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	PAGE:
JULIAN BREAM'S GUITAR	3
ABBY CAPLIN	
GRIT	4
SUSAN HARR	
ACCORDING TO WEBMD	8
SARA SOLBERG	
THERE ARE OTHER GHOST STORIES	13
TONY TALLENT	
DO TO ME WHAT I CAN DO TO YOU	17
JOE BAUMANN	
CRUST	23
DELLA O'HARA	
A DIFFERENT KIND OF MAGIC	27
ISAAC RUSSO	
TERMINAL VELOCITY	30
DANIEL DISTASIO	
DEMOTING PLUTOD MAN TEACHES THE LIVING	36
MARTY CARLOCK	
A DEAD MAN TEACHES THE LIVING	37
WHO WE ARE	38
LYNN HOGGARD	

NIGHT	39
DEAR BODY DANIEL MOORE	
DIRGE	41
G.H. MOSSON	
INFLUENCE	42
EDWARD LEE	
BEND BACK ANY FARTHER AND YOU'LL BE ON THE FLOOR	43
ALICIA ASKENASE	
END OF SEASON	45
WILL WALKER	
TEARING	47
JIM ROSS	
FENCE, BROKEN	48
EDWARD LEE PHOTOGRAPHY	
FORENSIC FORAGING FINDS	49
BACK ALLEY EXCLAMATION	50
WILLIAM CRAWFORD	
ADIRONDACK WOODS	51
LIVING DRIFTWOOD	52
CRAIG WEISZ	
MY TROUBLED TIMES—"TAKE THE TOOTH OUT"	53
JOHN BALLANTINE	

JULIAN BREAM'S GUITAR

ABBY CAPLIN

Nylon strings pulsed by perfect
nails finished in diamond dust, a thumb's
downward stroke
in billowing freestyle—
Strange hollow mahogany
stringed carnival
calliope, prancing and swing-
dancing like a harpsichord
come out of the closet,
his muscular libretto
of *Bourrée*, or *Granada*'s triplets
blowing soap bubbles over Spanish plazas
at daybreak. The crowd leans forward,
breath held as dark jasmine echoes
in wine-bites of laughter
down cobbled alleys—
a roguish smile, in his arms
a trembling torso of rosewood.

Abby Caplin was a finalist for the 2018 rash award in poetry, semi-finalist for the 2018 willow run poetry book award, nominee for the 2018 sundress best of the net award, honorable mention for 2017 Quercus fall poetry book award, award recipient of the San Francisco poets eleven 2016, and finalist for the 2015 anna Davidson Rosenberg poetry award. Her poems have appeared in *Alyss*, *Apt*, *Canary*, *Catamaran*, *Dunes Review*, *Love's Executive Order*, *Mudlark Flash*, *Salt Hill*, *TSR: the Southampton review*, *these fragile lilacs*, *third Wednesday*, *tikkun*, and others. She is a physician practicing mind-body medicine in San Francisco. [Http://abbycaplin.com](http://abbycaplin.com)

GRIT

SUSAN EVE HAAR

I'm in the kitchen cutting carrots. The floor is slate, so I'm wearing socks. It's one of those Berkshire houses; we've rented it for the weekend so our City kids can see the leaves change color, those glorious, incendiary oranges and reds.

The house is warm, and the kitchen lights are pushing back against the imminent darkness. It's beginning to rain. I am contemplating the nature of love. I'm remembering those teenagers on the subway yesterday, two raggedy teenagers with multiple piercings, kissing with such intensity, such yearning, such total osculatory absorption. I'm thinking about that, and tearfully slicing onions, when my little girl runs in, flushed with cold, her bangs slapped against her forehead by rain.

"Will's been in an accident," she gasps.

Something in me slows down, that chill of anticipation that prepares you for anything or nothing. That's when my husband runs in, slamming the door behind him. Will is draped over his shoulder. Steve is wild-eyed and terrified; he looks like he's run from a fire, or perhaps a hunter with a deer.

"He went over the handlebars."

I reach for Will. I take him in my arms and hold him, his body across mine, against my heart. We wrap around each other. I'm not ready to look at the damage yet. Not here. I carry him out of the kitchen to the master bathroom and shut the door behind me. I sit on the edge of the tub feeling his skinny bird body, his ribs heaving in and out. He's shuddering. I slow my breathing, I will him to quiet, I will him to be strong. Then I tip him back so I can see his face. It's hard to tell with all the blood, one eyelid scraped raw, the eye already closed. But I force it open though he bucks and screams. Both eyes are intact, and he can wiggle his jaw.

He's sobbing now. I see that there's grit ground deep into his face. One side is skinned, streaked with dirt and gravel, the gray embedded like gunpowder residue. There's clotted blood below his mouth and caked on his jaw. I see that's raw too, all the layers of skin scraped away, the flesh red beneath. He shrieks:

"Don't touch me!" But I turn him carefully and pull off his shirt off while he screams. He is so thin, the bones so delicate, his scapula like bound wings. The knobs of his spine are raked raw, each a small red circle like a bloody dime. And that's the extent of it; the damage is succinct. I try to explain this to Will. It's going to be okay.

"No, no, no!" he screams. I hold him, I wait. The screaming becomes a kind of drone, he's getting tired and pauses for a moment, exhausted.

"Look, Will, am I your mother?" I ask, and he nods, clinging to me with both hands, his body still shaking.

"Do I love you?"

He knows this is a trick question, but he nods anyway.

“I know you’ll be okay. We just have to clean it.” I say this in my most matter-of-fact way.

“No!” he shrieks. “It will never be okay. Never!” Snot festoons his nose. “You’re lying. You lie!” and the tears slide out from under the shut eye and pool in the valley of his swollen cheek.

I pivot, put the plastic stopper over the drain, and turn on the taps. I rock Will while he wails; the steam rises around us. Dipping in a hand, I run more cold water. I know he doesn’t trust me.

By the time the tub is full, we’re both a little worn out, but still he flails out at me, retracting his legs as I lift him into the water. He stands there naked, the water up to his knees, sobbing. One eye is oozing a sticky liquid that mats his eyelashes, and the bruising is rising fast, purpling his face. I’m afraid to touch him. I strip off my clothes, drop them on the floor, and get in. Will stands facing me, his eyes shut. There’s a smudge like an experimental bit of moustache under his nose, and the wounds on his faces are already clotting. He holds his arms in front of his face, warding me off. One wrist is badly scratched and already so swollen it doesn’t match the other.

“Is it enough if I kneel?” he begs, as if I can give him an exemption.

“Look, you do it.” I hand him the washcloth moistened with warm water and guide his hand upward toward his face. He shrieks, though the cloth isn’t even there yet. It’s like when he’s over-tickled and all you have to do is wave a finger.

“We’ll wait ’til you’re ready.” I run some more hot water, warming us both. Will crouches, curled up on himself, all bone and shiver and hurt.

“I will never be ready. Never.” He glares at me one-eyed and wild. “You can wait until I’m a grown-up. You can wait until I’m dead. You can wait three hundred years so I’m dead anyway before we get out of this tub. I will never be ready!”

“Look,” I say. “You could do one-sided bubbles. Like this.” I make a fish face and blow out gently, my face tipped into the water. “Can you do it? Try.”

“Do I have to?” He’s still crying, his face so puffy I can hardly see his good eye, squinched up in misery.

“If you do it I won’t have to use the cloth.”

“But what about my eyes?”

“Close them.”

“I closed them when I hit.” He shivers.

“Do the cloth,” I order, holding it out again, and he weeps, batting it away.

“No, don’t touch me!”

Now I am beginning to catch his despair, and there's a whiff of panic between us, that somehow neither of us will ever get out of this tepid tub, caught in the twilight zone of injury.

"If you can't do it, someone has to. It can be me. It can be your dad. Or it can be the doctor. But he will hold you down and just do it," I warn.

"So, call him, I don't care!" Will screams.

"Who?"

"Daddy, anybody." Will is desperate and wily and he's calling my bluff.

The door opens. It's my husband. He's changed his clothes and is wearing fleece slippers. His thick hair, salt and peppered, is combed carefully back, the furrows distinct, gelled back. I want to kill him.

"Hey, how're you doing?" He sits down casually on the toilet, crossing his legs. He leans forward, checking us both out.

"We're okay," I say.

"He was wearing a helmet." He looks at me for forgiveness. "I could drive you to Lenox; they've got a great emergency room," he suggests. Now Will begins to scream in earnest.

"We can take care of it."

"You're sure?" He looks at me earnestly, his pale blue eyes taking us in, Will and me, some naked lump of humanity.

"I'm sure," I say. "GO."

The door shuts behind him and there is a sense now that we are in this together, me and him. I look at him, my poor little wounded wiggle.

"Is there anything," I ask him, "anything that you want that you don't expect to ever get?" I am fishing in the dark here, but he quiets and says:

"Yes. There's a car. I saw it on TV. It has one red side and one blue side, and it moved with a box and a pointer and it could back up and turn over and it never crashed into anything; it just flipped over and raced away so fast." Will's voice is rhapsodic now, he's almost in a trance and I say,

"Think about it. Think about the car. If you let me clean you up so there's no more dirt, I will get you the car. That exact car. I will get it tomorrow."

And he says, "Do you have to use soap?"

I press the washcloth up to his cheek.

“One,” I say, and take it away. We count up to eleven because I favor odd numbers, then work backward, just for variety. He cries and cringes, but he lets me do it.

“Think of the car,” I command. “Where will we get the car? Do they have it at McCays or will we have to go to Toys ‘R’ Us?”

“Stop it, stop it, you’re hurting me!” he cries. “You have hurt me more than a hundred times. More than infinity. And it will not stop!”

I grab him now and pull him to me; he’s struggling and hitting out at me. I hold his arms back and I whoosh out the dirt, daubing, squeezing the soapy water while he howls. I don’t quit. I won’t let him scar.

His face is raw, and the knobs of his spine are leaking blood. The grit is gone.

“We’re done,” I announce. I lift him out of the tub gently, my hands under his arms. I wrap him in a towel and he hunches against me, one side of his face so delicate, the pale skin translucent, and the other distorted, oozing, clean.

“It was terrible.” He cuddles against me now.

“Very terrible,” I say, and I try not to cry.

“But you know,” he looks up at me tenderly, “we had to do it.”

To date, Susan’s work has been primarily in theater. Her play *the darlings* was published by Broadway publishing (2006). Her plays have also been published in the best men’s stage monologues of 2007 and in the best 10-minute plays of 2018. Her work has been produced at primary stages, the Women’s Project, 13th Street Rep, and a variety of other venues. Susan’s work has been recently published in *biostories*, *bluestem*, the Borfski press, *Citron Review*, *Forge*, the *Furious Gazelle*, *Glint Literary* magazine, *Saint Ann’s* review, *Stonecoast* review, and *sweet tree* review. She is a member of the actors studio, ensemble studio theatre, and HB playwright’s unit, was a selected participant at the women’s project, and served a residency at new river dramatists. Her work is included in the book of monologues, *radical thinking inside a box*, which will be published by Smith & Kraus in 2019. She also has monologues, which will be included in *best women’s monologue 2018* and another in *best men’s monologues 2018*, both to be published by Smith & Kraus. Her essay “Grit” has received an honorable mention from *glimmer train* in 2019. She received her J.D. and a B.A. in visual studies from Harvard university. She is currently a real estate consultant to the dean of New York university law school. When she’s not writing, she enjoys gardening and beekeeping.

