

# NINE MUSES REVIEW



Issue II

June 2024

# Nine Muses Review

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June 2024

Edited by Katie Baughman, Abhinav Aitha,  
and Lily Baughman

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# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I am so so so thrilled to introduce the second issue of Nine Muses Review! Can't believe we've already made it to Issue II. It is an honor to be trusted with the beautiful work that makes up these pages and I'm so thankful we've gotten the opportunity to share it with all of you. I hope Nine Muses Review can always share your work with care.

We are so excited to have received submissions for this issue from over three hundred fifty individual submitters across the world. While creating this issue, we had the privilege of reading many truly fantastic and meaningful pieces, many more than we could ever fit in the pages of our journal. That said, I am overjoyed with the ones we were able to accept and share here— beautifully creative works by beautifully creative artists. This issue, we found ourselves especially drawn to pieces that speak to each other and the world around us. The works that make up this issue are really special to me. I hope they are so to you, as well.

Thank you for submitting, writing, reading.

Katie Baughman, EIC

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# How to Turn Bird

Eat plenty of seeds – not with a spoon – directly from the feeder, funneling them onto your tongue before swallowing. Or scatter seeds onto the grass, then peck at them, tasting dirt. Practice hopping with two feet all the way across the lawn. You are a pogo stick, a spring, light as pollen.

Sleep outdoors under a gibbous moon, its swollen white eye like the hump of a camel. Waking to tiny droplets of dew, a spiderweb clinging to tulips.

Shed your skin. Replace it with feathers, downy, built for speed. Enough to hide your tiny heart, the hollow place between bones.

Decide which bird. Not the too-common robin or jay. Not the sparrow, small and insignificant. Not the ubiquitous Canada goose, which always has to follow the flock.

Palm warbler then. Flash of yellow in the pines. Reddish-brown cap, stripe above the eye. Looks good on a life list. Male.

Fly down to Boca Raton – flying, you can fly! – and perch on a chaise lounge at your sister’s pool as she tells her friend that you still haven’t disposed of your father’s ashes after three-and-a-half years and how hard can it be to scatter them at the beach, yes, it’s illegal, but who would know and at least it’s better than sitting in a box in your garage.

Shit on her Cadillac Escalade.

Fly to your mother’s apartment nearby and watch through the window as she gets ready for her date. Curlers, eyeliners, girdle, foundation. She sees you on the sill and says, *hello birdie, What cha up to?* Wink.

Fly to Loxahatchee where you and your father used to bird every Sunday. The Everglades. Gators and tourists. Your very own swamp. Here’s the

marsh where you saw the black-crowned night heron. There's the log with the roseate spoonbill so flush pink it looked fake. Ghost birding.

Fly farther, fly faster. Try to trick yourself into acceptance. Concentrate on your yellow feathers, how soft they are, how tender. How birds don't know how to cry.

Migrate to Canada. Flit amid birches by a fairytale lake where mountains kiss the clouds. He's never been to this place with you. No memories here. But the birds are the same: Osprey. Grebe. Plover. Nuthatch. A cormorant perched on a rock by Lake Louise, still as death, drying its waterlogged wings in the sun.

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**Beth Sherman** has an MFA in creative writing from Queens College, where she teaches in the English department. Her stories have been published in *Portland Review*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Tangled Locks Journal*, *100 Word Story*, *Fictive Dream*, *Flash Boulevard*, *Sou'wester* and elsewhere. Her work will be featured in *The Best Microfictions 2024*. She's also a Pushcart, Best Small Fictions, and multiple Best of the Net nominee. She can be reached at @bsherm36 or <https://www.bethsherman.site/>

# Discussing God With a Seashell

Is it important for you to know that your creator was a predator?

Do you care that he was armed with a venomous proboscis  
that paralyzed his prey before he ate them?

That he then slid back into the dark cave  
of his indrawn room, to sleep, digest, and forget,  
before the hunger returned?

Do you understand that *you* were that room?

