rush about. Food is consumed. The din of conversation continues at top volume. The firefighters trudge back through the room, a stretcher between them, a blanketed bulge on top. Hunter puts down his oyster shell and moves his chair as the parade passes our table. The waiters soundlessly close the door and restore the tables and chairs to their original position.

No one looks up. The diners on the padded bench slide back into the vacated space. The four family members return, remove sweaters and coats, and reopen their menus. I hear a siren.

“My God!” I say. “What do you think happened to that woman?”

“I don’t know,” Hunter says. “But you better eat those snails before the next course comes. It’s black cod with whipped cauliflower, sun chokes, broccoli de ciccio, and banga cauda.”

Really?

When our waiter asks if we are enjoying our shellfish, Hunter stops chewing to beam, “Delicious.”

The waiter’s smile is practiced.

“The food is good,” I say in a voice loud enough for my neighbors to hear me. “But the behavior in this room is appalling.”

“Excuse me?” the waiter says.

Hunter smiles. “She means that your customers were too polite to stare at the plight of that unfortunate woman. Unlike my companion here.”

I drop my napkin over the whipped cauliflower and sun chokes and stand up. Now everyone is watching.

The waiter clears the oyster shells without comment.

I hear laughing and shouting and slurping as I head for the door.

Drowned Man  
John Grey

I keep hauling this body  
from the river –  
ambitious  
because the guy's twice my size.

Could be my brother of course  
or, at least, my companion,  
but he's a stranger,  
caught up in the current.

And did I mention  
that he's dead.  
And it's not me  
but the cops that are doing the hauling.

But I see his face  
on a river bottom  
of shattered glass,  
squashed beer cans.

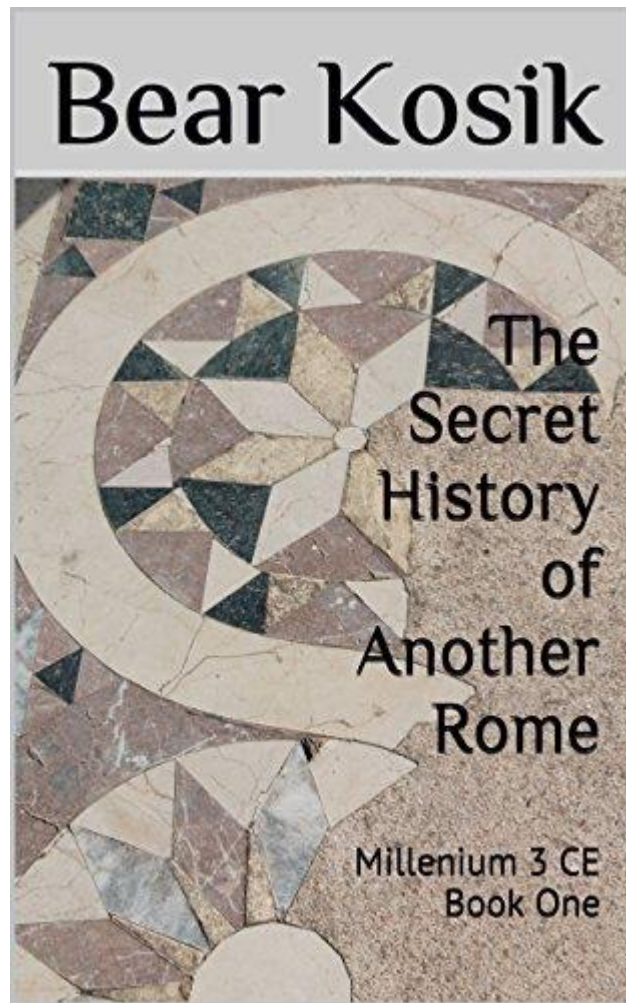
He's the one who  
knows what he's doing.  
He clings to banks,  
wraps silently around rocks

Schools of fish swim out  
of his fluttering lips.  
A crab crawls sideways  
up and down his cheeks.

