



Twisted Vine
Literary and Arts Journal

about the Journal...

Twisted Vine Literary and Arts Journal is run by students in the Master of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies program at Western New Mexico University. We aim to publish annually. Surrounded by Gila National Forest, Western New Mexico University dates to 1893 and serves 3500 students in 70 fields of study.



on the cover:
Brian Pottorff
Fall Still Life
acrylic on masonite 2015

Masthead

Fall 2019

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A Word from our Managing Editor...

Contemplating how to preface this edition of *Twisted Vine* in order to do justice to all of those that contributed to this effort is humbling. As the Managing Editor I see the many hours of work that the staff has put in to make this edition possible. Together we have sweat great drops of blood as we agonized over how to make this happen. Once we thought we had it mastered we discovered another major problem. It was a good problem, but one that at least caused several of us a great deal of pain. We had far more material that most of us wanted to publish than *Twisted Vine* has the capacity to put out.

This leads to the most important people that made this edition possible, our contributors. The staff enjoyed reading their stories, poems, and admiring the visual art. Most of us also are writers and artists, so we saw the thousands of hours of effort put into the contributions we received. The fact that so many did that made me step back in awe as the site we used became so flooded with submissions that we could not accept any more. From the bottom of our heart we want to thank our contributors for their work to make this edition of *Twisted Vine* what it is.

A final thank you goes out to the people that will consume the works we are publishing. We hope you find the visual art as inspiring as we did. The diversity in the poetry we have collected should be enjoyable for you as well. Hopefully the stories, both fiction and non-fiction, will bring a smile or cause you to step back and look at the world in a new way. Thank you for taking the time to read our journal.

Randy McBride
Managing Editor

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Poetry



Cenotaph from the Opryland Hotel

— Ryan Kelley

The wax figures
of Dolly and Buck and Roy
were our people,
Come up through the southland
and down through the mountains
But we didn't know that then
Our grandparents tight-lipped
About the orphanages
and the shacks
Rotting on the outskirts of town
About sack dresses and dandelion soup
And dead sisters and coroner's visits
In the dead of night
So we took photographs of Liberace's piano
And Elvis' Cadillac
And laughed about good ole boys
and blue eyes crying in the rain

We came down to Nashville
with mom and dad,
The preacher and his family
Back when those little white churches
Were good and kind and meek
And "The Old Rugged Cross"
and "My Redeemer Lives"
Didn't rattle and clang
Like a tinny piano
through the wires of the old
Shure Brothers microphone
we stood in front of onstage at the Opry
And pretended we were Conway Twitty and George Jones
and all the other pomade

and Brylcreem singers
under the tape deck of grandpa's truck.

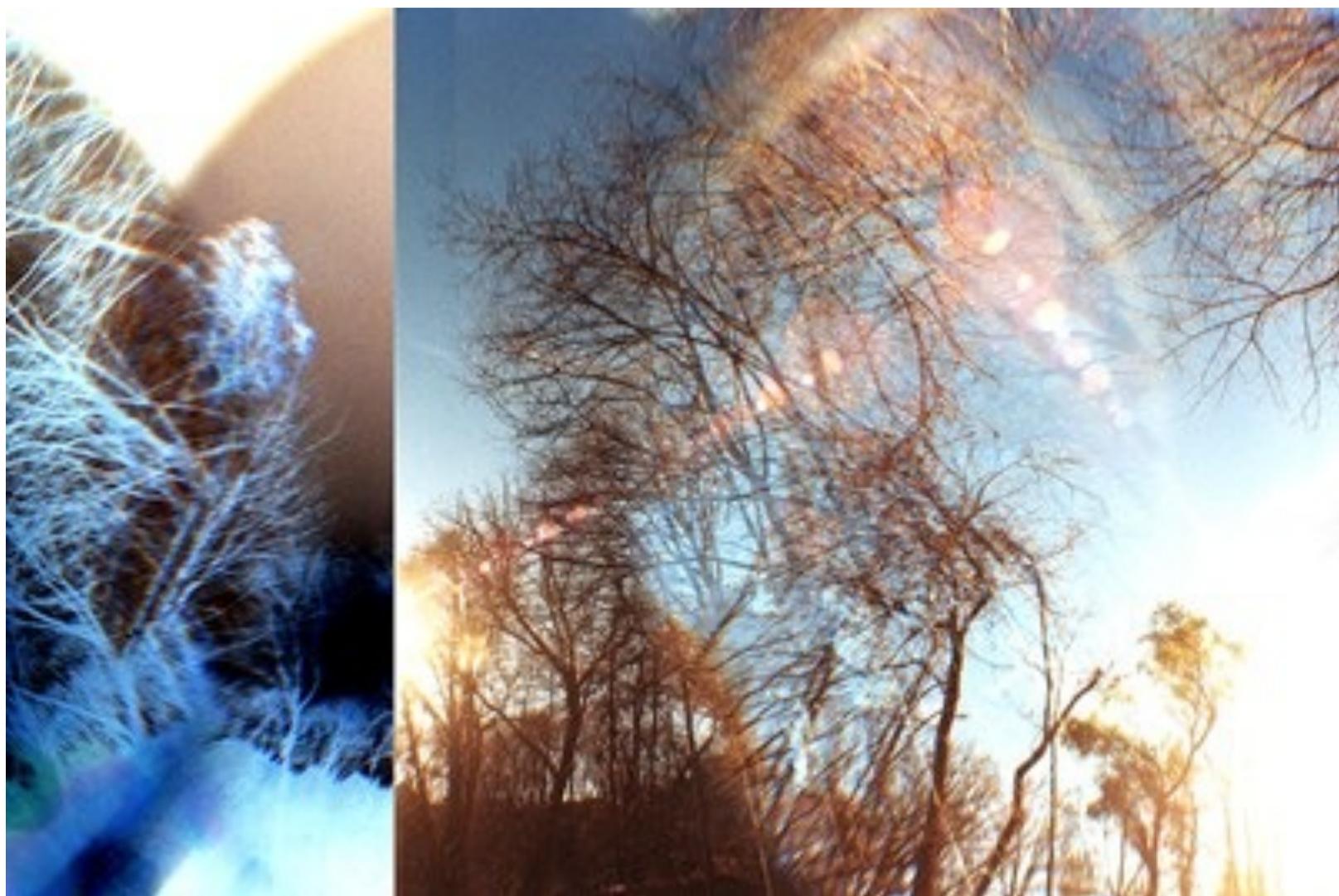
It all seemed so corny and maudlin
So we raced through the atrium,
of the Opryland Hotel
Past the gift shop of California Raisins
and Koosh balls
and World's Greatest Dad coffee mugs

We weaved through the corridors
Until you laughed and darted from me
down the steps disappearing under the veranda
Crying I found you in the mist and sunlight
Of that great big waterfall.
Hank Williams Jr on the PA,
Singing about family tradition.
Slammed fists into you without a dent
You patted me on the shoulder
"I know," you said, "I know."

They boarded up that little white church
The preacher joined up with some ambulance company next town over
He hauled dad up to the city
When the pancreatitis set in
after all those years
And I howled
drunk with fear and anger
Shot-gunning my little coup
Through the streets of little the boarded-up town
Stumbling up the stairs of your apartment
Blue eyes crying in the rain
Spilling out to you
While you sipped Grand Marnier from a half-empty bottle
And touched my shoulder,
Saying "I know, I know."

At night I walk down to the hedgerows where the river opens up
And all the old songs rattle in the trees
like empty bottles
Something about meeting up yonder
or further on up the road,
You stand on the other side,
Brilliant as that afternoon waterfall
“I can’t linger here,” I tell you.
And you just smile
and nod
through that same veil
of sunlight
And water.
You reach out,
and almost touch my arm,
Saying “I know, I know.”





Leah Oates *Transitory Space* photographic diptych

Gathering
Abiquiú, NM

— G. Timothy Gordon

Ghost Ranch, O’Keeffe haunt, March hermit buds
gathering—amaranth, wild iris, lavender, sage—
desert brush life before full bloom-on-show, stem,
scent, color, glow, without spirit-water yet spirit-busy
working selves through pitch-black night, ash and dust,
blackcaps askew, dry wash cauldron, awaiting beauty,
grace, fullness all-at-once within, grown modest and dumb
at what you were born for, feeling this much alive becoming *you*
all over again, even before dawn breaks mourning doves’ laments
worrying you back into invisible chemical brew.



There I got the call: you need to come home.
I left Jeff City in the tweed suit
I always wore to the Capitol,
my low brown pumps suitable for marble.
It was always the same numbing route.

I had not been “home” since I stood
on the graduation stage and hurled some words
in a sweaty hothouse Little Rock auditorium.

In Cape Girardeau a gravel truck blew a kiss
to my windshield, spreading like a spider web,
spanning the mirror’s orange fuzzy dice,
my own personal white trash Rubik’s cube.

I checked into a plain room in a sensible hotel,
not wanting to stay at your house in Maumelle.
I’d read the forecast. Maumelle would be raining people
and I’d left my spray-on peoplecide on my St. Louis desk.

Searching the floor for your room in the cancer wing,
I got a sting, a punch in the gut when I looked up
and saw Dad’s name, forgetting that we always called you
your middle name. Seeing it there was a shock all the same.

I never knew you’d joined an apocalyptic henpecking
holy-rolling tabernacle on I-67 when you got so, so sick.
People know that death hovers over their voices,
cults of the easily led brain-dead, speaking in tongues.

Your whole family had become a brood of scolds
following the pulpited pied piper I took to calling Brother Jim Jones.
They Oompaloompa-chanted some garbled-up prayers.

Your congregation of sanctimonious Kool-Aid droolers
had hung posters in cheery kindergarten colors:
“Steve! You will walk out of here full of Jesus and cancer free!”
“Steve, the Devil will not get you! Jesus declares victory!”
Satan saw a lot of exclamation points in getting behind thee.

I realized that I already have been thinking of you in past tense
and that at least the Oompaloompas know your name.
“He” is Steve. Say his name. Repeat it. His name is Steve.
I whispered to my sister that when you died it would be a rough
surprise; Death had its sting since they didn’t pray hard enough.
A gruff nurse in the hallway leaned warily on the wall, tense,
eyes telegraphing that in this crowd I stood out for common sense.

She gave me a brochure, telling us what to look for on page 13.
I don’t wonder how to spell “triskaidekaphobia” on too many days.
I thanked her not for my brother or “him” but in your given name.

I recalled again the name of our father leaping from his deathbed door
in this very same hospital six full years before. I edit your door. Steve.
Your name is Steve. Sing it. Wrap it like a wreath on that closed door.

Your wife finally agrees to read it, and says it doesn’t matter who prays;
for weeks she’s watched you rending bedclothes even on morphine,
embracing earth’s tenuous grasp on you while flitting above it like an ash.

Briefly, you awaken to suck an orange Popsicle and your eyes lgrin to see me, even though the whole family knows when I come “home,” I have given the hitchhiking Angel of Death a ride through the Ozarks to where you’d be.

You say to your wife, “Baby, let’s go. Come on. Let’s just go on home.” She doesn’t take your meaning, and pictures the family room in Maumelle. I saw your eyes, your earnest attempt to rush into the yawning tomb. I took your meaning about leaving that prison bed, understood very well.

Now that your wife has read page 13, she is willing. The watch drill begins; the med techs on death duty, like so many wind-up soldiers, goosestep in. They try to lift your dragging arms, already dead weight. They are too rough. They want to flip your inert cinder-block body to tape-strap a bag to your butt.