That, emancipated, you are now the only evidence  
that remains of your creator,  
whom you were made to protect?

Your existence offers no explanation  
for why, or how, you landed intact  
on this field of ancient ruins.

Your perfection tells us that you do not belong here,  
but you cannot go back, any more than Abram  
could have returned to Mesopotamia.

It is as if you were sent to our strange shore  
for a purpose, to spread a message  
we're still too dense to understand.

I hold you to my ear, and listen to the faint hiss  
of life, although of course you are not alive.

Not in the way that we are, or your creator was.

Yet like a prophet carrying news, you speak  
without speaking of this paradox I know  
but still don't: that you who are not alive  
will outlive all of us who are.

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**James Lilliefors** is a poet, journalist, and novelist who was born in Los Angeles and grew up in the Washington, D.C. area. His writing has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Washington Post*, *Hoogly Review*, *Door Is A Jar*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Miami Herald*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Salvation South*, and many other places. He's a former writing fellow at the University of Virginia and currently lives in South Florida.



## Lublin II

### Linocut

*As much beauty as was allowed under the Warsaw Pact.*

---

**Peter Newall** is a writer and musician who has lived in Australia, Germany, Japan, and now in Odesa, Ukraine, where before the war he sang for a local r'n'b band. He very much admires Max Beckmann.

# Sweetpea 3000

We're good to go – he has unclipped my bra and I've long since lost track of who the killer is in this doc – then my little robovac Sweetpea trundles in. Knocked off his stride, Chad carelessly turns Sweetpea off. He sees my face and knows he's done the same to me.

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**Ewen Glass** (he/him) is a poet from Northern Ireland who lives with two dogs, a tortoise and lots of self-doubt; on a given day, any or all of these can be snapping at his heels. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *HAD*, *Bridge Eight*, *Poetry Scotland*, *Gordon Square Review* and elsewhere. On socials (and in real life) he is pretty much ewenglass everywhere.

# *At twenty-one, I ponder myself as an invasive species*

At eight, my mother tells me

I can't do anything right,  
tells me nine times seven is sixty-three  
not fifty six, like I had written  
down with my bic blue ballpoint.

I go to bed soon after,

squint through the shadows of my nightlight  
count and drop my fingers – stop at my index,  
*sixty-three, sixty-three, sixty-three.*  
Not fifty-six, not anything else.

At twenty, my mother and I sit

by the river. She says; *you're a writer now, mijo.*  
She says; *I remember when I taught you*  
*how to write your name.* As if I haven't  
been a writer since then,

when I learned the power in naming things,

and how easily that can be stripped away.  
She mentions the beaver, beady eyes with  
a dead frog between its jaws. For once,  
I know more than her.

At nineteen, I learn what a nutria is.

An old man at the river points to one  
and mentions how they're an invasive  
species, beaver-lookalikes, rodents to be hunted  
because they can't do anything right.

At twenty-one, I am the farthest from

home and all I can do is write about it.

Write about death, about drugs, about violence,  
about everything that is me, as I try to be  
someone more.

I have no nightlight,

numbers don't lull me to sleep anymore,

no niche animal knowledge to question in the dark.

Just me, as invasive as I am, I whisper;

*Alexander, Alexander, Alexander.*

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**Alexander Beets** (he/him) is a Puerto Rican writer from Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. He is pursuing an M.A in Creative Writing at UNC Charlotte. A lot of his work involves exploring the intersections and effects of the industrialism and classism that has grown and evolved in rural North Carolina, and what that looks like for the people still living there. He has fallen in love with exploring the many different avenues of documentary poetry. You can find some of his work in *Nova Literary-Arts Magazine*, *Carolina Muse*, and *Querencia Press*.

## Photo Safari, 1998

The baboons are trying to get into  
our hotel room on the second floor.

We were warned not to unlock  
the window, that the baboons know

how to open them, will jump inside  
to grab anything they can— purses,  
field guides, binoculars, sunglasses,  
passports. We'll never see them again.