ACCORDING TO WEBMD

SARA SOLBERG

Symptom Checker

Identify possible conditions and treatments related to your symptoms

(This tool does not provide medical advice.)

Please answer the questions below to the best of your abilities

Age?

24

Gender?

Female

Past or current conditions (optional)

Skip

Current medications (optional)

Skip

Are you currently pregnant? (optional)

No

Allergies (optional)

None

What is your main symptom? (Please search in the box below, or choose one of the common symptoms listed.)

I habitually panic that my dad is about to die.

Please tell us more. What are your symptom details?

It's been twenty minutes, and Dad still hasn't answered my text? He must have had a heart attack—he must be lying on the floor of his office this very moment, phone on his desk and out of reach, unable to call for an ambulance. The hour hand of my alarm clock has just flicked past four, and Dad's not home yet, despite his promise that he'd be back sometime in the early afternoon? Clearly, he's been in a car crash; maybe a deer jumped in front of him and he swerved, careening off a back country road and striking a tree at 60 miles per hour. For seemingly no reason, a sensation of dread floods me as I sprinkle some of Mom's Russian tea mix into a mug of hot water? It must be a paranormal phenomenon, the universe telling me that I'm about to get a call from the police, a stranger's voice regretfully informing me that my dad has been in an accident, there was nothing they could do.

I lie awake in bed at night, staring into the darkness of my room, and worry. Surely, dinner meetings don't go this late. I toy with the idea of calling him, but the thought that he might be annoyed by the two *Are you okays* I've already texted him that evening stops me, fingers digging into the duvet in favor of reaching for my phone. I hear a car coming down our road and hold my breath, hopeful. The headlights illumine my dim bedroom for a moment, but then they continue past our house, plunging me back into darkness and dread. Dad's still not home. What if he's had a heart attack?

Do you have any additional symptoms?

I'm profoundly affected by innocuous things.

Please tell us more.

Yesterday morning, while rifling through the cupboards opposite the washing machine, I stumbled across the bag of eucalyptus Epsom salt I'd stashed there last spring. I pulled open the seal, and the pungent, minty scent wafted against my face like a puff of cigarette smoke; this caused me to cry. I've tried to finish memorizing Liszt's *Un Sospiro*, but there's a wall of deterrence in my mind which prevents me from playing past the halfway point, the eighth page of sheet music repelling me like a cross raised before a vampire. With autumn dryness now crisping the air, I've started to regularly lotion my hands, an action which leaves me feeling acutely empty. When I pass a hospice car on my drive into school—each painted the same uniform blue, the organization's logo plastered across their sides, low to the ground and proficient as the RNs who drive them—I feel some unnamed thing shift deep inside me, as if a creature has found refuge for hibernation in the squishy hollow between my stomach and liver, and has rolled over in its sleep.

Do you have any additional symptoms?

I've started to hoard a variety of items.

Please tell us more.

Admittedly, it's a tendency I've always been prone towards—stowing away the various knickknacks and haberdasheries of life that will never again be useful to me, but are too loved to throw. Lately, though, this tendency has been worsening. A couple months ago, I found a crumpled, oil-stained shopping list that had been lost behind a shelf of dusty soup cans, the *potatoes and apples and corn syrup* transcribed in Mom's looping cursive. The list sat atop the other paper recyclables for about ten minutes before I changed my mind and retrieved it, placing it instead in a shoeboxed collection of yellowing newspaper clippings and timeworn birthday cards and obituaries. A few weeks later, I found a two-inch strand of fraying maroon yarn stuffed beneath a couch cushion, a scrap from the mittens I had knitted for Mom last November; this, too, went into my shoebox of treasures. Then there was the other day, when I came to a

great revelation while scouring the floor of my bathroom: I can never let Dad buy a new toilet brush, because the one we have now is the same one we had when Mom was still here. Its bristles are flecked with particles of her shit, and a visceral part of me finds solace in the realization that I possess something that was once inside her.

I shouldn't think these thoughts. I shouldn't cherish such things.

Thank you for your answers! To help us narrow down the conditions which match your symptoms, please complete the brief questionnaire below.

1. When you panic about your dad dying, you're usually thinking about
 - a. last December, when he left your mom's bedside with the explanation that he was going to make himself something to eat before the bishop arrived to pray with them. Your sister Anna and you kept your mom company for a while. But then your mom fell asleep. This was fine at first, until you tried to wake her for her hourly dose of morphine. You started to hyperventilate when you realized that she wouldn't open her eyes—desperate, wet, gulping breaths as Anna cried out for your dad, who rushed into the room a moment later. You think about how he wept over her, lying unresponsive in her narrow hospice bed, not knowing if she would ever come back from this comatose state. If he would ever get the chance to say goodbye. You think about how broken he sounded when he said "I don't want my last words to her to be 'I'm going to have some lunch before the bishop gets here,'" about how, when she finally did wake, he never left the room without his parting words being murmured affirmations of his love.
 - b. that night, a couple weeks after your mom's death, when your dad locked his keys inside his car. He tried calling you multiple times, but you'd already gone to bed, the ringing muted by the earplugs you can never fall asleep without. You got up around three the next morning, still exhausted, but too restless to stay put. You think about how your stomach plunged, the moment you saw that your dad's bedroom door was open, and realized he'd never made it home. Then you heard the beeping of the answering machine, and your entire world shattered, because you were so, so certain that it was from the hospital, calling to tell you that something had happened, that your dad unfortunately hadn't made it. You never knew the meaning of the word *gratitude* until the moment you pressed the machine's play button—when you heard your dad's voice saying that he was at his office, and could you please bring the spare car keys? You had collapsed against the wall, gasping through tears, overwhelmed by the enormity of your relief and sorrow.
 - c. lying next to him in your parents' bed the night your mom died, squashed between him and Anna. You thought you would suffocate—stifling and sweaty from the heat of their bodies—but didn't move. You think about lying next to him those many nights after, in the spot your mom used to occupy, crying into her pillow and smelling the Vaseline you'd rubbed into the reddened skin under your nose, which was chaffed after three boxes of Kleenex.

Answer: b

2. When innocuous things profoundly affect you, it's because
 - a. they conjure images in your mind, like massaging your mom's swollen feet in a basin of warm water, Epsom salt sprinkled in to try and reduce the water retention her medications caused. Her

ankles and toes were so fat, stretched tight from the fluid beneath, her skin so incredibly dry that small flakes would float around them in the water like white specks in a snow globe, leaving a gritty film at the waterline when you emptied the basin. This should have disgusted you, but it never did. Not in these moments, which felt sacred. Not when your fingers began to prune as you kneaded her soles. Not when you patted her feet dry afterwards, rolling on the socks which clung tight to her bloated calves. This ritual completed, you'd move on to the next, helping her change into a fresh set of pajamas. In the moment of recovery she needed between taking off her shirt and replacing it, you'd rub lotion into her scaly, sore-looking back, trying not to notice the knobs of her spine. When you look at a lotion bottle now, you're deluged with the same feeling of helplessness you'd felt then.

b. they remind you of moments you'd like to forget, like the hospice workers who would drop by multiple times each day, bringing with them an assortment of generic, sterile gifts: unscented creams that wouldn't further irritate your mom's already strained breathing, bottles of liquid morphine to be measured in the packaged syringes they offered next, medication to counteract the swelling of her legs caused by another medication which in turn brought its own side effects for which there was always another medication, tanks of oxygen and clear plastic tubing. A wheelchair, when it became impossible for her to walk more than a few steps. An empty paint bucket and toilet stand, for when journeys to the bathroom were too much. A mourning candle—not for her, but for the rest of your family, to light as you washed her rapidly stiffening body.

c. you have associated them with what could have been. When you sit down to play a Liszt piece, you're reminded of a moment Before, back when you were so blissfully unaware of the things to come. You're reminded of the time your mom and you sat together on the piano bench, arms brushing. You had watched as she meticulously penciled in the ridiculous fingerings for you, playing each measure herself as she went, testing the arpeggios before transcribing her findings above each note on the page. When you look at these notes now, you pang with longing to have that moment back. You think about the vibrant smile that would have overcome her face, if things had been different—if you had finished memorizing Liszt's etude, and she had been there to hear it.

Answer: a, but sometimes the others, as well

3. When you hoard items, it's because

a. they bring peace

b. they bring sorrow

c. they remind you of those last few hours of vigil, your Aunt Sue in the background, silently watching, your dad in a recliner pulled close to your mom's hospice bed, holding her right hand, Anna kneeling on the floor, holding her left. And you, cuddled into your comatose mom's side—just as you did when you'd climb into her bed at night as a child, small and scared—head pressed against her chest, drinking in the sound of her heartbeat like it would quench some incredible thirst. It was snowing outside; your mom had always delighted in the snow, and you wished she could see. You hoard things now like you wanted to hoard her heartbeat that day—cup it in your palms and hold it close to yourself, wrap it in a soft cloth and place it delicately inside a shoebox of cherished things, this unsteady thump that was so incredibly precious to you. You hoard things now to prevent the anguish you felt then, when everything fell silent, the heartbeat you desperately wanted to keep slipping away.

Answer: all of the above

We've found a condition that matches your symptoms!

Your Mom's Death (best match)

[Click here for more details](#)

Your Mom's Death

Overview

There is no cure. This is a fact you will become intimately familiar with, over the few months it will take for the cancer to fully run its course. When you first learn that it's coming, you will write this line in your journal, over and over and over again, until it covers four pages in frantic, tear-mark-warped scrawl: "My mom is dying, and I don't know what to do." As you will find out, the answer is nothing.

But here is something they don't tell you.

When the moment finally arrives, and you've started to calm down—after they've taken her body away, and everyone who was on your mom's list of those to notify has been called, and your dad and Aunt Sue talk quietly in the kitchen, and you huddle next to your sister on the living room loveseat, in front of the Christmas tree, a cup of your mom's Russian tea warming your hands—you will realize that you feel not sadness, but relief. The freefall of waiting has ended. You no longer have to cringe in anticipation of the ground you've been plummeting towards, which looked so distant at first, but then you fell further, and drew closer, and cringed harder as you tried to brace yourself. You no longer have to hold your breath for the upcoming impact, wondering what it will feel like when you finally hit the bottom—how much it will hurt when your bones shatter, your skin splits open, your skull bursts.

The exhaustive freefall of waiting has ended. Huddle against your sister, and breathe deep breath. Fill yourself with the citrusy scent of your mom's Russian tea, and allow the relief to consume you. This is the only cure you will know.

Sara Solberg is a first year MFA candidate at northern Michigan university. She lives in Marquette with her furry partner in crime, Tasha. When she isn't writing, Sara can be found trekking through the expansive forests or kayaking one of the many lakes surrounding her home. Her poetry is forthcoming in the other journal.