I cry out, “You’ve already torn his rotator cuff.” They give me a dismissive huff. “He’s not a carriage horse. This can’t be how you people manage this stuff.” They argue some more before the words “charge nurse” bring a shrugging retreat. They didn’t mind being rough with the near-dead. They just wanted clean sheets.

I go with my sister to the bathroom down the eerie fluorescence of the hall and Pastor Jim Jones seizes the chance to evict one of your daughters, your sister and me from the orderly prosecution of the death order. The machines dance off. The blood pressure plunges below 50. I am allowed back for the last sighing breath. I am flying, now, with you, straight into the vortex of the people-storm of death.

I think of my stepsister’s house because Steve’s house is far too people-y for me, and the air stiff with the widow’s resentment of my parents. I sympathize in silence. After 35 years she’s entitled, just as I have been entitled for 20 years give or take to not come “home,” unless dragging along the unshaved vagabond, hitchhiker Death. Dad, this is my friend Death. Do you want to shake Dad’s hand? Give Mom a kiss?

She's entitled to umbrage at a man capable of squandering breath on sobriquets for his otherwise neglected spawn. I, so much younger than the others, an only child, almost, was the smart one, Susan the sweet one, Phyllis the skinny one, and Marilyn the sexy one. He omitted the schizophrenic one among his prawns. You, Steve, who worked side by side under his name—your name, too—looming over the highway like a colossus, he pronounced with faint praise “the best truck man in the Southeast.”

The beast used to brag that when he cruised home in his dealer car and drove up by the house, past the windows, we all were lingering, so anxious just to see him. Someone, sick of his pride and pretense to our love noted that 6:30 was the hour to sup.

Such tender vignettes trace the contours of “home” and the fractious family it contained.

You are dead, Steve. When I called the Skinny One I knew that Death had stolen my voice,
a petty theft. Unable to speak, I drove to the Skinny One's people-free safe place instead.

The rest of them, people-ing easily with each other at your house on Lake Maumelle, glare at my betrayal when I come by to join the meeting of the People's Temple planning the funeral, which is to say listening to the First of the Seventy-First pour out of the thundering pulpit of the Reverend Jabes Branderham's Brontean eternal curse on our quest for the Jonestown Kool-Aid, on our furtive death-thirst. What a fine Pimm's Cup he nurses.

Steve's Jack Daniels is tantalizingly high on a shelf that is far beyond my parched reach.

I said my piece and left, knowing later they'd spread my bones on the gossip platter. “So aloof,” they'd say. “We've got plenty of room for her to stay right here with us.” “So cold-natured. I guess now she's a lawyer we plain folks just aren't good enough.”

My family has always been woundedly, huffily, gruffly expert at carving the meat clean down to the bones and then painstakingly ragpicking the tortured carcass.

At your funeral, my four-year-old asks, "Does this mean Uncle Steve has gone to God?" "Yes," we rush to assure him. "Yes, he has." The Skinny One smiles and takes my hand. A cousin I'd never liked stayed for the burial and made everything go too people-y.

We sang your favorite hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," I again dressed in my prim tweed, and I peered through my cracked windshield in the cortege, knowing I'd never replace it because it was a sentimental web. The fissure spread until the car was taken in another theft.

But blessings for the wingnut, for the Oompaloompah Greek Chorus shrieking dissent. Give us the wretched refuse of Gulliver's teeming shores and hurl them at Arkansas. Blessings on each and every carefully numbered, God-forbidden, cult-ivated head. Look for me rising through Ozark fog with vagabond angels shedding themselves on 67.



The Fireflies on the Path to the Pond

— Tom Squitieri

Wander down the path
With me
To the pond
To shed and swim

Let's watch a few stars
Bounce off the water
Play tag with
Each other
As they laugh and splash a comet
And flounce in the moon's smile

Watered out
We walk as we are
and find the path
Led by fireflies back to
our tent
Serenaded by the cool dirt
That chortles under our feet

Over the hill is a camper
With a lantern
And mosquito net
Not realizing
it is here, where we are,
That crickets mean
the song of nature
and

not a silence

The morning will crack its cold smile
It hardly seems sincere no matter
How hard it tries
Since it never can squelch that inner glow
Of the heat that passion provides
Of the fire and trust we share
that defines being alive

As always, there are embers
to help stoke the fire
Night darkens
And invites

Tonight, the tent will review
Our explorations
Tomorrow we will find
That apple tree



Avocados and Toilet Paper

— Jason Arment

at the bodega

Spanish lyrics play loud it's

Saturday morning

at the bodega

hot egg and cheese with pepper

ketchup and no salt

at the bodega

buy coffee for one dollar

buy water for two

at the bodega

teenagers gather for fun

it's mom and pop's place

at the bodega

the squash sits beside the pear

scented dryer sheets

at the bodega

the empanadas are crisp

greasy and taste great

at the bodega

soap snacks cigarettes stashed same

noisy black plastic

at the bodega

buy avocados artwork

toys tissue and shoes

at the bodega

only at the bodega

on the block near you





Marsha Banas *Taco* oil on wood panel

Bear Medicine

—Ryan Tilley

It was shaman invoking the spirit of beast
With the braves in agreement through prayer.
They had taken the fat and had smeared it on drums
As they wore it with pride in their hair.

But the Indians left as the whites on the ships
Were a fatal immediate threat.
Their displacement was permanent pain with a life
Of disease and relentless regret.

Through the years, the Caucasian circumference grew
With the theft of the animal's land.
As the centuries moved on, the forest became
A retreat for communities planned

With intrusion. And then, she was spooked by his eyes;
The inimical animal stare
Was vindictive response for the gradual theft
Of environment known by the bear.

He had made a maneuver to swallow her head.
In the mouth of the bear, she was caught.
In the mouth of the bear, she had sensed her demise.
On the north of her lawn, she had fought.

She had wrestled the bear and protected her young
As the animal wanted his land.
On the south of her lawn, she had loosened his grip.
It was better to fight than withstand.

She escaped from the mouth of the bear as the breath
Of the beast had assaulted her nose.
It had smelled like a fish in the Florida sun.
At her feet were remains of a rose.

She discovered a totem in form of a tooth.
It was large and devoid of a crack.
It had fallen on top of a withering frond.
It was valuable proof of attack.

She would learn that her neighbor was feeding the bears
By the curb, which had broken the law.
She imagined the force of her fist as it aimed
To deliver a cross to his jaw.

In her dream was a bear with the power of speech.
He was meant to perform as her guide.
With the spread of his grin, she had seen him with light
And she petted his beautiful hide.



Distant News of a Massacre
In memory of Pulse

— Bhodi Tims

Just west of the badlands,
at the edge of mixed
marshland and boreal
forest, Sandhill cranes, cougar
and moose
inhabit an ephemeral landscape.
Herds of wild horses drift along
the horizon point,
trees break their outlines
into the memory of loss,
something
that-had-once-been-there.

A sound,
like the truncated blow
of whale pods,
from the lead
stallion moves
the herd back
into dead space,
into vibratory structures
of light drifting through timber.

Their shy presence tugs
at the despair I feel
about human presence in such places,
at once an observer and a threat
to the delicate moment these

lives create with each breath.
I want to recede into
the negative space
inside the Jack pine and trembling Aspen,
a ghost forest that only exists
when the herd stands perfectly still.



Valentine

— Daisy Bassen

I am at home in the heart of a blue whale.
I'm small enough. It's large enough
For a demi-goddess, a stowaway,
A friend of Jonah. I like to lay my hand
On the ventricle's fat wall, feel the currents
The valves make. I am a parasite,
A patroness, a palace courtier. There is salt
Within and without, enough iron for a magnet
As big as my own heart, two fists worth;
Leviathan is my host and she is gracious.
There is room for me and I can tell the tides
As they shudder through the waters,
Flesh, blood, sinew: hers and mine.



Ignition

— Carla Schwartz

The pilot doesn't stay lit anymore,
no amount of coaxing. It's all plumbing, though —
one pipe connected to the next,
this union, that nipple,
so the boy turns off the gas
and the boy and girl begin the undoing,
the loosening — first the gas valve,
then the burner tray. The burners look like ribs
set to grill, iron lollipops, riddled with holes
where the gas would flow, only these have 50 years
of crud, looks like Rice Krispies sprinkled all over them,
so the boy shakes one out, then the girl brings him another,
and another, until the tray and all burners look new,
aside from the rust. The intermittent pilot fits in,
just where the old one sat, and they wonder at this small miracle,
since the new one is meant for an electronic ignition.

They continue like this — one thread, one union,
one cock at a time, and then mount the electronic pilot control.

Just a few hours before the subzeros descend, they turn on
the furnace breaker, the main gas feed, and the shutoff.
The girl flips the switch to power the thermostats.

After that, the tick-ticking, the arc of sparks, the burners ignite —
you can see it in their eyes.

Death of the Earth

— Tanya Erickson

My skies hang low dripping with blood
Reeking of sulfur and car exhaust.
Water oozes out from my gaping wounds
Pooling with blood at the mountain's feet.
An asthmatic wind riles up the smudgy air
Coating my surroundings with a noxious residue.

My land convulses, regurgitating the venom in my belly
Like a stomach with a parasitic infestation.
Menacing waters lurk near the jagged shorelines
Washing up noteless plastic bottles wrapped in polymer rings.
Voicelessness of the former sea inhabitants
Echo off the mountain tops.

Grass dies in the valley where children used to play
Leaving only their phantoms behind.
Smokestacks smoldering orange and grey on the horizon
Staining my lungs a chalky black.
Bones of the wild buffalo strewn on the vacant hillside
Now charred where the fires once roamed.

Tides march onto the barren villages
Carrying expired ocean species.
My waters tainted with sticky sludge and scum
Dancing along the desolate seashore.
Rancid waves arching over on itself
Putting on a show for no one.

Man's negligent sovereignty from the promontory
Casts out across the broken landscape
He feels nothing.
I cry out in anguish
My essence escapes into the void.
Returning all to darkness.



One of Us

— Jason Arment

As a child I couldn't imagine
Another person like me all the way
Around the other side of the world
As an adult I've been to the other side
Of the planet & seen how much alike
They & I are, how we cry the same tears
& bleed the same blood, or near enough
To kin folk the only difference visible
Is under a microscope or the way
Our words sound or dreams look
But besides that there aren't many
Intrinsic differentiations to speak of

But when I was over there, it wasn't
About how the Arabs feel & think
Hear of their precious hopes & aspirations
See the cities of their fathers or walk
The streets of their youth to halls of justice
Maybe if I go back to Iraq I could sing
The songs of their people & break bread
With their families & promise
Never to wake screaming from dreams
Of them again



back of yes

— Patrice Boyer Claeys

his eyes
said Murder, and the

wind
mirrored in leaves,

flowers, a crow—
the world up to now—

tried something different—
a propulsion

to feel happiness
or possibly—

yes, the perception
of myself—back there,

back then, back
from extinction.



Elocution

— Laura Handley

They told us that the way we speak was wrong,
the music in our voices an error.

With all they have to show: guns, boats, cars,
gold, steel, semiconductors,
and the fatal stress of formality,
how can they not be right?

Flat and colorless is the ideal,
straightforward speech that shares nothing
of the nature of the speaker,
and stays out of the way of business.

So we have bleached and flattened,
taken to gray box-houses and stiff black suits
but they still cannot accept us, not quite yet,
for every so often,
a songbird in flight, shedding rainbow plumes
bursts forth from our mouths.

Until we fix this flaw, they say, success will elude us.