I'm eating sugar cookies while I watch  
them scamper across the opposite  
rooftop, watch them use trees, bridge  
to our building until there is one large

male, right up against the pane, rattling  
the window in its sliding tracks.

My roommate squeals in horror.

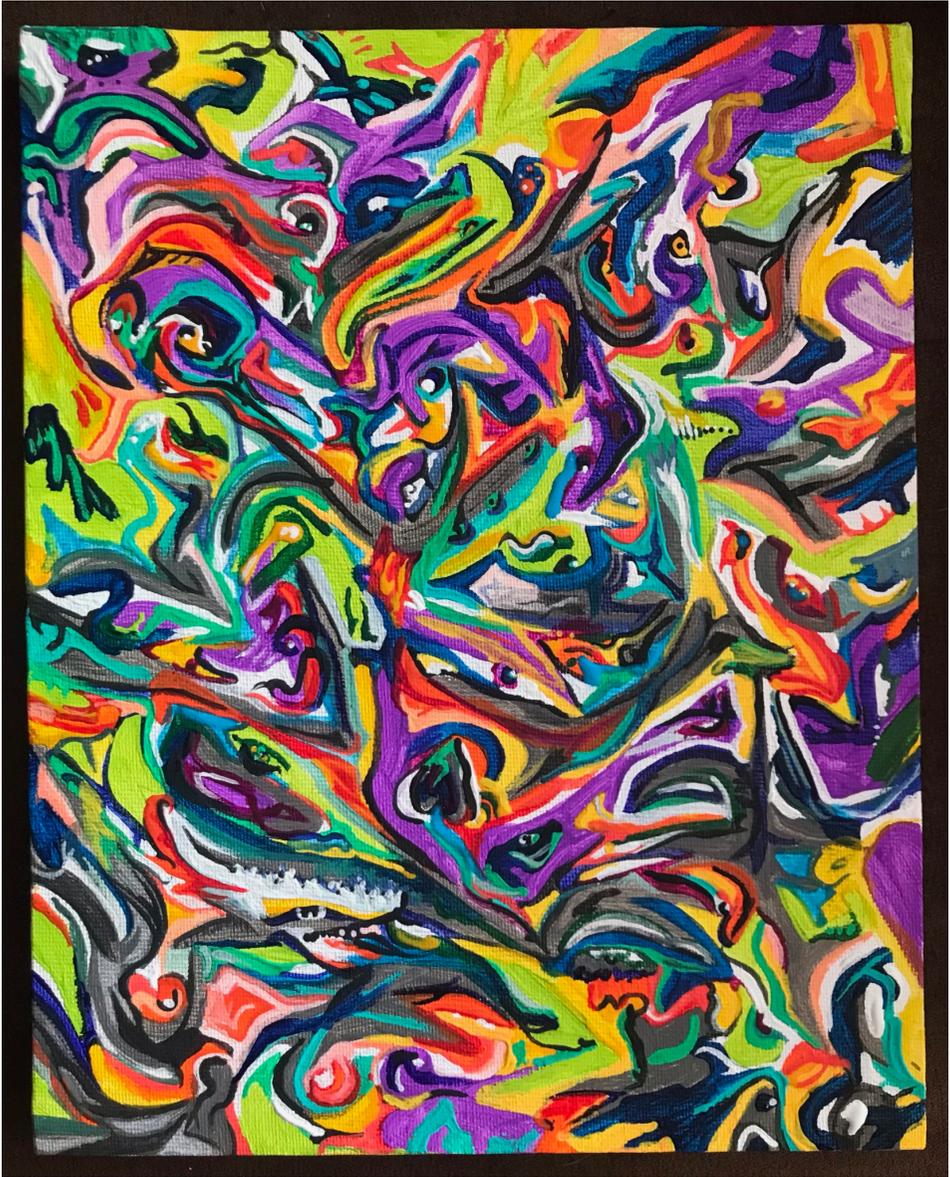
Neither of us think to grab a camera.