THERE ARE OTHER GHOST STORIES

TONY TALLENT

Randy and his two sisters were left at his grandparents' house on a Sunday night when he was nine years old. The house sat in the soft crease of a mountain. It was just out of sight from the highway that cut through the hard base of the Blue Ridge.

"You'll stay here until we get things figured out," his father said.

Randy was too sleepy to ask what they were trying to figure out. Marie and Trish were already asleep on the couch, their pale hair splayed out against the coarse blue upholstery. He fell back into the grumble of a Naugahyde chair. It was more wood than cushion and smelled of smoke and all the britches and behinds that had sat there before him.

"Stay here," Dad said.

He woke up in this brown chair the next morning, and within days he'd claimed it as his own. He was told to stay there, and he did.

A bookcase beside the chair held two things of interest to him. There was a thin Kentucky Twist tobacco box filled with wood shavings so long and intertwined they looked like the endless curl of a doll's hair. Next to the box was a book almost as brown as the Naugahyde chair. He forgot about the tobacco box, and the book won his favor. He mouthed the words of the title over and over: *Ghosts of the Carolinas*.

The book's cover showed an old-fashioned car on the road. The image was out of focus and a sickly, yellow-brown - the color of haunt. This was the kind of car that delivered bad news, the kind of car that would grab unwilling passengers and drop them off in unfriendly places.

The stories were scant though scary, and the pictures - black and white photographs that suggested haunted places - lay like dark punctuation marks. He'd let his sisters sit in the brown chair only if they promised to listen to him read about the ghosts: the mysterious lights that haunted Brown Mountain, the gray man who warned against deadly storms, the lost spirit of a woman on a roadside somewhere in South Carolina.

Randy took long breaths before opening the book. The stories frightened his sisters' small hands into fists. Each story seemed as if it could have happened right next to the very place where they sat, all of it so close to home. They stared at the photos and were convinced they were taken by actual ghosts with crude Polaroid cameras.

He kept the book near and would never loan it, not even to his sisters. It became both a comfort and a curse to him. The stories had him opening doors slowly, suspicious of dim rooms and startled by sudden noises. Still he kept it close. The book traveled with him in the backseat of his grandfather's Buick to Hendersonville to visit Dad. As they turned off on Upward Road from I-26, he saw the large green sign and thought maybe he'd read it incorrectly. Upward Road: the name sounded so much like the title of a gospel song his mother would play on repeat when she went through her religious phases. Later in the summer, he took the book with him when they visited her in a trailer park near Myrtle Beach.

“I just can’t get used to the smell of the water here,” his mother said. The smell was like the worst part of a match that’d just been struck. “Too much sulfur. Like the Devil’s breath,” she said.

His grandmother Neely told him that if he didn’t stop looking at the book he’d bring all those ghosts to life. Her eyes were dark, Randy thought, like the ghost woman in the story who wandered on the roadside. She was always there, always lost, in the same place, year after passing year.

They crisscrossed the Carolinas as his parents moved from job to job, town to town - in separate directions. Sometimes on these trips, his grandfather would take longer routes so they could visit relatives. A great uncle in Camden lived near an outcropping of rocks that looked like a group of tombstones, neglected and slanting toward the ground. There were no children around to play with, so he and his sisters would move in and out of the car, using it like a playhouse. Randy pulled the book out and read three stories to them when the evening sun began to wane. They stayed until it was almost too late to drive home.

As the car pulled away from the house and onto the road, Trish leaned over the front seat.

“Who was that old man back there anyway?”

“That was my brother. Your great uncle. Vance. You know Vance, don’t you?”

“Oh,” she said. “No, I don’t remember him.”

There were many trips and nameless relatives they met and then forgot. The Buick gave way to a Ford station wagon that took them to the addresses written on the backs of postcards or infrequent letters. Grandma Neely packed them sandwiches for the road, the mayonnaise greasing dark spots onto the brown bags. She would give one wave of her hand in a large circle motion before stepping back onto the porch, the station wagon moving down the steep drive toward the pavement of the highway.

The book was tossed in with a suitcase packed too hastily before they set out to see his mother who’d moved to Winston-Salem by then. They agreed to spend the night in her small apartment. Randy and his sisters piled on the floor and Granddad folded himself between the arms of the short couch. Anything to stop his mother’s crying and the spew of her frantic words.

“I’m just so lonely here,” she said, “so lonely.” Later when she had settled down in her bed, she mumbled, “Sweet dreams, anyway.”

Toward midnight, she tore through the rooms of the apartment, throwing glasses and upending furniture and the two pieces of luggage they’d brought along. The edge of a bowl grazed Randy’s temple then shattered against the wall. Everyone had abandoned her, she told them, “I might as well be buried alive!”

Her screams tamed to yells, and then finally a stupor of sleep fell on her again in the dark paneled bedroom. Marie wanted to leave. “She acts plumb possessed,” she said, and began gathering their clothes from the floor. They left while his mother was still asleep.

Randy rummaged through the loosely packed bags in the backseat of the car. His hand reached through T-shirts, wadded blouses and a stiff fold of denim. He could not feel the cover of the book. It

was dark, and he doubted himself. Maybe it had fallen from a bag onto the floorboard? They were already two hours from Winston-Salem. He pleaded with his grandfather to stop the car.

In a swath of yellow light cast over an empty parking lot near the highway, Randy removed each item from the suitcases. His sisters folded the clothes carefully, making neat what had been crumbled in their haste to leave the apartment, and placed everything back before clapping the suitcase shut. His grandfather looked under the car seat and shone the flashlight in the back of the station wagon before he finally said they must have left it behind in the apartment.

“We have to go back for it,” Randy said. His grandfather shook his head in a slow phantom-like motion.

“I’m not going back there,” said Marie.

“Me either,” said Trish. “No way.”

Granddad started the car and they moved away from the light of the parking lot.

“There are other ghost stories,” his grandfather told him.

Randy could not stand the thought of the book being left behind in the cinderblock apartment. “It’s only a book and it’s gone,” they all said to him in one way or another in the days following. But he could still feel its fraying spine in the crook of his palm, the weight of it on his lap.

Somewhere there was the tobacco box filled with wood shavings. There were other things to wonder about, and many other days would fumble and fade into forgetfulness beyond this one.

Marie and Trish tended always to stay close together. Randy found his way, mostly alone. The sisters, on a Thursday evening almost two decades since the long ride from Winston-Salem, pushed themselves against the wall where the blue couch once sat. They watched as the casket was carried through the front door.

Before his death, their grandfather had insisted he be brought home before burial, in the old way. Randy walked with them, and together they looked down into the narrow box. Granddad’s arms were folded across his chest, palms down. There on his arms were the dark welts and cracks where his skin tore so easily in the last few years, mottled and no longer repairable, like the Naugahyde chair where Randy used to sit.

A sudden storm had come through earlier that day, and a sickly yellow-brown light slanted into the room. Here were his sisters standing near him, and his father, who hadn’t been seen in more than a year, was leaning against the doorframe of the kitchen. Here was the slump of his grandmother Neely. And here were aunts and uncles, from Spartanburg, Hickory, Columbia. And the cousins whose names he couldn’t remember. Here they were. Here they all milled around in this small house, these ghosts of the Carolinas.

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DO TO ME WHAT I CAN DO TO YOU

JOE BAUMANN

I. Inside and Out

On a bright spring Saturday, Ricky woke up minus his left hand. Padraic was still snoring, which was unusual because the clock read after nine; he was an early riser, regularly yanking Ricky from sleep as he slid out from beneath the top sheet to make coffee, whose gurgling percolation would pull Ricky into consciousness. They'd stayed up late at a dinner party, dragging themselves home after midnight, Ricky dry-mouthed from one too many IPAs and Padraic blitzzy-eyed from wearing his contact lenses for too long. They'd downed glasses of water and made out in the kitchen before tumbling into bed, too exhausted for anything more than mild groping.

When Ricky rolled over to nudge Padraic that morning, he found himself staring at a blank space where his fingers, knuckles, and wormy raised veins should have been. Instead of losing his mind with terror, he stared at the stump of his wrist, smooth and pale like a mallet missing its head. He thought he might be dreaming, but the sunbeams squeezing through the venetian blinds felt real and warm, and when he bit his cheek he felt the hot pressure of his molars and even the slight, squeaky rupture of skin, a buggy drizzle of blood gathering on his tongue. When he tried to wriggle his nonexistent fingers, he felt the twitch of his forearm and even the flutter of phalanges, even though they were nowhere to be seen.

Ricky decided to experiment. Rather than waking Padraic—who would surely screech and run around in a weed-hangover blur as if he was the one who'd lost an appendage—Ricky set the stump against Padraic's bare chest, in the small trough between his pecs, right on the ridge of his sternum, as though placing a Ming vase on a pedestal. The sensation was sharp and immediate and jolting: Ricky could feel the hard line of Padraic's ribs and the soft, tight muscle of his slow-beating heart. It felt like a ball of flower petals, all mashed together and slicked with some kind of lacquer and thumping against his invisible fingers. He could sense the thrum of Padraic's pulse, blood race-tracking through his cardiovascular system like millions of cars on a speedway. The buzzing moved through Ricky's phantom fingers and up into his wrist. His own blood circulated in concert with Padraic's, their heartbeats curling into synchronization. He felt hypnotized.

Carefully, Ricky moved atop him, thighs spread so each knee was gently placed next to Padraic's hips. Then he lowered the stump to Padraic's stomach. He felt around. Acid slipped over his nowhere fingers. Padraic's abdominals compressed around his palm, spongy and strong. Ricky felt the snaky belly dance of Padraic's intestines. He moved down to Padraic's thighs, with their thick cords of quad muscle, then the rocks of his calves, and finally the delicate lattice of his feet. They'd met nearly ten years ago, and Ricky knew, it seemed, as much as there could possibly be to know about Padraic. His habits were like Ricky's habits, like his need to floss twice a day, and work on a sudoku puzzle right before bed, and go running every Monday evening. Ricky's tics—how he swept a hand through his hair when he was nervous, bounced a leg if he sat still for too long, had to chew gum after eating Mexican food—had become Padraic's. And yet this was a new discovery, a new height, a new something.

Padraic stirred, his slow, shallow breathing hitching with consciousness. Ricky moved his arm back up to Padraic's chest, felt the rise of his heart-rate and the squishy expansion of his lungs. When Padraic's eyes opened, they were droopy with the fug of sleep. He blinked twice, glanced at Ricky's face, then looked down at his own naked torso, where Ricky's arm was planted like a flesh-and-bone obelisk.

“Um,” Padraic said.

“My hand,” Ricky said.

“Yeah.”

“It’s disappeared. Or it might be invisible. Can you feel this?”

“Like a feather duster’s been stuffed down my throat? Yes.”

Ricky withdrew his arm. “Better?”

“Oddly colder.”

“I can’t really feel my fingers.” Ricky laid the stump against the bedspread. “Huh.”

“What?” Padraic stared down at the blank space where Ricky’s hand should have lain.

“Well, when I touched you I could feel inside you, but now I can’t feel anything with that hand.”

“That non-hand.”

“Right.” Ricky lifted his arm and stamped the stump to his own chest. “Nothing. Nada.” He pressed it against Padraic’s side.