Ginger Lawrence *I Need to Scream* lithograph

Responsory

— Ian Ganassi

It's a hierarchy, complete with hierarchs.
Low on the roster, Popeye is in the rigging,
Who never had the pleasure of a spinach salad.
And the cat can sleep for hours, twitching.

Forgive me my transgressions
As reported in crumbling comic books, ripe with dew.
Cleverness for its own sake is a defense against feeling things directly.
The Italian gardener said Dante Alighieri was a "big cheese."

It's a hierarchy, complete with hierarchs.
They pace themselves by watching each other work.
Who never had the pleasure of a spinach salad.
Whether or not we were introduced, we had no idea who Tim was.

Forgive me my transgressions.
Are you here to stay or just visiting?
Cleverness for its own sake is a defense against feeling things directly.
Someone who was with the general at the time.

It's a hierarchy, complete with hierarchs.
Not to mention matriarchs and patriarchs.
Who never had the pleasure of a spinach salad.
But it's a realm in which I don't belong.

Forgive me my transgressions.
Sometimes discovering the obvious hurts.

Cleverness for its own sake is a defense against feeling things directly.
I was out of old material so I had to think on my feet.

It's a hierarchy, complete with hierarchs.
And I should know. And Superman,
Who never had the pleasure of a spinach salad.
My chestnuts were too hairy this year, along with my ears.

Forgive me my transgressions.
We made much of it, as comedy of the absurd.
Cleverness for its own sake is a defense against feeling things directly.
Time goes forward and around simultaneously.

Heavenly/Blue

— Kenneth Pobo

Upstairs my husband works
on our finances. Downstairs
I scrub the kitchen floor.

Twenty-seven years have come
and gone. We've killed
at least that many African violets,

punished the snowblower
with nasty curses. He's retired
and I'm almost retired.

We attend more funerals now,
anticipate even more.
Death sits in the living

room with us, shares our
big bag of popcorn. Our faces
a drizzle of white hair. Maybe

grief bleached out the color.
Bills paid, floor clean,
we sit on the porch and admire

heavenly blue morning glories,
vibrant in a September morning,
closing in late afternoon.



Three Instances That Somehow Form a Disjunctive Unity

— Marcus Williams

1. *Not to Stumble, to Get to Tell You Something Simple*

—as if milk in a glass bottle could boil and scald inside a refrigerator,

in the chill Californians call June Gloom, sun muted not into despair
but something compacted between car tire and road. Azure sparkles

in clear-glass isolation stretched floor to ceiling, solid as a fish tank,

undulates as it plies a wooden frame, convinces me I'm liquescent—
a fluid perspective that pours stillness into balm, spreads and levels it

—seclusion in lieu of dying, turning me mute inside breakers. A sea

like the one that swallowed me when I was four, a Sunday afternoon
that became water, grit and a roar that has now returned, every noise

and each word amplified until the room's air is gone. Silent, I float,

motionless, not daring to leave this room to abandon calm. An ocean

of particles solidified into a bridge underfoot, over the Grand Canyon,

I might walk easier, feel vanish halfway across. So much for simple—

2. Washed Ashore Again and Again, Speechless, Spun Out of Control

Rubber-edged clocks trip perfect circles across sun-bleached cracks

in what I excuse as asphalt. I trace the backs of coastal mountains,

toward Mexico, the pretense to deliver auto parts. People think me

mute, a clear puddle. There's a gap in the dash—the radio ripped out—

like the memory of a dead musical relative as he swings on the chrome

arms of my passenger mirror; he knows how Mozart's tune now

shred my brain, along with small-talk, loud noises—anything that ripples

a silent sheen. Like sitting at the foot of a rising wave, seeing it crash.

3. *The Boats Have Rolled Up Their Colored Sails*

—and white, Spanish castle walls at El Porto keep their occupants' secrets.

The Pacific nods its ascent in an otherwise glass-smooth expression, tongues
sunset along the deep inclination otherwise known as horizon. Wine-drunk,

it slurs rollers into something that approaches syllables, its loquacity a counter

to words that refuse to come to me. Sailboats head to Marina del Rey. Engines
babble, grouse under gasoline breath to denuded masts that stand and listen,

while I watch surf churn with sand, pick out broken shells of conversation—



Abrazo Nocturno

— Constanza Bernad

Abrazar a Johann Wolfgang Goethe en la noche radiante de luna de otoño

Abrazar a Virginia inyectarle unos versos de espíritu anárquico alegría de vivir

Abrazar a Violeta peregrina viajera incansable a la sombra de su carpa

regalarle un castillo de luz un escudo de poesía sin interrupción

Abrazar a José Lezama Lima adelgazarlo en hijos en fuerza de atleta en auras

voluptuosas de su noche cubana

Abrazar a todos los hombres y mujeres poetas y escritores

A George Trakl le ahorraría los horrores de la guerra

A Friedrich Hölderlin le traspasaría su lucidez de pájaro

por plumas de constancia

Abrazar a la luna abrazar a noche

Desde un reducto cerrado sin edad y viva

Abrazar a todos y a todas

Todas y todos aquellos que no vieron su obra en la imprenta

Que no vieron su trabajo remunerado con dinero con reconocimiento

Con tranquilidad

A todos los artesanos de la palabra

Laboriosos obreros de la voz buscadores de la luz

Donadores del verbo mártires sufrientes

Suicidas del alcohol y la heroína

A todos os abrazo desde la noche lunar

Abrazo a Alfonsina Storni y pongo en su pecho

La rosa de la libertad

Violeta perenne de la salud y la compasión

Abrazo a Wladimir Maiakovski en Moscú

Su enorme cuerpo físico anega mi figura

Sano queda de lo que él llamaba hermosa enfermedad

Mientras se deslizan las nubes continuo besando

Abrazo a todas y todos aquellos quienes en este tiempo espiral y mágico

Viven conjugando versos con sed de infinito anhelo de justicia

Esfuerzo por mover montañas

Darle un idioma a las piedras

Crear en la noche la aurora boreal

Abrazo a los maderistas que cortan árboles inermes para sobrevivir

Abrazo a los carniceros que degüellan animales inermes para sobrevivir

Abrazo a las prostitutas que venden el placer como quien vende un coral

Abrazo a los moribundos y a los recién nacidos

Y cargada con todos los abrazos

Me deslizo

En la noche

Hasta la puerta del sol

Descanso en una canción silenciosa y solitaria.



Non-fiction



Prison Ethics 101 (or) How an Old Teacher Got Schooled

“To understand the man, you must first walk a mile in his moccasins.”

~ Attributed to Native Americans

— Thomas Davidson

I am an adjunct business instructor at Marion Technical College for the Business Prison Program. For the past three years I have been teaching college-level business coursework at North Central Corrections, and the Marion Correctional Institute. These are all male prisons in Northern Ohio. Since working at the prisons my life has been overflowed with astounding ‘life moments’. I have felt driven to write a story about a recent incident.

Yes – this is a prison-themed short story, but it is also a human story. A felon by committing their crime surrenders their rights (temporarily) to be a member of our society – this is something I understand. However, just because a man makes a mistake (or several mistakes) doesn’t mean he ceases to be a member of humanity. Trust me when I say to you: despite their surroundings and the burdens they bear - there is much good that persists in these places. I have learned more about the potential for greatness in the human spirit from working with my incarcerated students during the past three years than twenty years of my teaching of ‘traditional students’.

When I lecture in my prison classes I enjoy discussing the importance of perspective with my students. That they should strive to see things from the other man’s point-of-view. Since my wife is half-Cherokee and she constantly wears moccasins, I have always been strongly drawn to the quote accredited to several different people

interchanging the words shoes and moccasins. *“To understand the man, you must first walk a mile in his moccasins.”* I was recently teaching a class on a popular subject on the inside. A subject that we all will take home with us when re-entering back to society. Right and wrong, good and evil, morality, philosophy (and of course), the Big E - ETHICS.

I need to share this true story about an incident that occurred when I was teaching an ethics class in one of the prisons (Marion Correctional Institute). I couldn't ethically write about this incident without first obtaining permission from the student involved. I told him for the purposes of this story I would use an anonymous name when referring to him. He insisted on selecting the name. With his typical sense of humor - he wanted to be called prisoner Malcolm X. I always refer to my students by the prefix of Mr. – followed by their surname. This means that he would be Mr. X in the story. My students refer to me as Dr. D. This is a true story I am sharing with you the reading audience about Mr. X, Dr. D, in the Big E class. You just can't make this stuff up - can you?

On this day I was teaching a class on Business Ethics and Mr. X was a part of the class where approximately 50% of the students had worked hard for months or years to achieve their GED. They were finally taking college level course-work. I usually thoroughly enjoyed these sessions with newer students. Exploring their personal belief system and exposing them to the thoughts of great men such as Kant, Descartes, and Nietzsche.

I would follow my usual steps of utilizing creative ethical dilemma questions such as *“If you could go back in time – would you kill Hitler as a baby knowing how he would*

turn out?" I would play the numbers games of philosophy. "Would you kill one old business instructor (me) to save a million lives? Would you trade one life for the life of someone who would later cure cancer and save millions of others?" My readers - you have probably heard them all. However, they do the job of provoking good discussions. Until it was Mr. X's turn to be grilled. No matter how ridiculously creative the scenarios I created became – he completely and utterly refused to 'take' the imaginary life! He was unshakable in his responses – no never take a life – no matter how impactful it became in my imaginary ethical scenarios.

Becoming a little frustrated I stated to Mr. X *"Hey Mr. X remember our class rule to always be truthful. Are you following the rule?"* He quietly replied to me (and the entire class) *"Yes sir Dr. D - I am being truthful. No matter what awful scenario you come up with - you can never convince me that it is okay to take a human life. Nothing you can say will get me to change my mind."* Now I was really becoming intrigued.

I was remembering my first class with Mr. X (*I wanna be Malcom X in the story your writing Dr. D*) which had been Introduction to Marketing. I had been asking a series of pointed questions of the class to try and determine the extent of marketing experience that existed. Mr. X had stated flat out that he had 'zero' experience with marketing and that marketing might as well be Greek for all he could make of it. Further questioning revealed that Mr. X had never held down a 'real nine to five' type of job in his life. The only work he had any actual experience with was selling product. So - for the next 15-20 minutes I peppered him with questions such as: *"How did you determine your target market for your product? What was their demographic? Did you rely strictly on word-of-mouth or did you use other marketing strategies? How did you differentiate*

your product from your competitions? How did you establish pricing?" You have probably figured out - how this went. By the time class was over Mr. X was readily admitting that just maybe he had been mistaken and he knew more about marketing then he may have given himself credit for.

So, recalling our previous encounter in Marketing class - I was feeling confident (perhaps a little cocky). Once Mr. X truly understood my philosophical 'what if' questions – and my purpose for asking them – all would be well. I knew success was eluding me – and was simply a couple of well-constructed ethical dilemma questions away! So here we go again back into that morality breach. *"Okay Mr. X explain for my benefit and the benefit of your classmates why you can state so adamantly that you will never take a human life?"* I asked (somewhat smugly). *"Mr. X never is a very strong word – are you sure you meant to say never?"*

Mr. Malcolm X slowly stood to face me and the rest of the class. He was a tall (six foot four) lean muscled, and he moved like a cat. I have never felt frightened of the overly big-muscled, weight lifting types you find throughout the prison system. However, I have found that prisoners like Mr. X are far more physically intimidating. He began to speak. I immediately realized that this was going to be a 'moment'. Whenever I was a part of a moment – I would feel the hairs on the back of my neck tingle and begin to stand up. I was listening on the edge of my chair and soaking up each-and-every word. I could feel this moment would burn into me - like the others.