I walk to the window, face to face  
with this relative on my family tree,  
a distant cousin, eye to eye. Without  
thought or analysis, I bare my teeth, open

my eyes wide. The baboon takes off, leaps  
from the balcony, keeps running. Ancient  
parts of me know right action. No words  
needed. I chomp on another cookie.

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**Joan Mazza** worked as a microbiologist and psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self* (Penguin/Putnam). Her poetry has appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Slant*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia.



## Duck and Cover

Acrylic on canvas

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**Jessica Joy** is an artist, educator, and aspiring author. She lives in Maine with her husband, daughter and rescue dogs. Check out her website <https://sites.google.com/view/jessicajoyaae/home>

## Connection

This is where bicycle-man tried to stop me for a chat. There's a human need to work with wires. Connections are vital, even if clumsily rigged—dots & dashes conscripted by electric impatience—hence this bold meshing of man & bicycle, breaching the absence of welcome-signage.

Long ago, in this city, poets/priests/puritans/printing press—pilgrims all—pushed roots down, deep, into marshland, surviving the fire/fortune/fury of a faraway king. This city where bicycle man—not looking for money, not overly greedy for time—now meets my impatience, and ends up bike-wrecked on shores of slow understanding.

Later, I sum it up: my sin of instant judgement. I know now that chance conversations are like a pilgrimage: bags packed, oceans dared, fate fully surrendered to, in exchange for faint promises of unsullied connection.

Nothing new under the sun: when wires cross, we say one thing, another is heard. Like a door at ocean's edge, swinging open for one clan, closing ponderously, permanently, for another. Like being locked in a dark telegraph room, until you can figure out the wiring.

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**Tolu Ogunlesi**'s fiction and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *Wasafiri*, *Transition*, *Sable*, *Magma*, *Orbis*, *Eclectica*, *VLQ*, *Inkpot*, *Mississippi Review*, *Times Arts Review*, *Ad Fontes*, and many others. He's the winner of a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize, a PEN/Studzinski Literary Award, and a Honorable Mention in the 2006 Concorso internazionale di poesia Castello di Duino. He was shortlisted for a 2023 Miles Morland Writing Scholarship. He's been awarded writing/research fellowships by the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Sweden; University of Birmingham, England; Rockefeller Foundation and Harvard University. He lives in Abuja, Nigeria.

# Building my Father's Fire

With slenderest sticks  
of fat lighter pine,  
I stack four broken,  
breathing walls: *log-*  
*cabin fire lay*, scouts  
would call it. Old  
newspaper heart  
in an evergreen  
cage; no fluid  
needed to enflame  
dead headlines, ingrained  
genetic lessons.  
In my backyard pit  
amid sirens and horns,  
small nature pieces  
light into warmth,  
rise and fall like *Ours*  
in the barn-crack mouth  
of a Georgia farmer.  
Awaiting ashes, I  
watch the house burn,  
feed it more stories  
and sap-crusted fuel  
until the city sounds  
become too much,  
destroy the orange  
mirage, a replica

of rural nightfall:  
something like  
family, like home.

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**John Davis Jr.** is the author of *The Places That Hold* (Eastover Press, 2021) and five other poetry collections. His work has appeared in *The Common*, *Nashville Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA and teaches English and Creative Writing in the Tampa Bay Area of Florida, his native state.



THE GOD OF THE POOR BOUGHT A  
WET BOX OF MATCHES

**Acrylic on paper, 18cm X 12cm**

**2023**

*From the ongoing series of portraits called "Postcards From A Postponed Posterity".*

*#postcardsfromapostponedposterity*

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**Matina Vossou** is a self-taught artist living in Athens, Greece. She uses acrylics and a toothpick, a technique which she learned by her father, who was a naïve painter. She paints faces like perfectly unfinished mosaics of emotions and ideas. The skin is depicted cracked and like is illuminated from the inside. Instagram @matinavossou