“This is disturbing,” Padraic said, wriggling. “I could feel you in there, like you were probing my liver.”

“That’s because I was. Felt kind of like a sushi roll.”

“This seems unfair.”

“How so?”

“You, able to do something to me I can’t do to you.”

“Yeah, but you still have both hands.” Ricky held up his stump. “I’m not sure I can even write anymore. Typing is out.” An edge curled into his voice, like he’d just been punched in the stomach but was working to hide the nausea and pain. “I can’t work out or cook or anything.” Padraic saw tears crowd the corners of Ricky’s eyes, glossing the chocolatey irises.

“Hey.” He laid his hands on Ricky’s hips. “We’ll figure it out. In the meantime,” he said, guiding Ricky’s stump back to his chest, “at least you have this.” He pressed Ricky’s nub to his skin. They laid in silence, their breathing falling into a steady syncopation, Ricky inhaling as Padraic exhaled. Ricky let his phantom fingers dangle through Padraic’s bone and muscle and aorta, the warm pulse of life pushing into his own heartbeat. Padraic, his eyes closed, felt touched in a way he never had before: deep down, electric, the peak of radiant summit.

II. Outside and In

On a bright spring Saturday, Ricky slipped from bed while Padraic slept in, letting out atypical wet snores, perhaps a carryover from smoking weed the night before, for the first time in a dozen years, at the tail-end of a dinner party. Ricky didn't mind; it gave him the perfect opportunity to unearth the spyglass he'd found for three dollars at a yard sale weeks ago, intending to give it to Padraic for his birthday but deciding it served better as one of those random gestures of giving that, Ricky thought, couples needed to keep the energy up.

When he woke Padraic, he first offered him a glass of tap water, which he slucked down in half a dozen quick, loud gulps. He flailed back on the bed, arms thwacking on the pillows.

"I feel like I've been whacked by a semi-truck. No more weed for me."

"You only took, like, one hit."

"I'm out of practice, I guess. I had this wild dream where you didn't have a left hand."

"Strange." Ricky set the glass down on the nightstand and pulled the spyglass from behind his back. "Here."

Padraic scooped up. "What's this?"

"Just a little something."

"For what? What's the occasion?"

Ricky shrugged. "It's Saturday."

"I don't have a gift for you."

Ricky lobbed himself over Padraic and slipped beneath the sheets. "There's no scorecard. Try it out."

"What would I look at?"

"Anything." Ricky gestured to the window, where sunlight was squelching in through the old venetian blinds. "There's a whole world out there, Padraic."

Padraic took the spyglass, but instead of leaping up and pointing it out the window, he turned it toward Ricky.

"Whoa," he said.

"What?"

Padraic lowered the spyglass and scanned it. "Where'd you say you got this?"

"Yard sale. Why?"

He scanned Ricky again. "I can see you."

"I'm lying right here."

"I mean inside you."

"Inside me?"

Padraic described the marrow of Ricky's bones, yellow and alien, the coursing of his blood, the goopy blips of fat along his arms and hips ("Okay, okay," Ricky said, swatting the air).

"I can see your heart." Padraic aimed the spyglass at Ricky's center and leaned up. "It's like a cancer-filled fist."

"Please do not use the word cancer to describe my heart. It's disturbing. Let me see that thing." Ricky snatched the spyglass from Padraic and turned it on him. "Well, that's not fair. All I see is a smeary pile of peach shit."

Padraic slapped at Ricky's thigh and rabbit-punched him along the kidneys. Ricky prodded at Padraic's ribs with his free hand. He held the spyglass up in the air, like a precious electronic he was keeping out of water.

They laughed and jostled and the smacking and punching subsided into gentle prods. Ricky rolled onto his back. They both inhaled deep and hard. Padraic took the spyglass.

"Your eyeballs," he said. "I can see them rolling around in there. And your teeth. Your tongue is huge. It looks like you're trying to swallow a salamander or something. Your temples are twitching. And your brain. Textbooks have nothing on this thing."

"Please stop it," Ricky said.

"Your whole head does stuff when you talk! Say something else."

"This is disconcerting to me."

"Good. Something else."

Ricky rolled his head toward the spyglass, lay still, and then jerked forward with a growling yell. Padraic shuddered and leaned back, lowering the spyglass.

"Jesus. What was that for?"

"I felt like a biology experiment. Something on a microscope slide."

"Sorry." Padraic set the spyglass on his nightstand. "It was just kind of neat to see. Last time I saw inside something like that, it was when we dissected frogs in tenth grade biology. This guy that sat behind me broke his frog's jaw and made it sing and dance like it was in a cabaret."

“I held a human brain once,” Ricky said. “I was in seventh grade. I can’t remember why, but some woman brought an actual human brain to science class. I got to hold it.”

“Eew.”

Ricky shrugged. “I was wearing latex gloves. I can’t remember if it was heavier or lighter than I thought it would be. The brain stem looked a little bit like a really long artichoke heart. More gray, though.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I don’t know. What does my brain look like?”

Padraic picked up the spyglass again. “It looks like a brain, hard at work.”

“That’s a terrible answer.”

“What would be a good answer?”

“I don’t know.”

“I like seeing you this way. It’s a nice gift.”

“I meant for you to look at the stars. Maybe our weird neighbors from time to time. Not me.”

Padraic lowered the spyglass. “But you’re way more interesting than them.” He scanned Ricky’s abdomen. “Contract those,” he said, poking at Ricky’s stomach. “I can see all your little muscle fibers.”

“This makes me uncomfortable.”

“Why?”

“You can do to me something I can’t do to you.”

Padraic chewed his lip. “Okay. Here’s an idea.” He presented Ricky with the spyglass. “You go over there.” He pointed to the far side of the bedroom.

“Why?”

“Just do it.”

Ricky went.

“Now look.”

He held up the spyglass and aimed it at Padraic.

“I’m too close,” Ricky said, shaking his head. “You’re still just a blur.”

“Well, okay, just look at me the normal way then.”

Ricky lowered the spyglass and snorted. Padraic had pulled off his underwear and was lying naked, spread eagle on the bed. He’d brought his hands together, held up high, fingers curled into the shape of a heart.

“Lovely view,” Ricky said.

“You don’t need to see inside me to know what’s in there.”

Ricky crept to the bed.

“I’ll always tell you,” Padraic said. He lowered his arms.

Ricky left the spyglass on the nightstand.

“Any time you ask,” Padraic said.

Ricky leaned over him.

“Any time at all.”

Joe possesses a Ph.D. in English from the university of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as the editor-in-chief of Rougarou: an online literary journal and the southwestern review. He is the author of ivory children: flash fictions, and his work has appeared in Electric Literature, Electric Spec, On Spec, Barrelhouse, Eleven Eleven, Zone 3, Ellipsis..., and many others. He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at St. Charles community college in St. Charles, Missouri, and has been nominated for three pushcart prizes. He is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of the gateway review: A Journal of Magical Realism.

CRUST

DELIA O'HARA

Our mother was one of those women who could make a perfect apple pie in half an hour, and she made one every Sunday from Labor Day until Christmas. She didn't measure the ingredients, just cut a hunk of shortening into a pile of salted flour with two kitchen knives until it was the size of peas, threw in a little more flour dabbed up into a paste with cold water, and gathered the mixture together first with a fork and then with her hands. The dough chilled in the fridge while she stripped eight Mackintosh apples of their jackets, one continuous ribbon apiece — red mottled with that true apple green. She rolled out the first piecrust round, sliced apples into the bottom, covered them with sugar, butter and a good dash of cinnamon, rolled out the second crust to a uniform thickness, fit it over the mound of apples, secured it to the bottom crust with drops of water, trimmed it, fluted the edge with her fingers, picked out an "A" on the top crust with the tines of a fork, and eased the pie into the oven.

When it was done, she set it on a metal rack on the counter to cool, then the roast went into the oven. Peeled potatoes rested in cold water in a heavy pot and the succotash was ready for steaming. At that, she went off to visit her own mother in the nursing home. It was our job to keep an eye on things while she was gone.

That first Sunday the crust disappeared, Mom saw what had happened as soon as she got home. When she called us out to the kitchen, her voice jagged with anger, we could see the cinnamon-crust ed apples through a hole that began at the right leg of the A and went all the way out to the edge of the glass dish.

Tom and I had been doing homework, drawing, watching TV, all the things we did on Sundays between church and dinner. Dad and Claire had gone to the park to find leaves for her biology project. Mom called us to the kitchen by name — Tom! Laura!

"Who did this?" Mom demanded, one hand splayed on the counter next to the pie, the other on her hip.

Tom and I looked from her face to the pie to one another. We were standing in our cheerful yellow kitchen, redolent with the smell of roast beef, both of us in jeans and t-shirts and stocking feet. Mom ran her hand over the spotless Formica counter, as if it might hold a clue. I should have been the prime suspect, because I loved pie more than anyone else. That wasn't how Mom saw it, though.

"Tom! Did you wreck this crust?"

Tom had been slouching against the refrigerator, picking at a scab on his arm.

"Hey! Why me?" he cried, pushing himself up and out into the middle of the room. A piece of his long brown hair slipped from behind his ear into his eyes.

"This looks like your handiwork, that's why," Mom said, her mouth a tight line.

"What does that mean?" Tom said.

"You're always ruining things," Mom said. "You broke that blue glass vase, remember? I loved that vase! It was a wedding present. And then you lied about that, at first, too."

That had happened weeks before.

"That was an accident!" Tom shouted.

"Maybe this was an accident, too," Mom said darkly.

Things were heating up more than I liked. I edged toward the door.

Mom said, "Do you know anything about this, Laura?"

"No!" I said.

"Well, this crust didn't pick itself out of that pie," she said, and glared at Tom again.

This didn't seem to me like something Tom would do. He didn't even like pie. But I knew I hadn't done it, and he was the only other person who'd been home. He'd been lying to all of us lately, too. He'd used one of my favorite t-shirts to wax his car, and then, when I found it in the trash all covered with gunk, he'd claimed he didn't know how it got there. Tom was the only person in our household who would spend one minute waxing a car.

"It had to have been Tom," I said.

"I didn't eat your stupid crust!" Tom shouted.

He pushed past me out of the room, and as he went, he punched me hard in the shoulder.

"What do you think you're doing, hitting your sister?" Mom yelled, chasing after him. "Come back here!"

A moment later I heard him slam out of the house. He did not come back for dinner.

* * *

The second time was a rainy Sunday. All us kids were home, and so was Dad. He came out to the kitchen when Mom called us all together, and peered at the ruined pie. Almost half the crust was gone. Tom didn't come down at first. Mom had to send Claire to get him, and when he arrived, he stood sullenly just inside the kitchen door. We all watched him, to see what he would do.

"Well, this seems to be Tom's idea of a practical joke," Mom said, her face red with anger.

Tom rolled his eyes. "Why do think this was me?" he said. "Why?"^[L]_[SEP]

"Laura said it wasn't her," Mom said.

"I said it wasn't *me*," Tom said.

"Oh, but you lie, Tom — all the time!" Mom said. "You told me you were going to stay after school for stamp club, and I found out later you were hanging around the mall with your worthless friends."