Mr. X raised his head and looked the class straight in their eyes. He reminded me of a superbly confident young lion surveying his kingdom. *"Well sir - the reason I can speak with absolute certainty that I will never-ever agree to take a human life - is*

because I have taken a life before - in fact that is why I am here in this place". I heard some mental and actual gasps in the room. Mr. X was entering the usually unspoken territory of 'what was my crime that put me here'. He continued in a voice that trembled with pent up emotion and yet somehow remained powerful. *"A close friend of mine from childhood – worked for me moving product – yes I mean drugs"*. He paused for a moment to survey his captive audience. *"I had received word that some product was missing – and that my childhood friend was stealing from me"*. When he next spoke - there was a touch of fire in his speech. *"Friend or not – he was taking from me – from my family – and I had to make an example of him."* Now he pleaded with us via his tone and demeanor. *"I had to – if not – others who worked for me – or were my competitors – would believe I was soft"*.

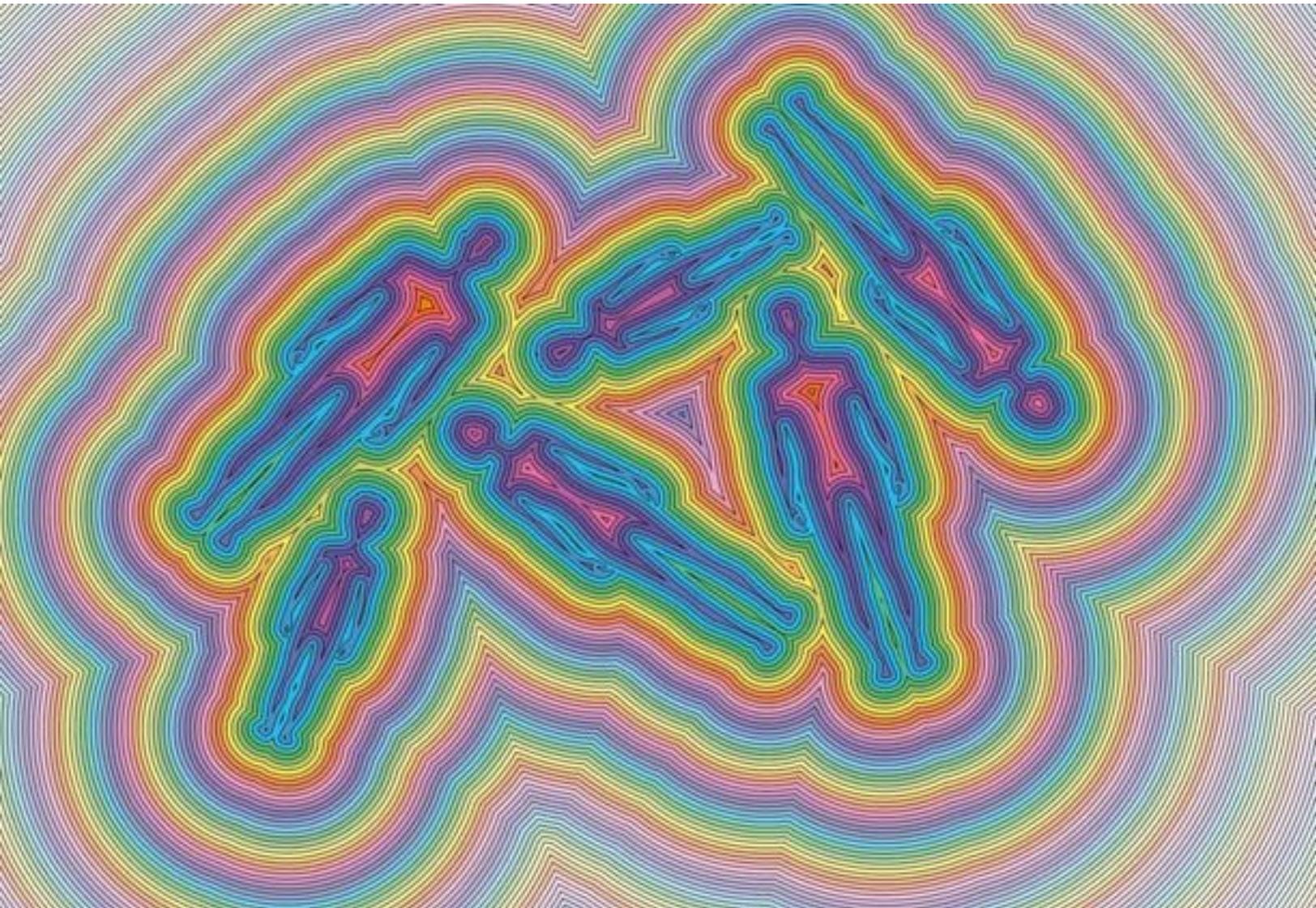
At this point Mr. X looked downward at the top of his scuffed prison-worn shoes and his voice softened again. When he next looked back up at us – his warm brown eyes were filled with tears. As he struggled to speak (at this point the class was so quiet that I understood that old saying 'you could have heard a pin drop') he finally managed to speak in a quiet but firm voice *"We went for a walk – a walk away from everyone else. I knew that my best friend was planning to kill me - kill me and take my place as the boss. We looked at each other - and we both knew – so we began to fight"*

Mr. X looked downward for a second time. Not at his shoes this time – but at his scarred yet powerful-looking hands. When he looked back up at his hypnotized classmates (and teacher) he raised those well-muscled hands and displayed them to us all. *"I beat my friend to death with my bare hands"* he pronounced in a quivering voice. Now he turned and looked directly at me with burning eyes *"Do you know what it feels*

like to kill a man with your bare hands Dr. D - with these hands?" he raised the offending items to my eye level. *"Well sir, that is why I can answer your ethics and morality questions all day long - and tell you never – never again – will I take a human life".* As he finished speaking he slipped lithely back into his seat.

I clumsily cleared my tightened throat and began speaking *"Well umm- thanks for being so open - and honest - and sharing your story with us – Mr. X."* It was obvious to all in the classroom - that I was taken aback and searching for my words. *"Okay class – so let's talk about the dangers of this 'numbers philosophy' why a smaller number of lives should have less 'value' than a larger number of lives, or should we feel that way?"* I cleared my throat for what I hoped was the final time. *"Umm - okay class - has anyone heard of a Japanese city called Hiroshima?"* As the hands flew up around the room I snuck a quick look at Mr. X. He was sitting quietly at his desk with his powerful hands folded in his lap. He was staring intently at his hands as if he was waiting to receive a deep philosophical message from them. I thought to myself for perhaps the umpteenth time – Tom you always seem to learn more from these felons than you teach them in return. Mr. X looked up directly into my eyes and smiled tentatively at me. I smiled back – both of us happy - because all remained good between us.

I realize that an old teacher like myself - can still be schooled. I also realize that an old teacher like myself – can still be right once every now and again. It is all about perspective. So - I am urging you ladies and gentlemen of my reading audience to not judge a man (or woman) without first striving to see things from their perspective. I am turning off this computer now and going to sleep. Walking a mile in a felon's moccasins has really worn me out.



Fabio Tasso *Colorful is Better* digital image

You Hide It

— Lydia Isaacs

I was so happy to be able to retire right after my 53rd birthday. After thirty long years at my career, able to retire with a modest but decent pension. My honey followed me into retirement six months later. We would have decades of fun before us, and if we needed to engage part time jobs to supplement our modest pensions, we could do so.

In the course of the next nine months, I would be diagnosed with two cancers.

First I was told the blood results indicated I had MGUS (monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance). This meant that these abnormal blood test results would lead to a blood cancer, but it could be years before it advanced to the next stage. Five months later I was told it had advanced to the next stage, 'smoldering multiple myeloma', of the "light chain" variety. I was told that if a given ratio of light chains exceeds 100, the disease will be considered to have 'converted' to active disease signaling the need to begin treatment. Four months later, as I was struggling to adjust to living with this Sword of Damocles hanging over my head, I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer, 'uterine papillary serous carcinoma', an uncommon and invasive form of endometrial cancer.

Surgery was scheduled. Needless to say, my mental health deteriorated. I didn't believe how my life had changed. Two cancers? Two Swords of Damocles? With retirement, I had been looking forward to a new chapter in life. Little did I know what that chapter entailed. Two aggressive cancers were waiting for me as I turned the page. My life as I had known it, was over.

In the meantime, the important ratio for the light chain myeloma exceeded 100, the

magic number that called for treatment. But there was a reprieve. My new myeloma doc informed me that although the protocol was to begin treatment once the light chain ratio exceeded 100, such recommendation was developed based on data for those who have the 'heavy chain' variation of myeloma. His recommendation was to wait it out and not begin treatment. In the doctor's words, we are just waiting for the other shoe to drop. We will know this is occurring when my bones start breaking down, sending too much calcium to my kidneys. So bone pain and failing kidneys are the markers that are now part of my nightmares.

In a truly horrible twist of events, surgery for the endometrial cancer was scheduled for the same day our oldest child was getting married in India. We cancelled our travel plans and still weep over not being with our child and daughter-in-law at their celebration. My sister and sister-in-law were at the wedding ceremony, receiving texts from my husband with updates on my surgery status. We find some small comfort that we were with them at their 'first' small wedding in the US but we missed the grand celebration. Remembering I wasn't there still brings instant tears.

Surgery prep (emptying the gastrointestinal system) meant a blinding migraine. Awaiting surgery meant discomfort, fear, and uncontrollable shaking until the anesthetic sent me to sweet oblivion. Upon waking, pain, pain and more pain, mixed in with some discomfort. Not to ignore the bloating, nausea and brain fog. Small indignity? No one told me my pubic hair would be shaved. Recovery was slow. But the real challenge lay in waiting to see the doctor to find out how far the cancer had spread. Finally, I received great news, the cancer stage was 1a, the least invasive stage. Given the aggressiveness of the cancer, the gynecologic oncology surgeon indicated chemotherapy was the next

step. I was referred by the surgeon to the chemotherapy oncologist. The latter indicated 6 treatments of carboplatin and taxol were the norm, to be administered in three week cycles. That began a 6 month cycle of nausea, fear, depression, fatigue, and collapsed veins. Life became defined by those drugs. There was nothing else. I was lucky to have lots of support. I knew that I was. But despite the company, I still felt alone with the cancers that had invaded my body.

Chemo finally ended. I felt deep relief. That nightmare was at an end. But my life of pretense continued; with my husband, my Mom, my children, everyone. Sure, I am doing okay today. Sure, I will play a game, sure I will go for a walk. And so on. But nothing could return me to life before cancer.

The truth is that cancer has made me someone else. Cancer, chemotherapy, and the medical system have stripped and continue to strip away bits of my soul, little by little. What is left is an open wound. I mourn the me I was. She is gone, and replaced with this scared patient I am trying to know.

I returned to the chemo doc for what I thought was a routine appointment, a month after the last chemotherapy treatment. The appointment began by proceeding as I expected; white blood count is still low but should continue to recover, how do I feel etc. But then it took an unexpected twist; the doc indicated that radiation treatment is an option. That when we discussed it at the beginning of my treatment, it was not but things have changed. The irony is that I had pushed the question hard at those first appointments, based on my own research. The chemo doc tells me that a radiation oncologist can best explain the option of proceeding with “brachytherapy”.