I shout at him  
through the muffling of water  
that surely it didn't  
have to end this way

He watches, silently,  
my rippling figure,  
my hands wet and dripping,  
letting him go.





Debate rages today about how to respond to climate change, population growth, and resource exploitation. What will be the result if the alarms are not heeded in our century? Is technology the answer? What lessons will humanity learn from failing to successfully address these issues? The Empire of Rome at Alexandria is one possible result: a paternalistic society that provides the essential needs of its people (as in some of the most developed, contented societies today) in exchange for their faith in science and history and choice not to procreate.

The Secret History of Another Rome explores the life of the leader of the Empire at its height in the mid-27th century. After twenty-two years as Supreme Pontiff of the Empire, Ranulf's memories flood back to him, from the time he moved to Alexandria with his mother to his present situation. He reflects on his choices, his training and his relationships. His thoughts are scattered; the moments of his life return out of sequence, one prompting another. He recalls the incomplete bonds he has had with so many people in his life.

As Ranulf tries to find his path, he challenges the order that has provided stability to the Empire for three centuries. Ultimately, he must decide whether he will continue in the role he did not choose leading a society where everyone else does have a choice.

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Life with the Crusher  
John Grey

Is he really the most narcissistic man  
on the planet?  
Your diary says so  
and it hasn't lied to you yet.  
You've seen him, bare-chested,  
flexing muscles in the mirror.  
His physique is all he's willing  
to take responsibility for.

To him, his little family  
is merely the result of a certain comic hopelessness  
when you slept together that first time  
and now have a mostly unwanted son.

He bullies the boy.  
He bullies you.  
And there is always much  
you are afraid to tell him,  
even simple things like you're tired  
and want your sleep.  
For you see the dark coming.  
But he prefers the company  
of his sweat, his nautilus machine,  
even on your birthday  
or the anniversary of when first you met.

You can't identify  
with his weights, his pulleys.  
And when you start to speak  
of something that interests you  
he acts like some officious autocorrect,  
so you only say what he wants to hear.  
Maybe you need to see a psychiatrist  
but what could you say in your defence?  
How unlucky you were to run into him that day?  
How hooking up drunk in bars sells romance short?

The truth is, bad as it is,  
this is still the best your life has ever been.  
So what's next?  
He berates you until you feel better about yourself?  
He beats you until the pain goes away?  
You merely hope for the best.  
The worst already knows where to find you.

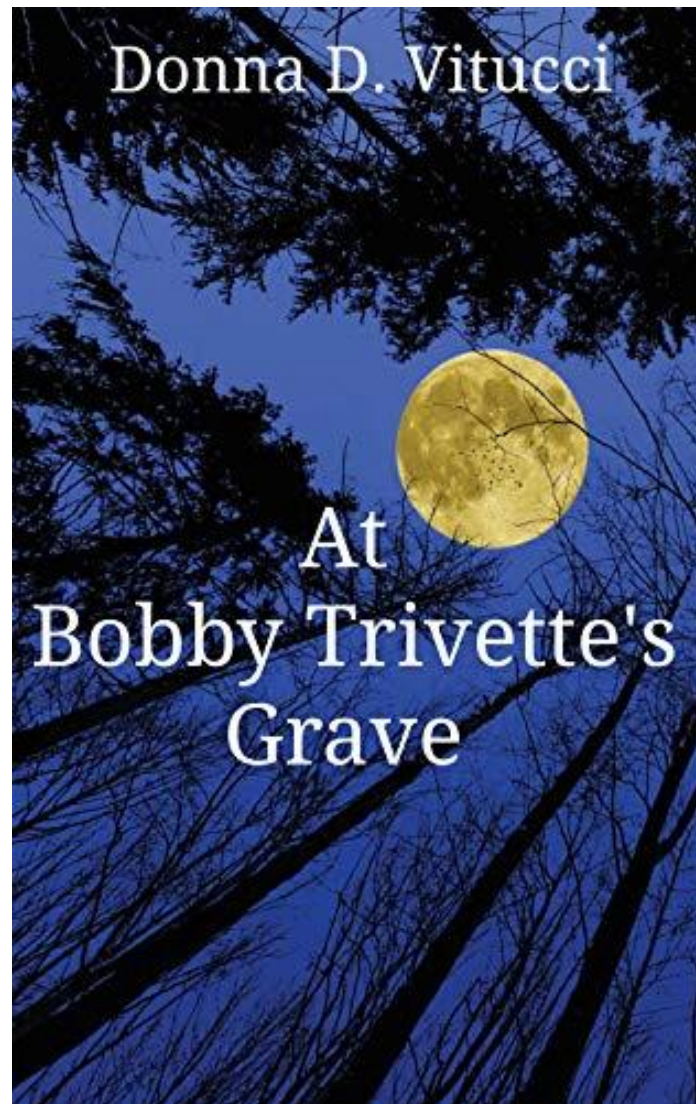
I was John but I Wished I Was Paul  
John Tustin