Mom never permitted any of us to go to the mall just to hang out, and I had some sympathy with Tom's trying to get around her on that one. I actually liked quite a few of his friends. That rainy weekend, though, Tom and I had quarreled constantly, over what TV shows to watch, who ought to take the garbage out to the alley in the rain, who deserved the last Coke in the fridge — that kind of thing.

"Laura? Claire? Do you know anything about this?" Mom said.

"No," the two of us said in unison. I added, "Tom did leave the TV room for a while this afternoon, and I heard him out in the kitchen."

Tom looked murder at me. "I was getting lunch," he said. "Is that a crime now?"

"What's this about, Tom?" Dad said in a rough voice.

"I didn't do this," Tom said.

"The worst part is the lying about it," Dad told him heavily.

"The worst part is the disrespect," Mom said, her voice catching. "I try to make a nice meal on Sundays. I try to make a nice home, and this is the thanks I get."

Tom started laughing. "I didn't take your crust."

Dad stepped forward and slapped Tom hard across the face.

"You think this is funny?" he said.

Tom stood his ground, making his hands into fists.

"Oh, you want some more?" Dad said with mock wonder, and pushed Tom's chest lightly with his fingers. "You want to fight me?"

Tom's hands dropped to his sides. He looked dejectedly at the side of the cupboard.

Dad said, "There'll be no pie for you tonight, Tom. You've got no right to act like some hooligan. In fact, you can stay in your room during dinner and think about how you've been treating your mother."

"I'm not staying here," Tom said. "You can't make me."

He pushed the door open and left. Dad let him go.

"He's totally out of control," Mom said to Dad.

I was already feeling guilty for implicating Tom. Maybe he had just been getting lunch.

Dad said, "The lying is a really bad part of this. The disrespect, and the lying."

Mom burst into tears. "I don't know why I bother. No one cares."

“I care, Mom,” I said.

She looked at me with suspicion, and then she glanced at Claire, who was standing by the counter poking with a fork at the innards of the pie, but Claire had been away from the house the first time the crust had been ruined, so it couldn't be her. It wasn't me. It had to be Tom.

* * *

Thanksgiving. Everybody was coming. Aunt Susan would pick Gram up from the nursing home and bring her to our house. Mom got up early and made two pies, one apple and one pumpkin, before the turkey went into the oven. She and Tom had a row upstairs, right when he got up, over his plan to hang out at the mall with his friends after dinner instead of staying home with the family. The rest of us were all up and dressed. Mom was already wearing her brown skirt with the big felt turkey appliquéd onto it when she stomped back through the house, her face flushed from arguing with Tom.

We had a swinging door between the dining room and the kitchen. Mom whammed it open and saw, there on the counter, our big gray cat, Jerome, crouching over the pie. She started shouting. Claire and I ran from upstairs to see what was going on, wearing our own special outfits for the day. By the time we got there, Jerome had taken up an attitude on the counter, all injured dignity, flecks of piecrust clinging to his snout.

He hadn't had time to do much damage to the pie, Mom would laugh to listeners much later, relating a pleasing sketch of that portion of that day that would become one of the stories we told about our family. She never mentioned that she had accused Tom, or that our father had hit and shamed him, or that I had betrayed him not once but twice. If Claire was there when the story was told, she might fill in some of the parts Mom left out, that we'd run from all over the house in our harvest colors to see Jerome, caught in the act, but no one ever put in that Tom had not been there with us, that while we were in the kitchen, he got dressed, and left, and ate Thanksgiving dinner at a friend's house — or that he never spent another Thanksgiving with us, not ever. I certainly never put in those parts about Tom, and I was brought up to believe it's a terrible thing, to lie.

Tom joined the Navy the day he turned 18, and we never saw or heard from him again. He's all right, apparently. You can Google him. He has a family, and he's head of sales for a company you've never heard of in Minneapolis. That morning, though, none of the rest of us could take our eyes off Jerome as he slunk off down the counter toward his cat door, licking his chops, slipping down and out the low flap in the larger door in one long, fluid motion.

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF MAGIC

ISAAC RUSSO

The rider plodded along the dusty path, rocking steadily to the beat of his horse. Dunes of pale sand swirled around him like the tides of some ocean frozen in time, stretching as far as the eye could see in all directions. As the sun blazed overhead, Abram reared up on a ridge and looked out on those never-ending plains. "This is our world now," he thought. "And it is dying."

It had not always been that way. There was once a time when rivers flowed through those valleys like blood through veins, and rain showered the land, but now it was tears that watered those fields and magic was to blame. Magic had been everywhere, the whisper in the wind that breathed life into the trees each spring, or the twinkle in a newborn's eye. It was the very spark of life itself, hanging heavy in the air like a summer storm. Now it was gone, and Abram would not rest until he found the man who stole it. A man he used to call a brother.

The thought left a bitter taste in his mouth, something he was used to nowadays, and after he spat and pulled the wide brim of his hat down low to shield his eyes, Abram took off again with a quick switch of the reins. His horse raced along the narrow trail that snaked through the hills, a path walked by many before him. They had all been searching for the same thing: salvation in this dying world. He was looking for something else, however, something he knew might be gone forever, but he had to know. Was magic really gone forever, and if not, could the world ever recover from the traitor's wrath?

The day magic disappeared was one he would not soon forget, every time he blinked, the scenes were burned on his eyelids. It seemed so long ago, yet sometimes it felt as if it was only yesterday. He slowed the mare to a trot as he fell even deeper into thought, and suddenly the dying world of today faded to black, and the world of yesterday came into full view.

"Hello, Abram." A man dressed in black said as he approached the altar of the Citadel. He stepped over the bodies of his sworn brothers carefully, so as to not get blood on his knee-high leather boots.

"What have you done, brother? You've killed them all." Abram said, his eyes darting between the traitor and the bodies scattered throughout the hall in bloodied heaps. There had once been an ancient order charged with the protection of magic, the spellslingers, but now it would seem the order was quite dead. Abram looked at the man responsible, searching for any measure of the man he once knew, but in that moment he was unrecognizable.

"Can't you see? Now we have it all, you and me. You were always my favorite, Abe. The others were so strict and so controlling, but now we can do whatever we want." The man in black tried to explain, but the only person he was making any sense to was himself. "Come on, brother."

"Don't call me that." The words were sour on his tongue, and there was a sudden burn in his chest that he hoped was courage. His hand moved to the gun at his hip and was met with the cool sting of steel and the faint hum of magical power, they were the spellslingers, after all. "You're no brother of mine, sir. Leave now, Stranger, or die for your crimes." Abram's words were firm, but inside his soul was shaking; and with that the Stranger left, gone like the evening sun.

As the world of today slowly came back into focus, Abram cursed himself for not killing the Stranger when he had the chance. He supposed he still had too much love for the man. After that day, the Stranger disappeared without a trace somewhere into the desert. It wasn't until word of the first massacre reached Abram that he began his pursuit, and he'd been on his trail ever since. He was the last of that fallen order, a lone rider out to save the world, but that was not going to stop him. The world needed magic, and he needed to make things right and do what he should have done so long ago.

The sun had begun to creep towards the western horizon by the time Abram came back to reality, and what waited for him turned his stomach into knots. Black smoke rose in thick plumes in the distance, staining the skies a menacing grey. It could only mean one thing, another raid, and this time he was close. Magic might be gone, but there were still plenty of artifacts capable of summoning great powers, and the Stranger would not rest until he had found each and every one. Abram had been mere hours behind him the last time, and it seemed the day of reckoning had come.

Driving his spurs hard into the mare, he took off towards the smoke, and before long, the rolling sand dunes gave way to a small market town stained with innocent blood. The carnage was undeniable. Bodies littered the streets like trash thick with flies, and blood gathered in puddles even though it hadn't rained in years. The buildings lay in smoldering heaps, and the stench was so wretched it threatened to choke him then and there, but he found no sign of the Stranger. "How could someone do something like this?" he thought. Abram could not say, but power is a dangerous thing, and it makes dangerous people.

As he led his horse carefully through the massacre, he kept his eyes on the setting sun, distracting himself with the last beautiful thing left on the planet. He needed to get moving; the Stranger couldn't be far, and there was nothing he could do for this place now. His hand once again moved to the gun at his hip, it still buzzed with some hidden power, though it grew weaker by the day. Abram drew the weapon and spun the chamber until a single shining bullet fell into his palm. This was the source of the power, and without the gun to contain it, the metal vibrated his bones. It was spell forged steel, the preferred method of a spellslinger, and it was all the magic he had left in this world.

He reloaded the gun and returned it to the holster, he would need that little bit of magic for the Stranger. He only hoped it would be enough. As he reached the edge of town, the carnage finally subsided, and at the end of the street stood a single log cabin, untouched by the magical fire that swept through it like a storm. It was quite strange, and before Abram could decide to investigate, a crash from within made the decision for him. He dismounted and raced inside, gun in hand.

The cabin was a single room, empty save for a closet door on the far wall, and unless he was mistaken, there were whispers to be heard. He approached with deliberate, silent steps, and reached for the door knob with his free hand. It creaked in protest as he turned it open, but it was not the Stranger who waited for him on the other side, it was a wounded woman and a small child.

"Please . . . you have to help . . . my Elizabel . . ." The woman said in strained gasps, the blood on her dress suggested she had been bleeding for quite some time. The girl cowering beside her looked up at Abram with tortured eyes, they were eyes that should not belong to a child so young, but the world was a cruel place.

“I’m very sorry, ma’am, but I’m on a mission of sorts, and it is not the kind of place for a child.” Abram said, though he couldn’t shake the feeling he was trying to convince himself more than the woman. “You see, I’m going to bring magic back, for everyone.”

He thought it was a fair response, the woman disagreed, and suddenly a fury burned in her eyes brighter than any magical fire. “Magic? Magic won’t help me when I’m dead. It won’t help my girl when she starves after I’m gone, either. You are a fool, sir, a fool, if you cannot see that magic is never truly gone, even now. Look around, look at the sunset, watch the stars at night, magic is all around us. Now please, let my Elizabel see it for herself.” With that the woman’s shoulders sagged, and she seemed mortal once more.

Abram looked at the girl and saw that twinkle in her eye, perhaps it was true. Had he been a fool, and if so, for how long? He holstered his gun and took a deep breath, he knew what he had to do. When he reached down to gather the child in his arms, the woman grasped his arm with all her remaining strength.

“Thank you, sir.” She said, and the last bit of light faded from her eyes as she shut them on this world.

With Elizabel in tow, he left the village, covering the child’s eyes anytime they passed an unpleasant sight. Once they were far enough away that the sky was unblemished by the smoke, they stopped to make camp for the night. It was the last thing he expected to happen that day, though maybe, just maybe, it was the best thing that could’ve happened. Then he had an idea.

For one last time, he drew the pistol from his hip to examine the spell forged bullet, and after a silent goodbye, he loaded it into the chamber and pointed it at the sky.

“Watch this,” Abram told the girl, and with a pull of the trigger, the heavens lit up with bursts of bright blues and vivid violets. He had seen many magical sights, but for the first time in his life Abram saw a different kind of magic. The beauty of life was everywhere, but it had never been clearer than in that little girl’s smile.