It is awful. A prod, like a dilator, was placed in my vagina, hooked up to the machine

that delivered the radiation. I continued to lose what little was left of me. To all of those medical people in the room, I was a cancer patient, nothing more. They are compassionate, professional and kind, concerned about my comfort, but I see it in their eyes; I was only a cancer patient, not a person. Same as with chemotherapy. I tried to meditate through the procedure; I failed every time. And I mourned. I wanted to shout at all the medical personnel, 'Look at me! I used to be a person with a life. I was you. '

The way cancer strips you of so much; it is hard to capture the magnitude of the loss. So many little things too. Yeah, the chemo drugs robbed me of my hair. And I mean all my hair.

Radiation side effects meant diarrhea for me. And fatigue of course, my companion.

I then saw the birth of two eyelashes! I celebrated hair. Slowly they gained more company. Followed by a shadow where my eyebrows used to live. And then eyebrows started growing. Wispy hairs started to emanate from my scalp. And then further, unexpected indignities began. I grew soft but noticeable facial hair all over my face I never had before. It was disconcerting, upsetting. Thank God for the internet and women sharing their experiences with a post-chemo life. This has happened to many others. Still upsetting but at least I had information about others' experiences. And the unexpected hair grew in many other places. Who knew?

More importantly, I struggle with “waiting for the other shoe to drop” when the multiple myeloma decides to rear its head. I don't know how to live with the stark reality of not one but two cancer survival statistics for two “aggressive” cancers.

People ask- how are you? They want to know if I am coping, if my physical and

mental health are well. Most of them think because surgery and treatment have ended, that I must have 'bounced' back by now.

The truth is, I don't tell anyone the depths of horror and terror that has become my life. I can't; there are no words. I don't tell them I have ceased to be me. That I am this new being who used to be the me they knew. They grow tired of hearing that I feel sick and fatigued every day.

How can I explain how it feels? How I have not really passed the stage of "Why me" and how that phrase has a permanent berth in my head? How every moment that I was in treatment, peeled off another piece of my soul. How every time I enter the hospital to see the doctors my entire being is silently screaming in disbelief and fear. How every time I am waiting for the blood test results for the myeloma to post in the online patient portal, I can feel myself dying just a little bit more. The little that is left of me continuing to dim thinking there can't be much left prior to extinguishing.

That I just want to make it to that famed five year survival year for the endometrial cancer without a recurrence. I obsess about this, but I also obsess about the myeloma "converting" to active disease.

And how to make the best of this other life, with that which now has a life tenancy with me- the ever present and very controlling fatigue.

So how to live now that my life is irrevocably changed, that I have this other, unwanted life? I of course have no answers. And I am very aware of the astronomically high number of people who are worse off than I am and that have handled their situation so much better than I am. That only makes me feel worse; in my frailty, in my cowardice, in my negativity.

It is not as though I am not trying to accept that that which I call 'this other life' is indeed my life. I am trying, but failing often.

I remind myself, rather constantly, that I am still myself. That life is constant change and that although these are doozies, these are just the most recent changes introduced in my life. Constant change, constant adjustment. I tell myself I can do this.

That I need to be thankful for what I have. I try to take each moment as a gift. Each moment without pain or discomfort is a gift. Each moment of humor is a gift. Flowers, breezes, chocolate, hot showers, a working HVAC system, my favorite hoodie, homemade piping hot bread, cookies, the smell of lavender, a great jog, hugs from my honey; these are all gifts. Every time I experience something positive, I try to give thanks.

I know that I am lucky to be retired; so many have to keep working through serious illness.

That I am so lucky to have the support I do have. My honey, my Mom, my children, my siblings, my brother and sisters in law, my friends. They don't give up on me. My bad moods, my being uncommunicative and snappish, my tears, my despair.

I take deep breaths. All. The. Time. Amazing how so simple a step, helps me get to the next moment. Its effect is not dramatic and it doesn't 'cure' anything. It just helps me get to the next moment, which is often all I can shoot for.

I constantly try to be present and live moment to moment. It's very hard to do. And I find that I constantly have to work at this.

My husband and I have started planning outings: we walk the mall, we explore the city like we were tourists, we plan overnight trips. This helps, we enjoy ourselves.

Listening to music of course is amazing. Who can help swaying or dancing to a tune they love? And for that moment, I am lost to the joys of the song, to the movement of my body.

I try not to castigate myself for feeling like giving up, for not focusing on the good things, for being weak, for not thinking of those who are so worse off than me. Introducing guilt is not going to help.

I tell myself that if I have several bad days in a row of frequent sobbing, that does not make me a weakling. But I despair and want to give up.

I try not to worry and grieve about my lost future. I fail at it.

I read fictional mysteries, my favorite genre. Especially historical fiction mysteries. I enjoy reading but the floaters that have invaded my eyes and that impact my vision have robbed off some of the joy I have always found in reading.

I meditate. I still have lots to learn here. My mind wanders and wanders and has well worn grooves to the places where despair and 'why me' live. It slides effortlessly to these places. I fight it.

I pray. And pray. And pray. For others, for myself.

I explore faith. I feel like a hypocrite. Now that I am in crisis, I will see if this faith thing does anything for me.

I continue to try to negotiate with the universe. The universe remains silent.

I volunteer in the community. It helps a little.

I jog. Exercise is wonderful. I set and achieve goals, increasing my mileage. I go for long walks very often and practice my breathing.

I write. That helps a fair amount.

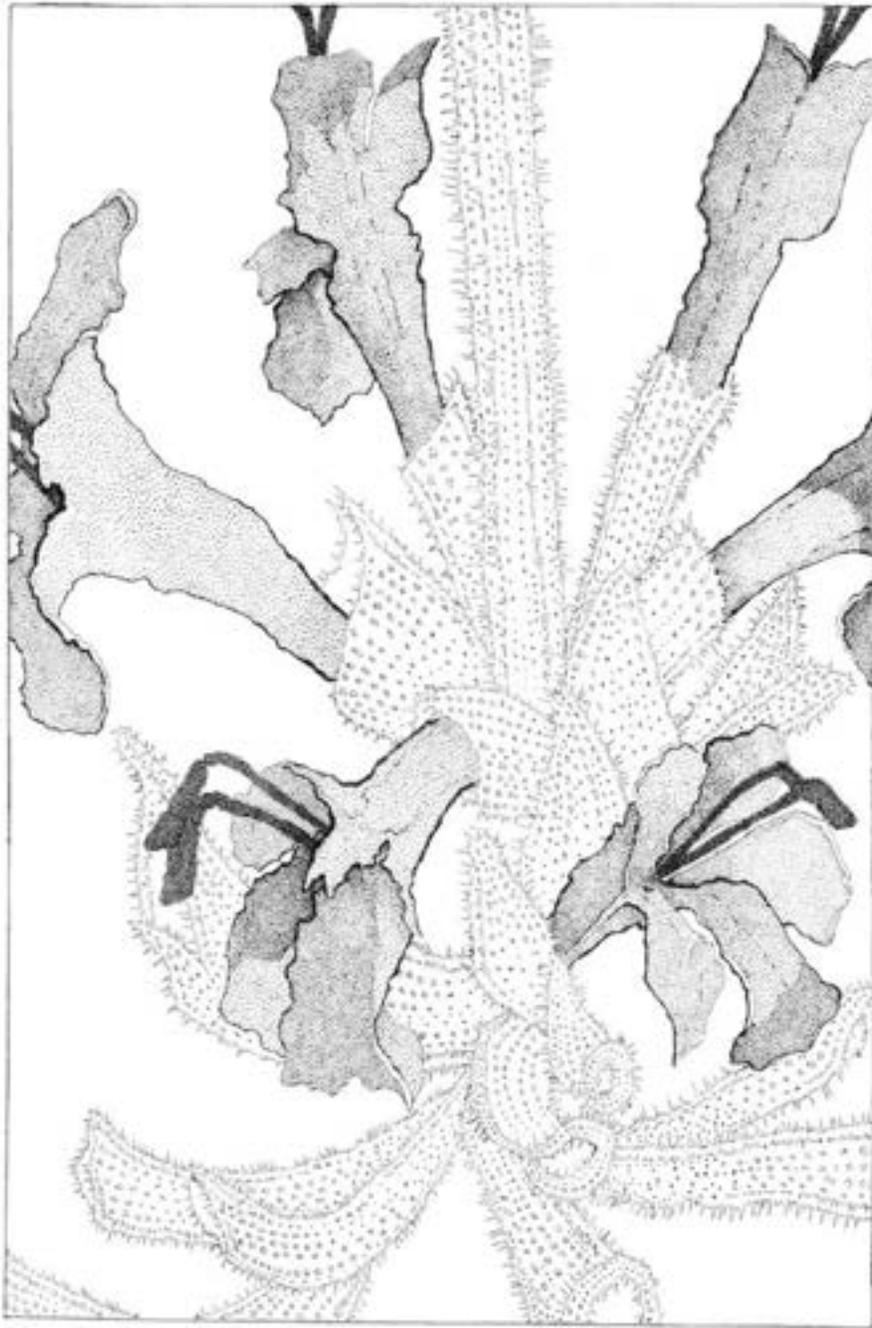
I evaluate seeing a therapist. I ponder and ponder this. I have wholeheartedly recommended therapists to so many over the years, sincerely believing they can help and seeing how they have helped. But I feel like all they might say I have heard already in my head. What can they say that will help me?

I give thanks constantly for my amazing life partner. But even with him, I can't fully express the fear, the hopelessness and how I realize that even with his support, that which often feels like the horror that is my life, is mine alone. He knows that illness has irrevocably changed me and continues to change me. But he sticks right by my side, every day helping me figure out what type of support I want from him on that given day.

So I am trying to figure out how to live with what I have. I know many, many millions of people have and have had worse circumstances than I do and so many of them do not have the resources and support I have. But as a wise friend of mine once told me, do not ignore your feelings out of guilt. Your feelings are legitimate and real. Remembering that helps, but I can't keep the guilt at bay.

And I haven't stopped believing in miracles. My youngest child, my Mom and my sister won't let me. And every day, my honey hugs me multiple times a day. Sometimes I have to push him away or he immediately pulls away because I am covered in sweat due to my temperature dysregulation. But every day, I can count on those hugs. And I know that is something for which to be immensely grateful. And on to the next moment of living.

END



Melinda Giordano *Earthy Delights* pen&ink drawing

Crystal Night

— Ben Gilbert

Cold crystals beautifully shaped and delicately formed into soft snow or the harsh ice on an inaccessible mountain. This is what the word crystal conjures up for me.

For others, it may be the cure of crystal healing or the devil calling out in piece of crystal meth, an expensive cut-glass thing or just a pretty stone. I had even known a girl called Crystal, whose beauty had the magic of a piece of crystal rock.

Berlin. November 9th 2014.

The bar was dimly lit. In fact, from the outside it barely looked open. There were no customers, not even a barman was visible. The only clue that it may be open was the flickering of candles burning on top of empty wine bottles, thick with teardrop wax. There was a candle on every empty table.

Just like this one, most semi rundown areas of this fashionable city have a special kind of bar. They are shrines to decay, homage to the old, hailing to the new, and utterly hip.

It's uncertain how long they will last, but for some time, I think, for Berlin still has a love affair with the ghost of its old decrepit East.

To make a bar like this you need time, money and a passion for eccentricity. When it's done, finished and ready for a customer, it will look like it has always been there; aged and ramshackle, just like a long forgotten warehouse or an abandoned factory. The only difference being that your bar won't just have been repaired; it will also be spotlessly clean: that quaint look of rural decay inside a city limit.

First, one needs to find a dilapidated shop in a cruddy part of town, preferably on a corner in an airy quiet street with trees and enough outside space for a few fair weather

tables. Plane trees seem to be Berlin's favourite, tall and grand, offering a leafy seasonal umbrella to all. Big stare-through windows are a must; after all, this is going to be a pretend not to be gallery.