# lamb

little princess in her tower, plastic tiara her sour metallic  
dollar-store crown jewels. emerald dragon, puppet nightmare,  
her felted monster, breathes fumes and fire of paper candlelight,  
orange and clove, glitter glue, every tooth she loses enamel in its mouth.  
flashlight fairydust under-covers illuminates embroidered eyes, patch-noses,  
quilted animals stand guardian, sister angel watching from heaven.  
she sticks armor unabashed all over little limbs, precious foam,  
adhesive adornment. lace socks skate the shine of kitchen floors,  
she's a soaring winter olympian. laundry basket rockets  
carpet-burn down stairs, she's an unidentified flying object.  
crayon calligrapher, watercolor witch, tempera troubadour—  
i ask her, *hold my hand.* this body's too old to be strong,  
though it was, when it was hers, skinned knees, bright-pink cast,  
trampled bone. i want her to come home. i'll tell her  
the doorbell still glows, a caramel star. the front window still  
casts rainbows at the stair. i'll tell her we can dance she can teach me how,  
little magic maker, little princess in her tower.

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**J.L. Morren** is a writer, artist, actress, and general creative from western Michigan. A recent graduate of the Writing program at Calvin University, she's going on to pursue an MFA in Acting. Her poetry and prose has previously appeared in *Orangepeel Literary Magazine*, *Londemere Lit*, *Midsummer Magazine*, *JAKE*, and *Dialogue Creative Journal*. Find her on Instagram and Twitter @jlmorren.

# Countdown

There were just too many numbers, a seemingly infinite amount, and we couldn't take it anymore, so we decided to get rid of as many as we could. Right off the bat we dumped the big numbers, the really big ones, the ones that nobody used anyway, numbers like quadrillion and quintillion and sextillion, to say nothing of gazillion, which we weren't even sure was a number, but better safe than sorry. It was when we got down into the trillions that the debates began, because we had some folks in the government who liked to talk in terms of these numbers when laying out their budgets; but we were about as fed up with our government as we were with numbers, and so we gave them the middle finger and dropped all the trillions as well. Next came the billions, which were harder to let go, as some of our wealthiest citizens actually held such numbers in our currency, and as in most countries, they also held a great deal of sway when it came to our decision-making; but in the end, we were able to reach a compromise: our billionaires could keep their high-falutin numbers so long as they began putting them to good use.

That's when we started getting creative. We decided to cut out all the odd numbers, because, well, they're odd, aren't they? Whenever we needed an odd number, like, *really* needed one, we would have to speak in terms of evens that divided to make an odd, such as six divided by two to get you know what. Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "Doesn't that just force you to use *more* numbers, not mention adding a great deal of difficulty to counting?" Yes, that is true, but that was the whole point: we wanted to make numbers so annoying that no one would use them except when necessary. We did keep one odd number, the number one, because we knew that its use was ubiquitous, that we would catch ourselves using it even when we weren't meaning to, such as in the first part of this sentence; and in fact, we chose to

make it our lowest number, getting rid of that pesky zero, which nobody wanted anything to do with anyway, and don't even get us started on negative numbers.

After that we turned our sights on fractions and irrational numbers and other suspicious and kooky-looking numbers that our mathematicians knew a great deal about but none of the rest of us did, like the Fibonacci sequence and Avogadro's number and the pi that you couldn't eat—and, oh, imaginary numbers, which we should have banned right from the beginning, because really, imaginary numbers? Who the hell thought those were a good idea? We also threw out all those numbers that people liked to bring up on the false assumption that they would impress other people, like the number of stars in the galaxy or the number of neural connections in the brain, numbers which had probably been covered when we got rid of the big numbers—but again, like the number gazillion, better safe than sorry.

At that point we went back and reviewed what we'd done away with so far and decided, you know what, we really didn't need the billions after all, our wealthy would just have to find another way to count their money, especially as they hadn't been doing the good we'd asked them to do. And while we were at it, we got rid of the millions as well, just to show everyone we meant business. That's when someone, we think it was Larry, brought up the radical idea of eliminating every number that we couldn't count on our own fingers and toes. Now that took some pondering, because of how severe and limiting it was, but after we'd each had a go of it, seeing if we could make due with such a restricted set of numbers, we resolved to pass it on the condition that we reintroduced all the odd numbers up to nineteen—or, in Larry's case, twenty-one, as he had an additional pinky toe.