I was John  
With his overtly personal stories  
Put into song  
And his jealousy of Paul -  
The man with the universal love song  
Ever at the ready  
And the pretty boy looks,  
The voice like honey.  
I would awake at noon  
Then go to the studio, arms folded,  
Upset that Paul had already been there for hours,  
Playing all the instruments at first  
Because no one else had yet arrived.  
Why was it so easy for Paul?  
Why was he always smiling that smile  
Of "I'm just happy to be here"?  
Did he always have the music in his head  
Just like me  
With nothing else to do but put it down?  
Did he have a life beyond creating?

I was once John but now I'm George –  
Contemplating the universe  
And our place within it,  
Loving Jesus as I question his existence  
And gently accepting what is...just is.  
I only want to learn  
But if the opportunity arises  
I'll be happy to write something  
And share it with you.  
I don't even care much if you like it.  
Your life is your trip, not mine.

Someday, Maharishi willing,  
I will finally be Ringo –  
Getting by on my ability  
With nothing but practice,  
Without too much hassle,  
Waiting for geniuses  
To write songs that fit my peculiar voice,  
Imagining someday I'll be the one  
With happiest life  
And the hottest wife.  
Art is lovely and maybe  
Enlightenment is attainable  
Before we shed the mortal coil  
And so what if all that

Is true?  
I'd rather be sitting in a café  
Drinking black coffee  
With my still-lovely wife  
When I am nearly 80  
Than examining Sutras  
Or trying to put four minutes to music,  
Begging for an audience  
Or an intervention –  
Guided by jealousy or ego -  
Or, worst of all,  
Getting up early  
And begging strangers  
To please, please  
Worship me  
As I put down the one more song  
That will cement my name  
Into immortality.  
The idea of immortality is lovely  
Until you die.  
Then it's nothing.



When you slam the door shut on your boyfriend's pleas you don't expect to never see his beautiful face again. A simple silly argument, you expect to get past it. You expect to love, fight, make up and love more. You're young and there's plenty of joy to come. But Bobby Trivette meets with a tragic accident in Kentucky's back hills, and Dru Ann's future turns to pure free fall. Her grief spiral sets everyone connected to her evaluating the ones they love and the ways they've lived in this small town of Paris, Kentucky, forever in the shadow and the spirit of the Cane Ridge Shrine.

[https://www.amazon.com/Bobby-Trivettes-Grave-Donna-Vitucci-ebook/dp/B07MFHLGK6/ref=as\\_li\\_ss\\_tl?ie=UTF8&qid=1548894461&sr=8-1&keywords=At+Bobby+trivette%27s+grave&linkCode=sl1&tag=monic1-20&linkId=d6699f691ad2785c3133e262f452d244&language=en\\_US](https://www.amazon.com/Bobby-Trivettes-Grave-Donna-Vitucci-ebook/dp/B07MFHLGK6/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&qid=1548894461&sr=8-1&keywords=At+Bobby+trivette%27s+grave&linkCode=sl1&tag=monic1-20&linkId=d6699f691ad2785c3133e262f452d244&language=en_US)

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Author website: [www.magicmasterminds.com/donnavitucci](http://www.magicmasterminds.com/donnavitucci)



Derivative  
Carson Pytell

I am a derivation of my father:  
Pragmatic like a kicked mule,  
Bereft of elastic imagination,  
Stolid like the pigeon's stool:  
Only eavesdropping on poesy.