Next, clean out the crud and dust until there's a canvas; not a blank one but one that's surely more than half-complete.

Half strip the walls, knock off some plaster, expose brick, leave a little of the old wall paper hanging here and there, and do the same with the ceiling. A few essential repairs may be needed, but when it's done, it still has to look really trashed, yet beautifully clean – this is Germany.

Floors are always the same: wide and chunky old wooden boards, lightly sanded, stained and then polished, the wear and blemishes of age still clearly visible, or an old broken tiled floor, repaired with odd colours and textures before being smoothed down and highly polished.

Make sure the bar itself is made of some kind of discarded bric-a-brac like an old wardrobe, broken palettes or, even better, half a fishing boat. Again, make sure it's not too nice or in good condition.

The electrics must look bad. They are only good if it seems as if the wiring was done a hundred years ago: dirty hanging cables loosely wired into broken connectors with ancient lights casting spooky shadows. Silhouettes are good. Electrocuting needs to be an option.

Just a few things left to add.

Tables and chairs, although functional, must be wobbly, eccentric and downright bizarre. They are cast outs found on the streets, in a dump or the poorest second hand shops. Nothing matches, no garish colours and if it breaks it doesn't matter (it's probably

already broken, anyway). I even went to one that had a big old-fashioned bathtub just sitting on the bar room floor – for what? For everything – coats were lying in it when I looked, but I imagine kids would have a riot there, after all these places are civilised coffee shops in daylight hours.

One last thing: the toilets.

There are only two rules to follow. Obviously nothing will be new, that's a given. They have to be spotlessly clean and totally covered in graffiti, not the stylish arty type, but the thick felt pen of the urban job. But don't worry if you're not up to the job, your clients will do it for you, soon enough and free of charge.

And now the staff:

Men must be wafer thin – no gym for them. Underfed and bearded, definitely not that unshaven macho type, casually dressed in bland clothes that are far too big. We're talking nineteenth century Norwegian fisherman or some kind of dirt poor Bolshevik farmer type. Women walk straight out of a Brueghel painting or a tragic Lorca play.

Open the doors and let the hip come in.

To enter such a place with awareness is like entering a church or place of worship. You may not be religious or even have religion, but you know that others entering do.

Welcome to the church of the urban hipster.

In the bar I had entered, music was playing but you could still hold conversation without raising your voice. I listened briefly: an American man with a deep-throated serious voice talked and half sung about life and the absurd. I stopped listening after I heard the word crucified, wondering who the hell had been crucified for the sinners of this holy place.

The congregation was out and the place was empty. We would pray alone tonight.

The barman appeared – waif like, bearded and very softly spoken. We ordered wine. I looked around, a piano stood in the corner and I wondered if it was ever played, or if it just sat there looking pretty, another piece of bric-a-brac from somewhere down the road.

There's only one Berlin now, no East or West, but the whole place is like a museum to both. You can see the divide in bits of the old wall with its famous graffiti along the Spree, and in the old check points, custom houses, gates and stations – even the tram lines only operate in the old East, for the West pulled up its tracks long ago. The miles of brain numbing apartments in the East at Marzahn-Hellersdorf and the old airfield at Templehof in the West, now a park and conference centre but still looking as if planes land every day, are all perfectly preserved and stating loudly – East, West or the line between.

These bars are something like that; a dividing line between the two – run-down, tired, malnourished and in decline – The East meeting the West with its ultra cool modernism.

And to be honest, they are fun and civilised places to visit. Not raucous and beer swilling, neither are they elitist. In fact, if you are dirt poor and turn up in shabby bland attire, you can just pretend deliberate and measured down dressing. You'll fit in just fine.

My friend and I sat down in this post-modern installation. I guess we were the only exhibits to anyone passing by. We talked about the day. We had hiked long and hard through a vast forest, whose floor had been a mottle of muted autumn colours glistening in the fine rain. The skies were overcast and moody, even at midday the tall beech trees, still considerably covered in leaf, created an eerie twilight. We walked in silence through a sea of grey and brown, the crisp air slightly stinging our faces.

In this empty tract near the Polish border, we had come to look for beaver. They frequent the rivers and marshland below the forest. Although we didn't see a beaver, there had been plenty of evidence of them in the boggy swamps and flowing streams. We saw the classic chewed up tree trunks where a trunk is left teetering and tottering on a tiny stem, and the log dams that make a beaver's lodge.

We had underestimated the time needed to return to the car, and had had to hike hard through fading light along confusing dark trails and increasingly dense mist, skirting around ghostly pools and gloomy lakes. We made it back just before pitch black enveloped the world.

There we were, happy and weary after a great hike through the forest, enjoying the surreal tranquility of this Berlin hipster bar. Out of the blue, my friend asked me if I thought she was a hipster girl. What the hell did that mean – being part of some phony transience, a small moment where you belong to some ephemeral elite, or just a modern thing deliberately showing difference? She was from another part of Germany, not a Berliner, but maybe that's the point – all hipsters are somehow foreign invaders. Who knows? Not me for sure.

That was about as deep as the conversation got, any deeper and we would be stripping away the wallpaper (or what was left of it anyway) to reveal probably nothing much at all – and that would have simply spoiled all the fun.

The American continued to deliver his endlessly dull word parade, and, I kid you not, when I went to the loo – there it was – the thick felt pen of yob graffiti covering every square inch.

As we were laughing together in this bizarre environment, another friend entered. Passing by, she had seen us through the windows and was now heading towards our table, beaming a huge smile that was almost lost in her mass of black hair, wild and

thick like a Himalayan yak. She had just come from where half of Berlin had been; in fact, not just Berliners but half of the world's press and cameras.

This place was empty because it was November 9th.

Why had we been here and not there? This was no time to pray in an urban hipster bar, this was the time for celebration out in the cold crisp autumn air.

Was it?

Yes it was. The praying could wait 'till later.

Oh.

With all this talk about East and West reflecting in a hip bar's decor, we had somehow missed the point. Well not the point exactly, but what the majority had firmly on their minds.

It was twenty-five years to the day that the Berlin Wall came down, was breached, jumped and effectively finished – the day of re-unification, the day that difference died.

My friend and I had been deep in a forest unaware that a very long row of white balloons edged the old wall boundary, lit up and ready to be released into the night sky, cameras clicked and profound articles were being written. A night of joy – let's not forget we are one, once again.

Oh, sorry about that, but we were looking for beaver and the lesser spotted three toed earwig in a dark and vast forest that conjures dreams and spooky night time magic, while Berlin and probably half the world were celebrating the wall coming down.

But these bars are still lamenting this total loss of difference.

You may think I have a loose screw, am slightly unhinged with the door now hanging off, for thinking such a thing, but these bars are really crying such a loss whilst having a grand good time.

We spoke about our Jewish roots – mine shaky like thin cracked ice, but my black haired friend has an ice shelf under her, a thoroughbred, with Hebrew in her blood.

But wait, she had no real interest in the wall, that divide that toppled down, or the evening's celebration, that was all just something to do – to meet some friends and have some fun.

This was 9th November, Crystal Night. The night the Nazi's burnt the synagogues, smashed the Jewish shops – all that glass and fractured shards sparkling in the firelight or early morning sun.

No one in their right mind would celebrate a night like this.

Crystal Night 1938.

My Mother went to school next morning. She was six years old and living in Bad Homburg. It wasn't until school was out around midday that she first knew something had happened. Her class and a few teachers ended up about four minutes from the school, down a road everybody called Jew lane (it had been officially called Judengasse before being changed to Wallstasse). The synagogue was ablaze, flames coming from all the windows. The fire fighters were there, but only to douse the adjoining properties, not to quell the Jewish flames. The shop opposite the school was smashed and wrecked – it was a stationary shop for the kids, owned by a Jew who hanged himself a few days later. No one asked questions and nothing was ever said. Soon after, my Mother remembers, two sisters in her class who had learning difficulties being taken away to a special school and being sterilized. It went on and on...

So, there we were – in a bar, hip or not hip, talking about a wall that was not a wall, and of a night the devil came and turned the world upside down. My Grandmother had come from Berlin and now I was not sure that I even liked it anymore.

Give me beaver anytime...

Here's a drawing that my Grandfather – Karl Trinkewitz – did of that very synagogue, sometime before it was burnt down to the ground:



Fiction



Castlereagh St

— John Potts

Could it be that I am a recording?

There is sandstone here, huge blocks of it: does that hold me in?

On its rough surface, or deep in its grain...

I have no sense of being in the stone, but I am always nearby. Am I kept inside, existing now and again in the surrounding air?

Like recordings in wax, or wire, or clay - they were all once vessels, they held information. They could all release it, when called upon...when played.

Otherwise, I don't know what to call myself.

'Ghost'?

But the word doesn't seem right, it doesn't attach itself to me.

Ghost? I exist but no-one knows it. When I am, I have no substance.

Perhaps *it is* true, perhaps the word is for me. So I can prove the existence of ghosts - if only to myself.

But I think it more likely that I am recorded in the stone.

I don't have a name, although I must have had one once. Occasionally I hear bits and pieces on the street, names used by the living to call each other. Always the same street, always the same section of street - and this is one thing I can name.

It is Castlereagh St, at the intersection with Market St in the city; it is a corner - always the same corner. The solid buildings, their sandstone blocks... When I am here, when I *am*, it is at this corner - and I am here now.

They are mainly a blur, the people passing along this street; they are fuzzy streams flowing through Castlereagh and Market streets, across the intersection, stopping and

flowing according to the corner's blinking signs. For some reason their vehicles are sharper: the cars, the taxis, the buses - they have edges, they have gleam, they have a quality I know to be colour. The vehicles are almost always in focus, and their engines rumble.

There are little bursts of vibration, sometimes, with bits of words wrapped inside them. I can pick up some of those words if I apply myself, but it's rare that they make much sense.

If I apply myself still more, I can make out images; I can sharpen a blur for an instant. A face, a poster, a newspaper, perhaps a group of people.

But the trouble is in exerting myself: it's not that it tires me, or that I find it difficult - it's simply that the exertion is foreign to me. I do not apply myself, I do not engage with the world...I am simply here, floating.

I am in the street, I am detached from the street.

I moved a little,
along the street -
but now I'm back.

It didn't feel any different when I moved,
but that is merely to say, I didn't feel anything.
It is raining, I think, but I don't feel the rain.

What can I say about myself?...

but I don't know. I don't know what I was. Why do I even assume that I have been? Only because I know things, I know the words and names that attach to things.

Right now however something is happening.

The rumble is deepening, the air is vibrating around me. It is normally gone by now - but not this time...

Tiny bits of words are coming at me, bouncing off each other - some pieces stick – they fuse to each other – they become whole words, even sentences:

This traffic's ridiculous

We'd better hurry

See you tomorrow?

No way we'll make it

The street has turned a little sharper, its sounds. There is a voice but not immediate – stretched and thinned out: a radio?

Two thousand and...

That number...is a date?

But I died on a different date -

how do I know that?

Suddenly I know: I know I was here, among the people on this street - not these people but their predecessors of some years ago. What was I doing?

I can see their faces now, these current-day people - but I want to be back, with the faces of my own time. These ones look bored, indifferent as they stream past in suits and docile shoes. Their faces have nothing to say to the world.

But there are other things here: something on its way to me... the street is roaring -

WATCH OUT!

STOP!

A screeching, a car and its sudden brakes -

I didn't look I was so eager to get across the last thing I felt was - and I want to scream in the face of these people then and now – but I cannot scream.