After that, we figured we were done. We'd brought our numbers down to a manageable level, a level that anyone could account for, and we celebrated what we'd accomplished. But over the next several weeks, quite without wanting to, we began to wonder if we couldn't do even better, if, with a little more sacrifice, we couldn't get our total number of numbers down even further. It was suggested that because we wore shoes—we weren't animals, after all—we would rarely be using our toes to count anyway, so why not abolish eleven through twenty as well—or again, in Larry's case, twenty-one? That got us to thinking that we might be able to get ourselves down to five, by ruling that we would only be allowed to count on one hand at a time, or what about three, the magic number? That's when it occurred to us that because we cared so much about love, and because we had already agreed ages ago that relationships must only exist in pairs—none of that French *ménage à trois* crap for us—wouldn't it be fitting if we had just two numbers, just one and two? But before we were able to finalize our decision and turn it into law, a wave of mysticism spread across our country, reminding us that all the numbers in the world, and all the separation we thought there was because of them, was really just an illusion, and that in fact everything was One. And so that's what we settled on, just one number, the number one, and we used it to account for everything, everything within the whole of the universe. And it was enough.

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**Wolfgang Wright** is the author of the comic novel *Me and Gepe*, the forthcoming science fiction novel *Being*, and over forty short works scattered across the ether. He doesn't tolerate gluten so well, quite enjoys watching British panel shows, and devotes a little time each day to contemplating the Tao.



## About Berlin

*Inspired by The Michelberger Hotel*



## The woman they never met

*Inspired by “Hard to Hide” by The Slow Show*

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**Laura S. Martineé:** I'm a restless soul who seeks adventurous puzzles through my words and artworks where I can find a space in whose dimension there's a truce between the mind and the heart. I always try to capture the imperfection in the reaction versus the perfection in the elaborated thought.

# Atomic Theory

the last time i saw you was in the steam of your coffee.  
you were a whispered threat across the plastic table,  
a molecular-level scream.  
i trembled, crystalline.

we waited for the spare tyre. my hands were shaking.  
the waitress put a plate in front of you, warned you it was hot.  
i hoped that you would burn your fingerprints,  
leave their ashes for someone to find – someone  
who didn't know our names.

for the next week, i dreamed of atoms,  
phase shifts, the endlessly vibrating world. you and i  
as colliding particles, your force  
infinitely sending me sideways.

after i left, your country froze.  
the power lines splintered under the weight of endless futures  
and in their final song, i hoped you could hear my voice.

when the concrete cracked in the parking lot, i was there,  
wrestling my expanding self between the slabs.

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**Bethan Holloway-Strong** is a poet, but mostly a university administrator. Her work has been published in *The Mays Anthology*, *BAIT Magazine*, and *Notes Magazine*. She appeared on the 52nd season of University Challenge, her favourite Ben & Jerry's flavour is Phish Food, and she has lived on three continents.

# The Friday Journal

January 19:

Hello, Journal - another job, another town - this time I'm in Indiana (yawn). I've been here over a week, walked in Monday morning to find the usual note addressed to "Father O'Malley." My boss still sees me as Bing Crosby's Catholic priest from the film "Going My Way" – you know, the efficiency expert. I'm just a secular, updated version, hired to troubleshoot and automate businesses instead of churches. I used to like the traveling, but it's getting old. This office is behind the times; no Internet advertising, old PC's, salesmen don't carry laptops, notebooks or smart phones - they actually phone in their orders! Fred's the office manager. He's not technically savvy, but at least he's cooperating. He listened when I told him they need a whole new computer system. He's let the office limp along with clunky old technology 'cause he hasn't kept up, but before I leave, I'll have him thinking, speaking and acting Microsoft XP, the World Wide Web, advertising on the Internet, inter-office networking with a LAN and online sales. And all salesmen will carry and use laptops or notebooks and smart phones. No ifs, ands or butts. See you next week.