Isaac is an aspiring writer living in the Chicagoland area. He is studying creative writing at Waubensee Community College, where he is currently the editor-in-chief of their literary magazine Horizons. “A Different Kind Of Magic” may have been his debut into the literary world, but it was only the beginning.

TERMINAL VELOCITY

DANIEL DISTASIO

It was one of those moments. Like the Clash song. “Should I stay or should she go? If I stay it will be trouble. If I go it will be double.” Deanna’s headbanging days were long gone, as was her marriage. But it was not some undecided love calling to her - it was her mother in trouble again. What she wanted, more than anything in the world, was to say no. To stay in the calm dove-grey light of her totally unremarkable third floor walkup in an overlooked neighborhood in upper Manhattan. Against her better judgment, she acquiesced. This would not turn out well.

Five days later, Deana headed to The Rizzoli Orthopedic Institute in Bologna. The man at the inn where she was staying said it was just up the hill, so she assumed it was a short walk. Her assumption was wrong; they often were. A pleasant stroll on a sunny day turned out to be an exhausting tromp two miles upward. What she thought was the hospital, visible eight or ten blocks away, was not the right building, but the *Ospedale Generale*. Her destination was another thirty minutes ahead at the end of a cracked sidewalk that stretched forever skyward. Taxis flashed by, a city bus blew exhaust in her face, sweat dripped from her brow, and a blister grew on her instep as she climbed and climbed.

“What took you so long?”

Deana did not have the energy to recount the past five days: a rush to replace her expired passport, interviews with pet-sitting services, a suitcase that had to be replaced due to a rusted-out zipper, and a battle with her insurance company to get prescriptions filled early. Then she missed her connection in Paris. The combination of Ambien and scotch turned her into a half dead mollusk. The stewardess shook her so vigorously she nearly vomited. Finally, a security guard helped her off the plane. Who knew airports were now behemoth shopping malls? Blurry-eyed, she stumbled past Gucci and L’Occitane, purses, hats, cheese, electronics—who bought a flat-screen TV at an airport?—everything but her friggig gate.

“You look awful.”

“Thank you, mother. How’s your foot?”

“It’s killing me, but the doctor from Venice is very sexy.”

Mother had a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time: fires, floods, financial crises. While others lost their homes, limbs, and livelihoods; Mother weathered tragedy as if it were nothing more than a lost earring. She rattled on about poor service, and the ambulance ride, the disaster of her hair. Four people were killed, twenty-two injured. The bus was on the border when the attack happened. A man, disguised as a *tchotchke* vendor, dropped a bag in the middle of the bus and ran off—no suicide bomber, he—mother was lucky to be in a window seat up front. The gentleman next to her, a large man from Saudi Arabia, shielded her from the main carnage. Hospitals were overwhelmed; the worst victims were airlifted to Dubrovnik and Venice. Mother was held overnight in a small town, and then moved to the *Centro Orthopedico* in Bologna.

Deana longed for a nice tall scotch and a long nap. Her head was aching and her stomach was still swirling from the long plane ride. Mother rang the nurses’ station for a cup of tea, complained it was too hot, and then let it sit until it was too cold. After an hour of half-listening to her mother rattle on, Deana

begged to be let go. She left with a list of items her mother needed for survival: talcum powder, cherry throat lozenges, velvet slippers, a head scarf—preferably colorful with flowers or birds—and bobby pins. It was going to be a long week.

“Slow, mother, slow.”

They put five steel rods in her foot to try and force her toes back in place. The staff was attentive, but scarce; consequently, it was up to Deana to bring food and water, to help her hobble to the bathroom, and after a few days to assume the role of physical therapist walking her up and down the hallway.

“You were always afraid of change. Terrified of anything that moved.”

“Mother, I am just trying to help you walk.”

“The important thing is to be happy. How can you be happy holed up in that tiny apartment with one window overlooking an alleyway? I warned you against the City.”

It was true. Deana’s days were punctuated by awkward moments of remembering a past that was only a silhouette, an outline barely defining the life hollowed out inside. She managed by holding onto signposts, rituals of waking and sleeping and filling the time in between with diversions that shielded her from demons that lurked outside the lines. Not divorce, not impairment, not loss of job, or friends; none of those things scared her. It was what *mighthappen*: a crippling fear that the next change would end the few comforts she clutched so dearly.

She placed her hand beneath her mother’s elbow as they walked the length of the colorless corridor. At the end of the hallway, light poured through the window flooding the floor with gold. Deana focused on the pool of sunshine, on the hint of an oak branch that cut a corner of the window, on anything but her mother’s words. Her city apartment lacked natural light; windows on each end revealed grey squares of concrete. In between the walls, her life was pale shades of prepared foods and mindless television, the saving grace of cocktails, litter boxes and mystery novels. Change was overrated.

The following day on her way to the hospital, a handsome maître de stopped her in front of a trattoria. He had called out to her each time she passed by, “*buongiorno*,” or “*per favore*,” as if asking her permission for something beyond lunch or dinner. He was older, but charming in that way that men get as they age. He stood in her path and then held one of her arms in his hand, gently, as a father might do to a child. She felt safe, relaxed. His teeth were shiny white and his breath had a whisper of anise.

“You must try Bolognese.”

“My mother.” She tried to explain.

But he insisted, “*E figlia premurosa*” taking her elbow and leading her to a table. “Sit.”

She sat. He brought her a glass of *Bonarda* from his uncle’s vineyard outside Parma. It was dark and rich, leaving a satisfying sweetness after each sip. A plate of linguine appeared, and more wine. He

flirted and she laughed and ordered another bottle of wine. When she called for the check, he brought her tiramisu and grappa, which she devoured happily, but when she stood up she realized it was a mistake. The heat, the wine, the food had made her heavy-eyed and unable to walk. She was dizzy and her footing uncertain. She had to lie down. Her inn was only two blocks away but she struggled to make it to her room. After fumbling with the keys, she managed to unlock the door, find her bed and fall into a deep and dreamless sleep.

The next day, she coaxed her mother along, timing her pace to the metronomic step-flap of house slippers beating a path toward the end of the hall. She nodded to an orderly whose smile acknowledged the burden of mother. A tangle of shadows on the floor scripted evening's approach. Deanna moved slowly toward the window, as her mother pulled her along.

"Why do you drink so much?"

"I like to drink."

"No one likes to drink alone."

"I do. Steady."

"Faster, Deana, faster."

"You are putting too much pressure on your foot."

"It's my fault, I suppose. I was never home. Then your father died on the train between Hicksville and Syosset. But that's no reason to live your life in a cocoon, Deana. It's not healthy."

It was true. She had never been a stay-at-home mom. Home was where you dropped off hats, kids, and doggie bags from World Hong Kong Buffet. When Deana took medical leave from Kurt, Schwartz, and Oppenheimer for carpal tunnel, she was certain she would be back within six weeks. Five years later, she collected her disability check, cozied up to a scotch and soda each day at 4 pm, and eavesdropped on her neighbors' increasing dissatisfaction. Life was venal. If people weren't being left behind, they were leaving. Stopping time was the only escape. Most people were too blind to see that. Deana saw. She knew.

"Slow, mother, walk slower."

Days stumbled along with tepid lunches at her mother's bedside, afternoon walks along the corridor, and the long sway of evening waiting for bedtime. As with all things *mother*, Deana came to expect the unexpected. Arriving before noon with a *prosciutto piadini* and *torta di mele*, she found a pimply-faced, man with a notebook, questioning her mother about the bombing. He looked nothing like the rumpled suit guys from the detective novels, stacked along the wall by Deana's bedside. He was younger, wore wire-rimmed glasses, looked more like an insurance salesman than an investigator.

"Did anyone give you anything, ask you for anything?"

“Oh men ask all the time. I take care of myself.” She replied in the same voice she reserved for all men, cheerful and coquettish.

She had become accustomed to Mother’s embarrassing behavior, the coquettish voice she reserved for men. But something in the man’s gaze, the pause as he weighed the answer, made Deanna uncomfortable.

“You are sure no one said anything unusual?”

Mother’s chin jutted out, as it does when she lies, and she shook her head no. The man thanked her and handed her a business card, *in case you remember something important.*

A week later, the city celebrated *Ferragusto* with street fairs, bands and a parade. Deana was stranded by the side of the road trying to cross, as a bevy of nuns with brooms swept clean a path in front of four men in robes hefting a statue of the Virgin Mother on their shoulders. The sky could not have been bluer or the air more fragrant with the scent of incense and gladiolus. It was a day so bright it could burst. She dodged dozens of children dressed in communal white, running across the street. Vendors sold shaved ice and *zeppoles*, while parents snapped photographs of children with powdered sugar on their lips. Minutes passed, the frittata she had purchased bore a grease stain on the paper bag. Deana lingered a moment longer, adjusted her sunglasses and continued her hike up the hill.

Even the hospital seemed lighter with half the staff away on vacation. Mother had tied an orange scarf around her head in gypsy style and wore large hoop earrings. She was in a festive mood, anxious to be released. The doctor presented the exit papers, which they couldn’t read, but signed anyways. He advised them that she should take it easy for next few weeks, walk each day but don’t overdo. She would need help to shower, prepare meals, and complete simple tasks.

“Don’t leave her alone, *va bene?*”

“Can she travel?”

“In a few days, I say yes.”

Deana nodded.

The doctor repeated, “Not alone, *si?*”

At the inn, she booked flights home, sorted through her mother’s carry bag and rearranged the few items they were able to retrieve after the bombing. Along with scarves and knee highs, she found a leather folio with a passport for Abdulrahman Muhammad Al-Mofty and a sizable stack of cash in three currencies.

“Mother, what’s this?”

“He gave it to me. I thought he wanted me to fish out some small bills for souvenirs. He was nearly blind. But thinking back, I don’t know.”

“You said nothing.”

“The man’s dead. What good would it do?”

“Unjust enrichment. Withholding evidence. Crimes, mother, punishable crimes.”

“Oh stop with the legal nonsense. He gave me his wallet and then he was murdered. Story over.”

Deana knew it would never be over; not as long as mother had money and a reason to keep moving. A silent rage threatened to take over. She kept packing, noticed a pair of scissors in her mother’s carry-on, took them out and set them aside. She fussed with the pillows, stared out the window, and avoided her mother’s gaze.

“This is about that time I left you at Melfi’s furniture store, isn’t it? You were so content in your stroller watching cartoons. I hated shopping for sofas and end tables - such a waste of time. I just wanted to get out of there. Halfway home, I realized and rushed back, expecting to find you in tears. But you just sat there staring at the ridiculous moose, as if you hadn’t noticed I had left.”

“Maybe, I didn’t.”

“The whole store was in an uproar. They called your father. I can’t believe you even remember it.”

“Who said I did?”

In the morning, she took a hot shower, bracing herself for the long flight home. She woke her mother, helped her to the bathroom and admonished her not to dawdle. She carried the bags down to the front desk, settled the bill and thanked the proprietor. When she returned to the room, mother was propped up on the bed, pillows beneath her legs, an Italian movie magazine in her hand.

“The cab’s here.”