I am drifting again, at my corner...on the street but barely aware of it...the faces I can make out now are different, their clothing is different...perhaps I have moved on: the same corner but a different time.

The world is a muted blur once more; no-one knows I am here. I am like a low-level current, coursing unnoticed beside the flow of the living.

Am I a form of energy perhaps, like electricity? Running on low power, subject to a sudden surge that lights me up and then somehow people might detect me. Perhaps that is why I appear...a recording needs some kind of energy to play it. Perhaps I am activated by a sudden surge of power.

If that is so, will my current eventually weaken, will it flicker and tremble and one day fade out altogether?

When I am not here it is like sleep, or a coma, or just...blank. Now I am here on my corner, new people passing by, their vehicles made of different shapes.

What is that echo? Insistent, growing louder...Sweeping up from somewhere, it's coming at me again, carrying everything with it, roaring up through time and sucking words like bits of metal along with it, flung around with images and faces:

there she is

on the other side of Castlereagh St:

my wife waiting for me

the weekend coming up, last minute shopping

she wanted to see me

she had something to tell me

I glimpsed her face for an instant across the street

and I'll run across the street to her we'll go into the store

Rubber tyres burn into the road – and human screams:

NO!

WATCH OUT!

A tearing

The splitting of air

The impact of metal

The world coming to a halt

I am engraved here somehow, in the footpath, or the buildings, or the street itself. Or recorded in one place: the sandstone, porous with time.

I am faint almost always, so faint that no-one picks me up...but I am here nevertheless, imprinted in matter. Waiting to be activated. For those few seconds am I a memory recorded here in the stone? Am I a memory being played back?

I wish somebody could see me, I wish somebody knew I was here. What is the point of a recording if no-one can hear it?

I was here, I was gone, I am here again. Will I surge up? Will the past show itself to me? - but perhaps it will not. Those episodes are infrequent, I think, the pain is too great...a memory keeping itself alive while others die.

Why can't I see her? If she were here, or the other side of the street...if she were here now: I could see her. Could I? Would I make her out from the blurs around me? Or is it already too far past her time?

Here they are, the streaming ones, the blurry shapes, something written on a surface: a number I can't make out. That's when I am, with these unfamiliar forms, the vibrations around me...

I am here again at this point: Castlereagh St, the intersection with Market St. This is my corner, and I know I cannot leave it...I am inside it, I am the grain of this place.

Through the comings and goings, the fuzzy streams, the shapes in focus and out, the vehicles and their roars, the occasional words, the flaring up, the sudden jolt, the screech of metal and her image over there, the other side of the street, the flicker on and off, the corner: I am all this, the buildings and the blocks, the stone, myself: I am part of Castlereagh St.



Brian Pottorff *Desert Obelisk* cement sculpture/outdoor installation photographed by the artist

Emigration

— Anthony Pezzula

I knew him as Don but I'm sure that wasn't his original name. He was Vietnamese and when I met him he was in his fifties and in the midst of a brilliant career. He was an engaging fellow, always upbeat and fun to be around. Even though he was well educated, I believe he had two Master's Degrees, he occasionally would mess up the vernacular. For instance, when delivering bad news, he'd say "Hey, don't kill the passenger." Once when we were choosing which restaurant to go to he said "Money is no option." When we pointed out his errors, he'd just laugh and shrug it off.

For some reason, we clicked and became good friends. I enjoyed his company very much and always found his conversation to be interesting. Yet he never talked much about his past. When I would bring it up, he would deftly change the subject. Sometimes I would talk about my childhood, my upbringing, or my family, not just because I liked to, but in hopes of learning more about his. He wouldn't bite though, and would just keep asking questions and encouraging me to talk about mine. That is until one night when we stopped for a nightcap after having dinner with our group of friends. The group had chosen a local Vietnamese restaurant for our get together and perhaps that's what got him in the mood. That and the martini at dinner and the beers he and I enjoyed afterward at a bar. It was just the two of us and the conversation led to our past lives. That's when he told me his story. I was mesmerized and decided I needed to record it. So here it is, I will give it to you in his honor.

When Don was a child he knew nothing but war. Viet Nam always seemed to be in a state of conflict, and in his childhood the South was at war with the North. His father was a pilot for the South Vietnamese Air Force and flew combat missions. They lived in a nice apartment in Saigon befitting his father's status as an officer in the Air Force. On occasion his father would even serve as a pilot for the South Vietnamese President. They had a comfortable life despite the war. His mother was able to stay at home and take care of Don and his little brother. They felt relatively safe from the ravages of war, at least for awhile.

Don was twelve when things started going bad. The Americans were winding down their involvement in the war, and the Viet Cong were making progress in the south. Don's mother would worry every time her husband went on a mission, sure he would never return. Don had no such misgivings. He adored his father and had every confidence in his abilities. It never crossed his mind that his father wouldn't return at the end of the day. He couldn't understand his mother's tears and always reassured her that everything would be all right in that simple yet doubtless way children do.

One day, as the sounds of artillery echoed in the distance, Don's father pulled him aside just before he was leaving on his mission that day.

"Son," he said, "if anything should become of me it's your job to get your mother and brother to the US. Do you understand that?"

"But father," Don said, "nothing is going to happen to you."

"We must be prepared for anything. Your mother is a wonderful woman but she's not strong enough to do what is needed. I fear that she would panic and act irrationally. You must be the man of the house, even at your young age. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes," Don said puffing out his chest.

"Now listen to me very carefully," his father said, "if something happens to me and things go bad, I want you to take your mother and brother and go to the US Embassy. You know where that is right? I took you there once to visit a friend."

"Yes father, I know where it is."

"Good. Now when you arrive ask the guard to see Colonel McGuire, he's the American officer you met that day, and a good friend of mine, a fellow pilot. Repeat his name to me I don't want to write it down, it's not safe."

"Colonel McGuire," said Don.

"Right, don't forget it," continued his father. "He and I had a long conversation the other day and he promised he would get us to America. I made him promise to get you all there if something should happen to me."

"Nothing will happen to you," said Don with the unwavering faith of a child.

"I know son, I know, but if I don't return I need you to be strong for your mother and brother. I need you to persist in getting you all to the US. That is our best hope for a good life for you and your brother. Promise me, promise me now that you will get you and your mother and brother to the US," his father said, looking him directly in the eyes.

"I promise," Don said a little shaken by his father's intensity.

"I love you son," his father said, hugging him.

"I love you too father," Don said returning the hug and not wanting to let go.

Don's father unwrapped his son's arms from his neck and turned to walk out of their apartment, not looking back. It was the first time Don felt a flicker of doubt that his father would return. His doubt turned out to be warranted. His father did not return that night, or the next, or the next. They were visited by a Captain from the Air Force on the fourth night who informed them that his father's plane was shot down somewhere near the border with the North. It was unknown if his father ejected from the plane and survived, and even if he did there was a good chance he may have been taken prisoner. He was officially listed as missing in action and presumed dead.

Don's mother wailed and was inconsolable. Don himself could find no tears being in a state of shock. How could this be? Not his father who could do anything, who was a great man. At first, he was in denial, but then remembered his father's words about being strong, being the man of the family. He took his crying brother in his arms and told him things would be okay. He then hugged his mother and let her cry on his shoulder. It was a night that seemed to go on forever, and one he would never forget.

A few weeks later chaos reigned in the streets of Saigon as the Viet Cong approached the outskirts of the city. It was just a matter of time now and those associated with the South Vietnamese military or government, or with the Americans, were desperate to get out of the country for fear of retribution. Don recalled his father's instructions and convinced his mother to gather what belongings they could carry and go to the US Embassy. As they approached they saw a huge crowd gathering near the embassy gates. Don told his mother and brother to stay by a shop doorway as he made his way through the crowd and squirmed his little body toward the front finally reaching the gate. Don knew very little English, but finally got the attention of a guard.

“Sir,” he shouted, “sir!”

“What?” the guard shouted back over the din of the crowd.

“Colonel McGuire,” shouted Don.

“What about him?” said the guard.

“Talk. Colonel McGuire talk,” said Don haltingly.

“You want to talk to Colonel McGuire is that it?” said the guard.

“Colonel McGuire, talk,” repeated Don.

“Sorry pal, no can do,” said the guard starting to turn his attention to others in the crowd.

Don reached through the gate and tugged on the soldier’s pants. “Colonel McGuire, talk,” he shouted insistently.

“You can’t talk to Colonel McGuire, don’t you understand? Chết, chết,” the guard shouted in imperfect Vietnamese, “he’s dead!” he yelled pulling away from Don’s grasp.

Don got the message and slowly made his way back to his mother and brother, thinking the whole time about what to do. When he told his mother his father’s friend could not help them, she revealed some money she and her father had put away, and told Don about a neighbor who could get them to a boat leaving the country. Eventually they made their way to that transport. They floundered for days in the open seas, hungry, tired and in danger of sinking when they were rescued and wound up in a relocation camp in Thailand.

Don didn’t forget his promise to his father, and took over the business of getting them relocated. His mother let him know that she wanted them to go to the Philippines thinking it was easier to get there, and wanting to stay among Asian people. He told her he would do as she wished to keep her placated, but forged on with completing his promise to his father and pursued relocating to the US. But it was a slow process, made even slower by the language difficulty. As weeks went by his mother would press him on why it was taking so long to get to the Philippines, and he would make excuses about a waiting list and needing to be patient. In truth, he was told he needed an interpreter if he wanted to pursue going to the US, and none were available.

Finally, his mother took it upon herself to inquire at the relocation office and made it clear they were seeking reassignment to the Philippines. Things then began moving

more quickly, quicker than Don wanted since he harbored hopes of finding an interpreter so that he could complete his promise. They got word that their application was approved, and were scheduled to leave for the Philippines in a few days, when Don was told that an interpreter was finally available. He was told to report to the relocation office and was shown to an interview room, where he waited patiently, but with little hope.

Don sat with his head on the table, and his eyes closed, thinking about how he failed and how disappointed his father would be in him. He heard the door to the room open and slowly raised his head to greet his interpreter. His eyes widened in shock when they settled on his father! His father rushed to his side.

“Is that really you?” his father said, showering him with kisses.

“Father,” Don sobbed, hugging him tightly, not wanting to let go.

“My son,” his father said, “I thought I’d never see you again. What about...”

“They’re okay,” Don said. “We’re all okay.”

“I thought I’d lost you. I thought I’d lost you all. I was shot down, but managed to eject. I spent weeks in the jungle, just avoiding capture. I managed to make my way to the coast and hooked up with some Americans gathering a few last refugees. They took us on a transport to a ship and eventually here. I didn’t know what happened to you all. None of the Americans were aware you were on any of the lists of those the Embassy took, and I feared you were lost at sea like so many others.”

“Father, I tried, I’ve been trying, but they are sending us to the Philippines in a few days. That’s what Mother wanted, but...”

“No,” his father said, “we will be going to the US, don’t you worry about that anymore. You did your job; you kept the family together and worked hard to keep your promise. I’m proud of you son.”

They hugged for what seemed like forever.

That was Don’s story. I literally gasped when he described how his father walked into that room. I can’t imagine what that little boy went through, but knowing the man he became, I’m not surprised he was able to deal with the trials that were thrown at him at such a young age. His family made it to America and thrived. He never spoke of those

days to me again. I sense it was cathartic for him to relay his story in such a way that night, but that he wanted to leave it in the past and focus on the future. That was okay with me, I wanted to cultivate our friendship and enjoy our times together. But I came to appreciate the triumph of the human spirit and the opportunities the land I love gives to those willing to take advantage of them.