February 2:

Fred didn't want to shut down for a couple of days while I installed new hardware and software, but I stroked him - pardon that expression - and he finally came on board. Everything is up and running. We should have all the wrinkles ironed out in a week. Doing business online should make for some nice sales numbers by the end of the year. Fred's going to look pretty dumb for having dragged his technological feet for so long. I went out to dinner with him last night. He and his wife showed me around town and even introduced me to a cousin of his wife's named April. I thought I'd hate Indianapolis - they used to call it "India-no-place." Actually, it's not bad here - enough stuff to do and places to go. It should be a required Midwest stop for a Republican like me.

February 9:

I could get used to this place - last weekend I took April out for a terrific meal and some good acoustic jazz. Forgive me for imitating that Dell computer guy on TV (I fold my hands together to pray and pretend to scratch my beard): "April is so-o-o-o nice." The new computer system is running smoothly. Fred is surprised that orders have already started to roll in from the Internet ads. I wonder why he doesn't feel threatened by me. I guess he sees me as just a rolling stone - a traveling consultant who'll be out of his hair soon, but he could be wrong about that. Tuesday night April and I had dinner at Fred's house - his wife sure can cook. I don't care how nice he is - businesses can't afford to have a guy who's behind the times running things. You have to keep up, or you fall behind, and falling behind is death.

February 16:

This town has everything you need and less of what you don't need, like crime, gridlock and the black soot that percolates through the air in New York, Chicago and L.A. - how'd I ever stand those places? The more I see April the more I want to stay here. Back to the office: glad I was a double major in college. Having an information systems and accounting background gives me a leg up on everybody - I can understand the books and fix the computers. Fred's books aren't horrible, but they're not 100% up to par. I didn't want to accuse him of mis-management or having Enron-style accounting, but I had to say something to his bosses. They're paying me to keep them informed. The books could be straightened out with an in-house audit, but a guy who lets his books go - you know what I mean. I just found out what they're paying Fred - way too much for what he does. I could do the job much better for that kind of money.

March 2:

Everybody seems to look up to me around here. It's like I was the boss and not just some hired gun. Once again, it's my dual-threat background. I

thought Fred had gotten with the program but I think he's started to resent me. Normally I'd be history by now, but I told my home office there are still things to be done. I feel at home here - am not looking forward to picking up and moving on.

March 16:

I've had it; I'm not working with this turkey any more. Fred's not incompetent, so they can't fire him outright, but I'm in daily touch with his board of directors. They're going to expand the Indianapolis office - maybe quadruple its size. Along with that goes a big salary for whoever runs this place. Somebody who has both the business and computer know-how would be perfect. I'd like to stay here - no more moves. I want to settle down - maybe with April. Now there's just one problem: getting rid of Fred. I don't think he'll take a second-banana role with me as his boss, so he's got to go.

March 23:

The vice president came into town for a meeting. In the corridor I tried to grab him, but I couldn't get him alone. I was going to tell him who should be running the place. Fred is onto me: he tried to get me fired. I'm going to make him wish he'd never heard of Al Dennison. I'll get rid of him, last thing I do. Then the boss will have only one guy who knows what's going on around here - they'll have to keep me.

April 6:

I didn't have to go after Fred the way I did but it's either him or me, and let's face it: he's not cutting it. April ditched me. She let me take her out to dinner then gave me the goodbye routine, the little shit. Fred told her what I've been up to. Sure, I trumped up the case against Fred - had to make it look convincing. I got the company's president eating outta my hand. He'll hire me, sure as shooting. I met a lady in a bar at happy hour the other day - her name's Monica. I've seen her almost every day - she always wears black. She came right

out with her history the night I met her - didn't want to hold anything back, she said. That wasn't the only thing she didn't hold back. It seems she did a little time for ripping off her boss. I'll keep her around, but not to marry; she's a little rough around the edges - not the kind of person you can trust.