And further derived from my mother:  
Her delicate, disabling womb;  
Inspiration never instituted,  
Buds that haven't bloomed:  
Burgeoning beasts that stroll with me.

Of my own full self I am unresolved:  
Made timid by supposed esprit,  
Wholly owned by contrasting caprices,  
Not knowing what might best be.  
Can only wait then go and see.

Larae, Again  
C.C. Russell

I dreamt a sonata, a solo  
vocal  
about its love. I dreamt in reverse,  
another verse  
about you.

I dreamt in terms  
of seeing you  
in turn, turn  
again  
this way.

This is how you come  
to me these days,  
the way you find  
an entrance, leaving me  
entranced, enhanced  
by your ghost,

its light fingers,  
these lingering

blisters  
of you.

Wake  
C.C. Russell

The price of ascension –

Pockets weighted with coins,  
the body is pushed  
off from  
the shoreline.

Facing north, we assume  
our usual positions  
as the sunlight tears  
the waves to shreds.

Music in Wind, Music in Mind  
Michael Brownstein

Shadow girl loses herself in the shade of clouds.  
Oftentimes she hears the moon, the tail of a comet, tidal lock  
and she can dance, her arms, her hands, her long fingernails,  
a rhythm of the bonfire, its blisters and strength, its wind Sekhmet  
and the furies of fire, Shu, Amun Ra and Tefnut.  
She stretches her long legs, shifts her waist, lets nature in,  
high steps and gallops, twists and lunges, scoots and thunder,  
laughter gripping the current of air surrounding her  
waking the gods of Nubia, Egypt, a small place in Sudan.  
Listen to the drums in the forest. Listen to the flame of color in clothing.  
Everywhere everyone gathers in the centre. Dance.

A Series of Untitled Works  
Simon Perchik

\*

Agreed! The firm handshake  
wipes it dry the way one reef  
irons things out with another

circles down as your shadow  
already seawater, homesick  
and the exact spot it remembers

–that’s the deal, you  
become rain while this stone  
is run backwards, girlish again

touching everything and the dirt  
comes loose, floating past  
not yet sunlight and side by side.

\*

Step by step half marble  
half backing away  
and though the struggle was fierce

this graveyard still depends on you  
pulling it closer the way silence  
has always followed

and went on from there  
–you’re dragged by hillsides  
not yet flowers, not yet thrown

helplessly lifting your hands  
without thinking  
or their darkness.

\*

You stir this can before it opens  
as the promise a frog makes  
when asking for a kiss: the paint

warmer and warmer will become  
an afternoon with room for mountains  
and breezes close to your shoulder

though that’s not how magic works

–there's the wave, the hand to hand  
spreading out between the silence

and your fingers dressed with gloves  
as if it was a burden and the brush  
raising your arm, the way this wall

needs a color that will dry by itself  
leave a trace: a shadow not yet lovesick  
no longer its blanket and cure.

\*

It's grass growing on the mirror  
and every Spring more smoke  
blackening your teeth –the dress

looks like hers, tossed off  
piece by favorite piece and death  
not yet shoulders and hips

--without a fuss she is touching you  
though you are moving closer  
as the lips that wait inside

and smoldering –it's half a mirror  
hardly enough for its kisses to fall out  
look at each other and the afternoons.

\*

It was a birthday gift, sent alone  
the day before your heart leaves  
for a place that's safer –a book

on travel, what to listen for, by yourself  
in walls that let you look back  
while your shadow is taken away

–it's too soon! the ribbon is still splendid  
will spend the night the way a sailor  
learns to tie huge sails between each arm

stretch out, not yet rope, clinging to a sea  
from a boat that's lost, is closing  
while you embrace the dark gray pages.