“I am not ready. We can’t leave.”

“It’s time, mother. Let’s go.”

“You can’t leave me...”

“I can’t?”

“The doctor said....”

“Time’s up, Mother. It’s over.”

Deana went to the side of the bed and pulled her mother by the arm. She resisted, pushing her away. Deana reached for her leg and tried to turn her to pull her up, and her mother kicked at her shin. Her velvet-slipped foot delivering a surprisingly sharp blow, nearly toppling Deana over.

“Stop!”

“You’re hurting my foot! I can’t move... It’s too much....”

“I am going, Mother.”

“You can’t”

As passengers, we all travel together, so we do not feel the motion of the earth circumnavigating the sun at 1,037 miles an hour. But individual objects travel at different speeds, often resisting the drag until they reach a point where the resistance is equal to the driving force. Terminal velocity is experienced by skydivers and solitary souls who alight from their lives briefly to interact with a world that wants them to change. It had nothing to do with her father’s death, or a broken marriage, or any of the laundry list of stumbles her life had taken. She had reached her maximum velocity in the quiet of her apartment with her feet up and Primrose curled beside her. Opening a paperback mystery, she took a sip of scotch and muted the voice in her head that repeated *You can’t go!*

Daniel Distasio’s work has appeared in the Louisville Review, Summerset Review, Reed, Stone Canoe and others. His first novel, "Facing the Furies" was published in 2012. A New York transplant to south Florida, he lives in Wilton Manors and Key West. He is also an English teacher and on line course designer. He has led adventure tours hiking and biking in Peru, Thailand, India and Iceland. He is currently working on a gay adventure set during the gold rush in Alaska in 1898. When not work or writing, he is caring for his three Shetland sheepdogs: Charles Dickens, Nikolai Gogol, and James Joyce.

DEMOTING PLUTO

MARTY CARLOCK

What did he expect anyway
he never played nicely with the other planets
went his own peculiar way wandering off for no reason
Until finally we noticed he was just too different.

Nobody thinks of him anymore
just an idea out on the fringe of everything.

Marty's fiction has been published in American literary review, Crack The Spine, Diverse Arts Project, Edison Literary Review, Evening Street Review, Fiction Fix, Flock, the Griffin, Halfway Down the Stairs, Glint Literary Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Ink Pantry, Inscape, the Macguffin, the Madison review, Mary: a Journal of New Writing, Menda City Press, Minetta Review, Old Red Kimono, Pennsylvania English, Riversedge, Phantasmagoria, Sanskrit, Schuylkill Valley Journal, and The Storyteller. His poetry has been published by Door Is A Jar, Edison Literary Review, Green Prints, Hobart, Inscape, and Moon City Review. For almost 20 years, he was a regular contributor to the Boston Globe and other publications; more than 30 newspapers and magazines have published some 1,600 articles under his byline. He is the author of two editions of a guide to public art in greater Boston. At the present time he writes for sculpture and landscape architecture magazines, and reviews fiction and nonfiction for the internet review of books.

A DEAD MAN TEACHES THE LIVING

LYNN HOGGARD

One must imagine Sisyphus happy.
—Albert Camus

A comment easy to imagine for someone
who has held a razor to his wrist.
What if, however, that someone falters,
realizing his craven hunger for life?

Meanwhile, Sisyphus keeps pushing
his uncompromising boulder until it careens
down the mountain. Then he trudges behind.
Sameness and struggle without hope.

How could this dead man be happy?
One must imagine... Pause there.
Imagine: Us, the living, walking down,
chained to a lifelong, senseless cycle.

Can we, then, imagine joy springing
from deep within muscle and sinew,
thrusting out—fiercely, exultantly—
as blood binds itself to rock?

WHO WE ARE

We're out of sequence.
Across from a pond—
the odd number
that should've been
where the water is.
Friends and postmen get lost
trying to find us. We ourselves
lose track of where we are.

We keep repainting our number
on the curb—111—as if repeating
the same *one* will wedge us
between 110 and 112.

So we look to the blue-gray pond,
rimmed by sunning turtles, where
perpetual ducks web zigzags,
and we say: *That's us.*
That's who we are.

Lynn received her Ph.D. in comparative literature from the university of southern California and taught at midwestern state university, where she was professor of English and French and the coordinator of humanities. In 2003, the Texas institute of letters awarded her the Soeurette Diehl Fraser award for best translation. Her poem “Love In The Desert” has been nominated for the 2017 pushcart prize by word fountain, and her latest book, *Bushwhacking Home* (TCU press, 2017), has won the 2018 Press Women of Texas award for Best Book of poetry. Her poem “In The Garden” has been nominated for the 2018 Sundress Best of the Net award.

For several years, she was an arts writer for the times record news in wichita falls and wrote more than six hundred articles, features, and reviews. She has published six books: three french translations, a biography, a memoir, and a poetry collection (*bushwhacking home*, tcu press, 2017). Her poetry has appeared in 13th Moon, After Happy Hour Review, The Alembic, Atlanta Review, Bitterzoet Magazine, Bluestem, The Broken Plate, Chaffin Journal, Clackamas Literary Review, Concho River Review, Crack The Spine, The Delmarva Review, Descant, Door Is A Jar Magazine, Evening Street Review, Forge, Edison Literary Review, Frigg, Gloom Cupboard, Gnu Journal, The Healing Muse, Licking River Review, The Macguffin, Mezzo Cammin, New Ohio Review, Pisgah Review, Sanskrit, Slab, Soundings East, Summerset Review, Schuylkill Valley Journal, Voices De La Luna, Tower Journal, Weber: The Contemporary West, Westview, Westward Quarterly, Wild Violet, and Xavier Review, among others.

NIGHT

DANIEL MOORE

Troubled by the disappearance of days
she started calling me *Night*. Not with
words familiar to the moon a depressing
glitter of gray. Not with sounds fear
would use as darkness squeezed her throat.
When her eyes blinked the dusk in mine
laughed in the sun's cruel face, She said
*why do you close the world at 7, making
it go to bed?* It's hard being the book & page
begging the kids to read, harder still to know
which lights may not return come morning.
Anything less than 30 watts & serotonin
weeps so loud I put sandbags under her eyes.
Flooding is common if the thorns in me
bloom as the ghosts clean house.

DEAR BODY

Let's talk about a preacher's daughter's belly
about the bastard beginnings of me
in Selma in a trailer where nightly she grew
a soldier's seed into an Amorite's rose.

She was my private greenhouse of glory
I learned to prune my beauty there
so stranger's would pay to hold little boys
& harvest the womb with adoption's turbine.

There the mind does what it can to borrow & steal
when it can't deal with holes that remain

can't change them ignore them or fill them with time
into pastoral places of biblical fields
where judgment's dark ink blackens the sky
above tender white skin & the Red Sea of her
& the Moses in me find nothing miraculous
delivered or free.

Daniel lives in Washington on Whidbey island with the poet, Laura Coe Moore. His poems have been in spoon river poetry review, Columbia journal, cream city review, western humanities review, phoebe, mid-American review, December and others. His poems are forthcoming in Weber Review, West Trade Review, Duende Literary Journal, Isthmus Review, Yemassee Review, The Meadow, Bluestem Magazine, Coachella Review, Conclave, The Phoenix, Aurora Literary Journal, Faultline Journal Of Arts & Letters, Slipstream Magazine and Barren Magazine. His chapbook "Boys," is forthcoming from Duck Lake Books (February 2020) finalist of the Brick Road Poetry Prize for "Waxing the Dents" (April 2020) his work has been nominated for pushcart prizes and best of the net. Visit him at danieledwardmoore.com.

DIRGE

G.H. MOSSON

In my studio apartment, I have boxes sprawling on the floor, unlocking themselves day and night—
boxes
in trees, on rooftops, lodged
in telephone towers, open boxes
on suburban hills, vast boxes
combusting behind
a picturesque sunset.

G.H. Mosson is the author of two books and two chapbooks of poetry, most recently family snapshot as a Poem In Time (Finishing Line, 2019), and co-author of Heart X-Rays (Pm Press, 2018). His poetry and literary commentary have appeared in numerous publications, including Measure, The Tampa Review, Smartish Pace, Free State Review, Rattle, and The Cincinnati Review. He has received four pushcart prize nominations and won the Erskine J. Poetry Prize (2016) from Smartish Pace Magazine. Mosson has a BA in English from Portland State University and an MA from the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars, where he was a lecturer and a teaching fellow (2003–2005). An attorney since 2012, he enjoys raising his children, hiking, and reading.

INFLUENCE

EDWARD LEE

When no one was watching
a jagged piece
of the night
broke itself free
from the cloudless sky
and fell on the century-smoothed pebbles
dancing across the sand
into the sea.

It shrugged itself to awareness
and stumbled into
sleeping houses,
infecting dreaming minds
with things no sane mind
should understand,
until there were
no minds left
to stain.

No one noticed,
as no one saw,
sleep a gift to all
that cloudless night,
though some of us doubt, question,
the thoughts so elegantly verbalized
by our suddenly changed neighbours.

Some of us doubt.
Some of us speak up,
but not enough of us,
no, not enough,

and the night,
and all its unseeable shadows,
slowly spreads itself across our once sensible days.

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including the Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. His debut poetry collection "Playing Poohsticks On Ha'penny Bridge" was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

BEND BACK ANY FARTHER AND YOU'LL BE ON THE FLOOR

ALICIA ASKENASE

Be gentle when you sweep
that mat.
It might buckle up
and trip you.

Canine Democracy

Wild dogs vote on whether to go on a hunt
by sneezing. If the leader of the pack
sneezes, they need fewer sneezers:
some votes count more than others.

The Cook

She must get cracking on the soup,
but the glacier that pours
from the teapot toward the cup
causes a delay.

The Burn

A man burns her hand with a cigarette.
The subconscious knows the truth:
it is fairly complex, yet as simple
as telling him to stop.

Dream

The postman was in his shirt and underwear,
she said please don't kill me.
Yet she can't remember dream #2,
burrowed in for another night.

July 2016

There is a Bank of America,
and directly across the street
a large, professionally made,
unofficial banner that says:

I HATE THE BANK OF AMERICA

Alicia Askenase is a poet and educator who has served as a founding co-editor of the poetry journal *six*, and literary program director at the Walt Whitman Art Center in Camden, N.J. she is the author of four chapbooks. Writing has appeared in recent anthologies: *New Works By Philadelphia Poets*, and *Not Our President*. Her journal publications include *Kiosk*, *Chain*, *Poetry New York*, *The World*, *six*, *Feminist Studies*, *Journal Of Modern Languages*, *Poppycock*, *Mad Poets Review*, and *Big Bridge*. One of her poems was selected as an Editor's Choice in the 2018 Sandy Crimmins Prize. She has work forthcoming in the new edition of poems for the writing: *Prompts For Poets*, Ed. Valerie Fox and Lynn Levin, Texture Press.

END OF SEASON

WILL WALKER

The trees will be staying the winter,
though some of them will have to get naked to do it.

The ones with berries or fruit
will let their crops ripen, then wither.

We are not so hardy,
do not speak the language of winter,

shudder at the thought of snow tires
and chains, plows, and months of frozen ground.