April 20:

My scheme worked - Fred's out and I'm in - temporarily. The president said he'll ask the board of directors to make it permanent. Fred's suing me, the little prick - says I cost him his job. Saying it's one thing, proving it's another. I haven't told Monica anything - this'll all blow over and I'll be on top of the world.

April 27:

I'm worried: when word about what happened got back to the board, they were shocked. Sure, I'm a consultant, but guys like me get tired of it, they want to settle down - happens all the time. When they asked me how much money I wanted I told 'em \$180,000 a year - they're considering it: That's like half a million or more in New York City. It's more than I've ever made, I'll tell you that. When I told Monica, she flipped; you can buy a big-assed house here for less than a half million and the cost of living is only 60% of what it is in the East Coast cities. I'll be rich. Monica's latched onto me - I call her "Virginia Hill," with respect to her shaky background, not to mention mine - I guess that makes me her Bugsy Siegel. I was drunk the other night and I let it slip what I pulled here - she called me "Judas" and I laughed just so she wouldn't know she hurt my feelings, but I didn't like it - not one bit. She better watch it, mistresses can be fixed too - just like office managers. I borrowed a bunch of money and bought a penthouse condo downtown - you should see it. She wanted to move in right away, but nothing doing. I still have my doubts about her.

May 4:

That little weasel Fred filed a civil suit against me - shit! They're not nearly as hard to prove as criminal cases. The board took me on temporarily, pending the outcome of the trial, and only because they didn't have anybody else who knows the score there. They don't trust me - how do you like that? The board said they weren't happy the way things turned out - my behavior was "unseemly and untoward," in their jargon. If they fire me, I'll fix their little red wagons, I'll ... I'll ... I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow their house down. I've got it! I'll import a virus and their new system will be so jammed up they'll never get straight. By then I'll have another job. Monica still wants to move in with me, but who needs it: she's 39 years old! I may find some 22-year-old bimchette and kiss old Monica off.

May 25:

Somebody sent me a video of "Macbeth" in the mail. There was no return address on it. He must think it's April Fool's Day, but that was ... some time ago. Fred thinks he's smart. The trial's not going so well - for me, that is. He's suing me for lost wages and the disruption I caused to his life. I sent him a copy of "Going My Way," so he'll know what efficiency experts do for a living.

June 1:

The trial's really going badly. Fred's lawyer dug into what happened at the office; I don't think the company's going to keep me and my lawyer said I better get ready to come up with some money, 'cause it looks like he's going to win a settlement. Guess I should have settled out of court. This condo - what the hell do I do with it now?

June 8:

Shit! Had to sell my condo at a big loss. I was found guilty, I'm out of a job and I'm crashing at Monica's place. She called me a loser. She said she's going

to find somebody else, somebody with "prospects" - what does that mean? Somebody with one of those tin pans who looks for gold? No- that's prospectors. What can I say about what I did? Nothing ventured, nothing gained - that's Hemingway, isn't it? No, wait a minute – it's, it's Christopher Marlowe or one of those guys from way back when. Don't know where I'll be next time I write. I feel like I'm sinking now, but I'll float to the top again, just like the scum on a pond - maybe those aren't the exact words I wanted but ... oh, never mind. C'est la vie. Bye for now, journal.

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**Doug Dawson** has written for the U.S. Defense Department and for car and trade magazines and has had his short stories published by Academy of the Heart & Mind, Ariel Chart, Aphelion Webzine, Literary Yard, Scars Publications, The Scarlet Leaf Review and many others and are included in the print anthologies "The Devil's Doorknob II" and "Potato Soup Journal's "Best Stories of 2022."

His book "Route 66 – the TV Series, the Highway and the Corvette" will be published by BearManor Media in 2024.

# The End

Thank you, truly. This journal couldn't exist without you.

See you soon!

- Nine Muses Review