Baby Love  
Donna Vitucci

*For Nancy*

Arise now. Everything you know has been erased.

The third floor with its drafty hallway and its leaky window panes has been rented. The faces you drew with chalk in the closet under the eaves mourn your passing, grins flipped to frowns, their eyes x-ed out like the hammer-dinged heads of cartoons.

Your bike went at the last garage sale under the power of some other child's pedalling, a child with a future, her gold egg still perfect.

The tattoo-ed boys who lived next door, who humored you pestering them and who painted a butterfly and pitchfork on your backside when you begged, have scored a new apartment.

And those who loved you best? Your mother, certainly, grayed at forty-five; your fractured high school years launched her sorrows. Each morning she walks the alley before dawn, a back way she knows like sleep, her full apron tied over the sweats she wears as pyjamas, goes on to unlock the supply door to Econo Foods and enters, flipping on the lights, tastes the vegetables and fruits in their bins just by breathing. Spoilage and done-by-dates pass through her teeth.

Fruit flies dig into the bananas, even fruit flies know when to hide, but you, you have always advertised your glory. First a blond-braided child in Dutch girl embroidered dresses, then spangle skirts and jellie shoes, purple tights, eye shadow at ten. Maybe you were school smart; we don't know. You missed a father, what guidance a dad might give, but a father could just as well shatter his girl, so maybe she saved you when she split from him. She accepts the blame but doesn't know how she'd have done any different through her weak times, debt, the drift-through lovers, the nightly pipe in the back courtyard.

You cupped her chin in your hands and drew her monkey-mug close when she raged over the poor bit of inherited jewelry and silver dollars you stole. With no remorse -- because when would she ever get it unless you turned mean? -- you spoke your toughest line into her grooved face: "It's not for you to save me."

The doll you long ago named Patience, the one you told your secrets, observed from the bed without blinking, your wishes stuffed inside her plastic head with your latest score.

Your mother left you jailed, or she took you to rehab's door, spent borrowed money on therapy and lawyers, no bottom to the cellar of her love and your pledges to right yourself. You drove her hope and her car hop-scotching into the junk heap, your last hysteria witnessed by the Jaws of Life.

Your mother whispers, "Hello sweet baby," to the child she cradles, you, but not you, a likeness of you and that boy you shared needles with in Helentown under the train trestle, that steep gravely ash heap where you two leaned in, taking it, and then barely breathing, revived to taste the street cocktail like mouthwash tossed to the back of your throat, your utter lack of care.

Arise now. Bid good luck to the homeless lining up in the alley for the shelter's opening, the wind tunnelling to Sixth Street and you with it, you as you shed gravity, your stalled fireworks wrecking the constellations others look up at and admire as you bleed out among the streaks defining the Milky Way. How you tarry since your time's run down, with sudden lust for a daughter you never acknowledged because that would have labelled you too boring. One last time you see it all like God sees: your baby's blue eyes, and you a pinpoint farther off than any moon or dying star.

Central Standard Time  
Mike Lee

While going through a thrift shop on a Sunday afternoon, I came across an airbrushed portrait of Christ, crucified, smiling enigmatically with droplets of blood sliding from under his crown of thorns.

The painting had been left to the elements at one point before being donated to the thrift and had faded to a garish green, thus giving the Christ head a macabre discoloration that accentuated its demise.

"I wish I could unsee this," a male voice muttered behind me.

His companion, also male, added. "I think this is a representation of the image on Veronica's Veil."

Oh, so he's not dead, just almost so, I thought. I moved on toward the back of the mezzanine to pick through the stack of old books piled on two tables set against the far wall opposite the railing.

I wondered if the beheaded Gorgon inspired the image of Veronica's Veil. I read the myth in elementary school, a very long time ago.