When the leaves start
making their early exit we take a cue

and start thinking lonely thoughts
about packing up, exiting this empty stage,

and saying Good-bye.
Each leave-taking now more final,

more nearly the last.
And what we'll leave behind: merely another summer

of days when I open my eyes
to wonder, and to the self so long gone

I only glimpse him
slipping down to the beach or setting sail

in the corner of memory,
or between houses where I see the sunlight

scatter its casual handful of diamonds
on the sea. Going home: no sweeter sorrow.

Advancing in retreat. Letting go.
Clearing out. Each time different. And the same.

Walker's work has appeared in Alabama Literary Review, Bark, Blue Lake Review, Burningword, Chagrin River Review, Common Ground Review, Crack The Spine, Euphony, Forge, Hartskill Review, Jet Fuel Review, Nimrod International Journal, Parcel, Passager, Pennsylvania English, Rougarou, Salamander, Schuylkill Valley Journal, Slow Trains, Southern Poetry Review, Studio One, and Westview. His chapbook, Carrying Water, was published by Pudding House Press, and his full-length

collection, *Wednesday After Lunch*, is a Blue Light Press Book Award winner (2008). Walker received his bachelor's degree in English history and literature from Harvard college. He has attended numerous writing workshops with Marie Howe, Thea Sullivan, Gail Mazur, Robert Pinsky, Alan Shapiro, And Mark Doty. He was also an editor of the Haight Ashbury Literary Journal. When not putting pen to paper, he enjoys placing bow on string and playing the cello. Walker and his wife spend their summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

TEARING

JIM ROSS

When you break a bone badly, and it mends,
but does not meld exactly, is not flush
one part to another,
you break it again, or let it
be broken for you,
because you trust, and accept,
it must be re-set.

You break open a wound, or let it be broken
open, if the wound turns red
and radiates heat and infection
runs rampant You allow it because
you trust, and accept,
it must be cleaned and re-closed.

You break open your mind when
it bursts already—"positive disintegration"
they used to call it—but now they want you
to *get back to work in five days*
with your polished coping
skills, a different mindset.

When your spirit cries out in anguish
and you cannot see the light
and darkness draws you in,
you want to rend the darkness
thinking it has swallowed the light.
It gets so hard to trust
that darkness and light are
one, and need not be torn apart.

Are there spirit bone doctors?

After retiring from a career in public health research in early 2015, Jim Ross resumed creative pursuits in hopes of resuscitating his long-neglected left brain. He's since published 75 pieces of nonfiction, a dozen poems, and 200 photos in 80 journals in North America, Europe, and Asia. His publications include 1966, Bombay Gin, Columbia Journal, Gravel, Ilanot Review, Lunch Ticket, Kestrel, Make, The Atlantic. Last year, he wrote and acted in his first play. He and his wife--parents of two health professionals and grandparents of four wee ones--split their time between Maryland and West Virginia.

FENCE, BROKEN

EDWARD LEE



Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including the Stinging Fly, Skylight 47, Acumen and Smiths Knoll. His debut poetry collection "Playing Poohsticks On Ha'penny Bridge" was published in 2010. He is currently working towards a second collection. He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Lewis Milne, Orson Carroll, Blinded Architect, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

FORENSIC FORAGING FINDS

WILLIAM CRAWFORD



BACK ALLEY EXCLAMATION



William C. Crawford is a veteran photographer based in North Carolina. He invented forensic foraging, a throwback, minimalist technique for modern digital photographers. Google forensic foraging on Pinterest for bio and more.

ADIRONDACK WOODS

CRAIG WEISZ



The magically verdant "Adirondack Woods" was taken near Lake Placid, New York during an arbitrary travel rest stop. I wandered off the highway at an unmarked trailhead and was surrounded by color and quiet.

LIVING DRIFTWOOD



"Living driftwood" was taken in Moss Beach, California, mid-morning, as the coastal fog was burning off, the sun creating a cathedral effect among the cliff-top cypresses.

Craig Weisz is a writer, photographer, and adjunct professor of film studies at Fairleigh Dickinson university.

MY TROUBLED TIMES—“TAKE THE TOOTH OUT”

JOHN BALLANTINE

“Let’s take both out next week. It will hurt, your cheeks will swell, but the pain will be over in two days.”

No, it won’t, I mumbled. It is not my wisdom teeth but life after college. Walking the Lake Champlain path through the November sunset, I wondered, as I stepped into the dark, what I was doing up here, next to the Northeast Kingdom. No guiding angels singing.

Looking out the window from my study with neatly arranged piles of papers on my desk—stories of drug-addict friends and interview transcripts—I stared out at the setting sun. No way out of Harlem or the Bronx for these guys. I scribbled, typed, read, and looked up to the night sky. What is happening in our cities? I gasped for breath. The betrayals, the false promises. There was no real work for the poor, the addicted, and the criminal.

They were promised a way out: if you were straight and showed up on time, all would work out, we promised; but that was not true for almost everyone working at Wildcat Inc., the supported work program for ex-addicts. I was there to supervise, learn, and help them out; peer into another world and tell the less fortunate, this is the way out. My first job after college.

There were no answers sitting on my desk. The cherry desk was made at Jamesburg Reformatory by boys half my age—and it was mine at cost, as my mother, sitting on the New Jersey parole board, passed judgement on the kids. Yes, no, a couple more months once the boy finishes school. I worked in the shop on the weekends, spinning wood bowls as the boys, the inmates, made my cherry desk and my mother held court. The boys were learning woodworking skills so they could make it in the real world, declared superintendent Charlie Houston. Fat chance.

I sat at my reformatory desk staring out the window, knowing that *Prisoners Were People*, a book my mother gave me when I was twelve. Why was the world so unfair? How did my addict friends—the smart guys who knew how to deal, play the numbers, and talk the good line—how did the smart ones break the grip of poverty and crime with no college degree and a screwed-up work history? This job, that, and a gap of three years when they were in the joint upstate. Just street smarts and fast talk.

The injustice hit me in the face as I crossed 116th Street and 8th Avenue—the dealer’s corner—or passed the strip joints crowding 42nd Street and Times Square. I was just out of college with an English degree, three films, and no call from the draft board. High blood pressure but not a conscientious objector, according to the Trenton draft board. “I ain’t killing no Vietnamese,” like Mohammed Ali said at his draft board hearing, but my blood pressure told the army that I reacted too quickly to guns, Agent Orange forests, and the contradictions of war. So I sat in northern Vermont with books, political treatises, elaborate conspiracy theories, and me trying to make sense of the scourge of heroin and the War on Poverty. Another program full of good intentions, falling way short.

How to tell the story, dissect the logic of addiction and unemployment—why working and playing by the rules was not enough—and why the promises of a way out with a good job, clean apartment, and crime-free neighborhoods were dreams, maybe misperceptions, that we all wanted to believe. These were men who told me their stories as we drank Chock Full o’Nuts coffee each morning. Clyde, Barry, and the ex-

addict supervisors reviewed the day's work schedule with me. We rolled our eyes at the always-late excuses and elaborate story about subway delays, lost subway tokens, and why I'm late. Clyde and Barry knew the score, I did not. A white college boy couldn't really get the game.

My black and brown ex-addict peers knew from day one that the system was rigged. Supported work was just another gig, like the methadone clinics, a good try that would not work. They were along for the ride—and the money was easy. For them it started with the color of your skin, where you were born, the crappy schools, how much money was in your pocket, and what you did to get by. Deal, steal, and a little work. Not fair, not right. And how was I, a 23-year-old white man, scribbling in a cold study, going to figure out how to break the cycle of drugs, crime, and poverty?

“Oh, the shark has pretty teeth, dear.”

Why do good people become part of the system...to some, the oppressors? Marx sat in a musty London library with books all around him for years and came up with *Das Capital* and his definitive answers to why capitalism would fail. I did not. There were no easy answers. Johnson's War on Poverty was sputtering out as the last American soldiers escaped Vietnam. The revolution was not taking hold. The picket lines receded, the barricades disappeared as billy clubs were sheathed. Who now was the enemy? I stared out the window. The winter nights were cold.

* * *

“This will hurt.”

Two wisdom teeth, impacted molars, pulled on a bright, cold, January day. I tapped and typed page upon page of my Wildcat story—why supported work did not work. Clyde laughed; he did not kill but knew those who did. “John, hold it man, stay with me as we dive deep into the dark alleys and walk across 116th Street to the really mean dudes. Don't worry, I have your back, man.

“We will make it out, but Barry won't, he's still caught in his fast talk and the smack. That stuff is bad, it fogs the head, kills.”

My cherry desk held the betrayals. The bleeding hand of purgatory. The addicts had to want the good life real bad; not the fix but the hard work, the broken promises, and the tears that come with the struggles to make it out. Some knew the game, most did not. I mouthed the words. Clyde knew the score.

My bleeding heart ached. Not right, not fair, not easy. I left Wildcat disappointed and angry; my friends had no choice, they stayed. I was too young to know, and they were so much older.

“Yes, take out both teeth as quick as you can.”

The pain felt good. My cheeks puffed up as I walked into the wind. The sun was sinking; I knew things were not right. Not my teeth or my unpublished essay but the wind in my face, turning me around. I did not know what capitalism was about, why Marx believed the proletariat would rise, how do-gooder programs would and would not keep those from falling through the cracks. The chasms.

“You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.” Yes, but I needed someone to tell me how to get out of here. The food I ate fed me, the clothes kept me warm, and my bed was warm with a woman I loved. The blues rang in my head; “Johnny B. Goode” was not enough.

By 1974 Nixon was gone; Ford pardoned him too quick. My Harlem buddies had less food, some methadone—a bet on a horse that did not show—and my words protesting loudly in an unpublished page. No exit there.

Yes, “the poor are always with us.” But what should we do?

“It’s going to hurt.”

That’s okay, it’s what growing up is all about. “The times they are a-changin’”; still, we are right some of the time.

THE END

John Ballantine is a professor at Brandeis International Business School. He received his bachelor’s degree in English from Harvard University, then earned his master’s degree and Ph.D. in economics from University of Chicago and NYU stern, respectively. His economic commentary has appeared in salon and the Boston globe, among others.

Ballantine’s writing is a longstanding avocation and reflection of being in the world of his family, the equations he discusses in class, the books he’s read, and the films he watches. Every month for the last fourteen years, him and family have held “poetry potlucks” at their house. He has taken workshops through the writers studio and the Concord-Carlisle Community School with Barbara O’Neil, following the “writing down the bones” method. His work has appeared in Adelaide Literary Magazine, Apricity Magazine, Arkansas Review, Bluestem, Carbon Culture Review, Cobalt, Crack The Spine, Existere Journal, Forge, Green Hills Literary Lantern, Lime Hawk, Massachusetts’s Emerging Writers: An Anthology Of Nonfiction, The Penmen Review, Oracle Fine Arts Review, Ragazine, Rubbertop Review, Saint Ann’s Review, Santa Fe Literary Review, Santa Clara Review, Snreview, Slippery Elm, and Streetlight Magazine. His essay “Half Of Something” is a finalist in the Adelaide Literary Award Contest for the Best Essay 2018.