Fourth grade was the year I learned the story about the Gorgon. I was nine years old. Vietnam was still a War. Richard Nixon a President. My favorite song on the radio was Dragging the Line by Tommy James. My favorite cartoon was Kid Power, and I had no friends.

In the backyard I learned to play football by myself, tossing the ball in the air while on the run, catching it and running for yardage. I was Roger Staubach scrambling, evading tacklers, diving at the stone set in the corner near the chain-link fence for the last-minute touchdown.

I later knew more about Veronica's Veil. I read it in the New Way Bible I received for my Confirmation in the spring of sixth grade. Veronica put it to Christ's face to mop his sweating, bloody, tortured brow, and returned with a miraculous image, showing to all who witnessed that he was the Son of God as the Romans marched him to Calvary.

But the headless image also referenced the decapitated Gorgon, the hideous monster slain by Jason of the Argonauts. One story was of triumph, the other was of empathy and I wondered then when threading classical myth with Pauline Christianity, which story held more meaning.

As I picked through the books I considered the vital need for humanity to grasp tightly to myths. The ancient Greeks had daring adventurers who vanquished monsters and gods who walked among them. The Christians had a suffering Messiah who brought light to an obscure corner of the Roman Empire; he who performed miracles, and brought hope to a proud but conquered people.

I supposedly had a happy and vibrant childhood, filled with wonder and joy.

As I flipped to the frontispiece of a novel to check to see if it was a first edition, the two men joined me on the mezzanine.

"Isn't it so annoying that when you try to get complete editions of a series printed in one color, the publishers suddenly change the scheme?"

I sighed.

I closed the cover. The book was a second printing. After placing it back on the stack I headed down the stairs and left the store.

When I hit the pavement, it had started drizzling. Though winter was fading off, the raindrops pecked at me with icy reminders that the waning season still held power. I flipped up the lapels of my coat and jammed my hands into my jeans, feeling timeless as a car passed by, the driver playing Gary Numan on his stereo.



Yes, timeless. Senior year of high school, not as lonely but I had an ideology to go with my alienation—with a soundtrack, though not so much Gary Numan, but more like The Clash.

Though now older, I grew to appreciate Numan's atmospheric, sparse arrangements and hearing the music brought me back somewhere else until the car turned at the light, and out of sight.

Someplace else was transported to a day skipping class to be with my girlfriend. She had enough credits to have half days while unfortunately, I had to stick around to take a world history class that I did well enough in that the teacher looked the other way when I handed in an imperfectly forged early dismissal note.

Sunlight bathed the late morning glow driving to meet her at the park in the pocket neighborhood that was our sanctuary from the world beyond.

We never had it easy. It was tough being different back then, even if it was just, in retrospect, outwardly a variation of a uniform. Deep down, though, there lurked the turgid rising tides of change. A time bomb of Gramscian praxis ticked louder, while more intense experiences led to different ways of living separated from the sameness we knew as half-formed minds.

But all that came later. We were kids cavorting on the swings holding the chains of fading innocence while riding high toward the treetops with the roofs of fading Victorians on the block across the street.

As we swept forward after the apex of our highest climb, she yelled. "Jump!"

Our arms rising, the shoelaces of respective Chuck Taylor hightops flying, we fell toward the endless green thrill of the grass.

With my feet firmly on the ground, I returned to the realm of the real. Realizing my age and feeling like I should act accordingly, I clutched the lapels tightly until I reached my subway stop.

I headed down the gaping maul, with Kid Power, Roger Staubach, Gary Numan, Antonio Gramsci, Gorgon, and Christ be damned.

## Bio's

Donna Vitucci has been publishing since 1990. Her recent novel, *ALL SOULS*, is offered by Magic Masterminds Press, as are her previous 3 books. Her work explores the ache and mistake of secrets among family, lovers, and friends. She lives in North Carolina, enjoying her cherished grandsons and her gardens.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Gibson Poems* published by *Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library*, 2019. For more information including free e-books and his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com). To view one of his interviews please follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSK774rtfx8>.

Michael H. Brownstein's latest book, *A Slipknot into Somewhere Else: A Poet's Journey To The Borderlands Of Dementia*, was recently published by Cholla Needles Press (2018).

C.C. Russell has been published here and there across the web and in print. You can find his words in such places as *Split Lip Magazine*, *The Colorado Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and the anthology *Blood, Water, Wind, and Stone*. You can find more of his work at [ccrussell.net](http://ccrussell.net)

Carson Pytell is a poet and short-story writer living in a very small town in upstate New York. His work has previously been published in *Vita Brevis Press*, *Literary Yard* and, *Leaves of Ink*.

John Tustin's poetry has appeared in many disparate poetry journals in the last decade. [fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry](http://fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry) contains links to his published poetry online.

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

Since retiring as an attorney for public schools, Nancy Bourne has been writing stories, making pottery, and teaching writing to prisoners and incarcerated minors. Ms. Bourne's stories have appeared in *Upstreet*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *South Carolina Review*, *Blue Lake* and numerous other publications. For a list of her publications, see [nancybourne.us](http://nancybourne.us).

Hannah Smart is a graduate of Middlebury College who writes both fiction and nonfiction. She has several published nonfiction articles in *Vocal's* affiliated magazines, one of which was chosen as a staff pick on the *Vocal* homepage. She is fairly new to the fiction-writing scene. She currently lives in Boston.

W. Jack Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of eight books including his latest, *The Caretaker's Son: Skip Savage Remembers Old St. Paul* ([wjacksavage.com](http://wjacksavage.com)). To date, hundreds of Jack's short stories and articles have appeared both in the U.S. and internationally. He is also an accomplished artist. Over a thousand of his paintings and drawings have appeared in books, magazines, and ezines. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.

M. M. Adjarian has published her work in journals such as the *Baltimore Review*, *Verdad*, *South 85*, *The Missing Slate*, *Serving House Journal*, *Pif*, *Gravel*, *Glint*, *Grub Street*, *Crack the Spine* and *Poetry Quarterly*. She lives in Austin.

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a 65-year-old veteran, prize-winning poet and author from New Hampshire, now residing in Oklahoma. He has three poetry collections to date. Ken does not have an MFA or Creative Writing Degree but he once rode a dirt bike on woodland trails from southern New Hampshire into Canada. He loves spending time with his cats Willa and Yumpy.

Will Reger is a founding member of the CU (Champaign-Urbana) Poetry Group ([cupoetry.com](http://cupoetry.com)), teaches at Illinois State University in Normal. His work appears in *Zingara*, *Poetry Review*, *Passager Journal*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *The Blue Nib Literary Magazine*, *Broadkill Review*, *Cagibi*, and the *Innesfree Poetry Journal*. His first chapbook is *Cruel with Eagles*. He is the 2019-20 inaugural poet laureate for the city of Urbana, Illinois.

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher, conga drummer who plays Afro-Cuban folkloric music for dance classes and rumbas, and a writer of poetry, flash fiction, and non-fiction. His writing has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines, more recently in *Hypnopomp*, *Former People*, *The Local Train*, *Defuncted*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse* and many others.

Thomas Simmons is a professor at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, South Dakota and teaches courses in trusts, estate planning, and ethics. Prior to joining the academy, he practiced in the field of elder law, representing numerous elderly individuals with chronic illnesses and dementia.

A poet, critic, and humorist, Dan Wiencek studied writing at Purdue University and his work has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Hypertrophic Literary* and *New Ohio Review*, among other publications. He lives in Portland, Oregon and is currently working on his first collection of poems.

Nigel Ford works as a translator, writer, visual artist and dramatist. He is English and lives in Sweden. Recent publications include short stories in *The Fortnightly Review* (UK), and poems in *Orbis* (UK).

Mike Lee is an editor. His fiction is in *Corvus Review*, *Ghost Parachute*, *The Opiate* and others. Website: [www.mleephotoart.com](http://www.mleephotoart.com). He also blogs for *Focus on the Story*.