The End





Keith Moul *Washington DC Union Station* photograph

We Will Not Cry For You

— Joe Baumann

The last time Bill Hoffman saw his son, he was yanking Carnegie so hard by the arm that he dislocated the boy's shoulder. He felt the muscle pop under his fingers like bubble wrap but he didn't stop moving as he shoved Carnegie against the bedroom wall while Philly, the shitheel Bill had found lying in bed with his son, scrambled out, hopping and babbling as he tried to pull on his Nikes. Bill glared at him as he whimpered and bound away, never to be seen again.

They were, Bill admitted later, wearing their clothes, the only skin exposed their hands and feet; each boy's jeans rode up to expose pale and pointed ankles. Carnegie's leg was draped across Philly's calf like a scarf. The boys were reading a shared copy of *Fantastic Four*, their heads cocked together like each was in deep thought. Their eyes weren't even on one another. This had burbled up more bilious rage in Bill than if he'd just found them sucking each other's dicks. That kind of stupid adolescent sex he could have processed, he thought. He remembered being fifteen, how everything he saw, from uncooked chicken breasts to advertisements for women's sweaters, made him horny. But the way the boys' bodies were wrapped around each other with such familiarity and comfort had twanged at something in Bill, sent him shivering like a divining rod sensing water.

Pam kicked him out with a swiftness he didn't know his wife possessed, tossing a half-empty suitcase onto the lawn and screaming that he was lucky she didn't call the cops (who would eventually track him down a day later, after Carnegie told the E.R. doctor what had happened). The suitcase contained two pairs of underwear, a cluster of mismatched socks, and one pair of khakis. Plus, a bottle of mouthwash that leaked blue all over the clothing. Bill was pretty sure a vindictive Pamela unscrewed the cap on purpose.

After seventeen years of marriage, Bill was alone, rejected; at the first hearing following his arrest, his son and wife refused to look at him, turning away in tandem as if they'd practiced the gesture. Pam was awarded full custody, though Bill did catch glimpses of his son from time to time. He parked his car opposite Carnegie's high school at dismissal times and watched him emerge from the building, surrounded by his

coterie of friends. Bill squinted toward the building and took surreptitious sips from pony bottles of Mickey's that he kept lodged carefully between his legs. When Carnegie graduated from high school, Bill snuck into the auditorium in time to hear his son's name announced, and the next afternoon, when Pam threw Carnegie a party, he slunk along the side of the house and listened to the sounds of celebration and congratulation, leaving when some obnoxious girl he didn't recognize caught sight of him hunched next to the azaleas. He sent a card with a check for two hundred dollars, which Carnegie deposited in his bank account a week later. Bill had scribbled his cell phone number on the card, but Carnegie never called.

Until six years later, when a number Bill did not recognize popped up on screen and the phone buzzed. Bill thought maybe it was an offer for a job interview and so he answered.

"Dad." His son's voice was a solid, dark bass note. Immediately recognizable.

"Hello, son."

"Mom's sick. She wanted me to tell you."

"Sick?"

"She's in the hospital."

"Is it serious?"

"Very."

Carnegie told him the name of the hospital, her room number, visiting hours.

Claimed she wanted to see him one last time.

"Last time?"

"They're keeping her comfortable. It's in the palliative stage."

"Palliative?"

"She won't get better."

Bill didn't remember his son being so straight-forward, so gruff. He'd been one of those faggy art kid, though he also liked swimming, thank god, and he started lifting weights in high school freshman, signing up for a gym class where they did bench presses instead of playing bombardment. But he liked telling stories, effusive and expressive at the dinner table, whirling his fork like he was conducting an orchestra as he spoke. This voice had no echo.

Before Carnegie hung up, he cleared his throat.

“Oh. Also. I guess, maybe you’d like to know that I’m married.”

His son, Bill learned the next day when he slumped through the grim hospital to his ex-wife’s room, was married to another man, who was introduced as Bradley. He was short but trim, his handshake tight and strong, his knuckles wormed with veins. His hair was sand-blasted and swept to one side, a style that looked utterly childish. Carnegie watched their introduction but said nothing, blinking at his father with a flamed look of daring on his face. His son had expanded like one of those pills you toss in water to create an animal-shaped sponge, his back broad, hips wide, legs thick trunks in his jeans. He wasn’t fat, but he also didn’t possess the same leanness Bill had carried until he’d taken a liking to heavy beer and double cheeseburgers. His hair was the same thick dark, but it had been cut close to the scalp, a style Bill thought made his son look even more bullish. Perhaps that was the point.

Bill sucked in his gut and said to Bradley that it was nice to meet him. Then he turned to Pam.

He hadn’t seen his wife in years, but he expected to recognize her. At first, he nearly laughed, convinced this was some fucked joke. Pamela had been a bombshell, all silky blonde hair, great rack, tight tummy, cheekbones that glistened with light. This thing on the bed was a shriveled shell of a woman, hair shorn and splotchy like she was plagued with mange, skin mottled and wrinkled, all of the swimsuit-model size and shape slurped out of her. Tubes and cannulas darted in and out of her flimsy hospital gown, a wall of machines blipping and blooping behind her like a gruesome, robotic choir. Her entire face—eyes, lips, teeth, skin—was gray. Bill shuddered.

“She can’t really talk,” Carnegie said in that same deadpan voice. “She can understand you, though, if you have anything you want to say.”

Bill blinked and looked from Carnegie to Pam. He ignored the cockroachy Bradley.

“We’ll give you the room,” Carnegie said. He took his mother’s hand without an iota of hesitation and told her that he and Bradley would be back in ten minutes. “If you think that’s enough time.” He looked at Bill.

Time, Bill thought. There was so little of it, yet the biggest moments seemed to stretch on forever.

Carnegie and Bradley shuffled out, Bradley saying something about grabbing a snack from the vending machine by the elevator.

Bill approached Pam. He couldn't bring himself to touch her; he imagined the mealy texture of her ravaged, wrinkled skin, spotted from prescription drugs and intravenous liquids. Her forehead reminded him of saggy aliens from movies, and her eyes were bulbous, rather than sunken, as if being pressed out from the inside. He wished he'd snuck in a flask; a burning gulp of cheap whiskey would help right now, calm the breathy nerves swirling in stitches right below his ribs.

He took a deep breath, registering the insecticide smell coming out of the folds of his ex-wife's body. Bill fought the need to cough. His eyes welled. He had to leave.

The hallway was empty, but when he neared the nurse's station close to the elevator bay, he could hear Bradley and Carnegie; they were sitting in a pair of blocky chairs right around the corner.

"He doesn't deserve to be here," his son said.

Bill straightened and stopped, just out of their line of sight. A nurse, poring over a file folder behind her desk, raised an eyebrow.

"I know that. Still, calling him was the right thing to do."

"You know me. A saint."

"I do."

Bill could picture Bradley leaning over and patting Carnegie on the thigh or pressing a hand through his hair. He imagined, briefly, his son and this dweeb kissing, and then the mirage continued, the two men groping and sucking at one another, clothes shed, parts shoved into other parts.

He turned toward Pam's room, standing in the doorway and squinting, trying to transpose this shriveled thing onto the woman he remembered. But time had taken her away, and all that was left was something he could not bring himself to touch or acknowledge. He skittered down the hall and found a stairwell, blank and dim, and slipped away.

*

He kept waiting for another call, his son telling him that Pam was dead. But none came. Not the next day or week or month. Two months passed. More than once he

scrolled through his phone and found the number but he couldn't bring himself to actually dial. After ten weeks, he was positive his ex-wife had to have died. What was the word Carnegie had used? *Palliative*. End-of-days. Time-run-out.

Bill remembered their first days together, when he and Pam met at the diner where he was a short-order cook. She'd come in with some girlfriends, hair teased out in a ridiculous lion mane. They were all over-lipsticked and gaffed in leopard-print jeans. Some concert; years later, he couldn't remember if they were coming from or going to. They ordered cheeseburgers and he found the largest patties he could, doubled down on the American cheese. Through the window he watched them eat, leaning over the counter and touching at their painted lips after each bite. All three of the girls were gorgeous, but he couldn't stop staring at Pam, to the point that he ignored the meat on the grill for so long it started charring, the smoke sending everyone out into the street. He managed to find Pam and introduced himself while the other two girls giggled and cooed. They went on their first date the next night, and never stopped. They were both eighteen.

He went to the library and googled her after signing up for a card, which the fumbly woman behind the reference desk demanded of him before she'd give him computer access. Bill typed in Pam's name, poking at the keyboard one letter at a time with his index fingers, feeling a flush of embarrassment; the pissant teenager sitting next to him was typing up something, her fingers flying across the keyboard, the sound like hundreds of animal paws tinkling against a hardwood floor.

Bill clicked on the first link Google coughed out at him, which led him to the bereavements page for a funeral home. Pam's face, her real face, stared at him. The picture was from sometime during the years of their separation, well before she was sick. Her skin was smooth and bright, her hair wavy and thick. Pam's smile was glorious, her teeth a clear white, her lips painted a perfect ruby that accentuated the delicate gloss of her cheeks. It made Bill smile just to look at.

Then he read the obituary. She'd died two days after his visit. The website said she was survived by a son and his husband, Carnegie and Bradley Hoffman-Deitz. The hyphenated, tacked-on name was like a rusting fishhook in his cheek. No mention of Bill anywhere. What the fuck? Was this legal, this erasure? He felt a heat summon

itself from deep in his chest and flare across his cheeks. Bill ignored the neon pink laminated sheet attached at the bottom of the monitor exhorting him to log out of the computer and check out at the reference desk. He stood so fast his chair flipped onto its back like he'd delivered it a swift kick. The eyes of the girl next to him went wide, but she looked away when he glared in her direction. He marched out of the library and slammed the door to his truck as he climbed in.

But what next?

He found a half-full pint of schnapps—peppermint, stinging as it went down—in the glove box. Then he put the truck in gear and grumbled out into traffic, letting its flow pull him along. Ten minutes later he idled in front of the house where he'd ripped his son's shoulder apart. The house where he'd nearly toppled into the flowers when his wobbly form was discovered by one of Carnegie's puny little girlfriends. Well, clearly not a *girlfriend*. A friend who was a girl. Because his son, Mr. Carnegie Hoffman-Deitz, was not interested in fucking girls.

Bill spat on the ground as he dropped out of the truck. He looked both ways, then crossed the street to the house and marched along the lawn, relishing the squash of the grass beneath his Carhartt boots. The porch rail had been freshly painted, a healthy-tooth white, and pots of lip-red bougainvillea hung in floating planters. He pounded on the door. When no one answered, he pounded again. He propped his hand in a visor against the sidelight and peered inside. He didn't recognize the furniture he could see in the dining room off to the left. Carnegie must have sold the table, even though it had been hand carved by Bill's grandfather nearly a century ago. The nerve of that boy.

Then, suddenly, the door opened. A tall, lanky woman in a striped frock, the sleeves rolled to her elbows, was blinking at him, a mix of confusion and stinking fear. Her hair was wild, blonde like Pam's had once been.

"Can I help you?"

He felt words slip away, his tongue lodged like a withered beefsteak. Bill looked down and saw, attached to the woman's leg, a boy of no more than four. Unlike the woman, his hair was dark, his skin the same, a deep olive color. She must be married to a Middle Eastern, Bill thought.

"How long have you had this house?" Bill said, voice throaty.

“Excuse me?”

“I’m—I’m looking for someone. I guess he doesn’t live here anymore.”

“No, I guess he doesn’t.”

“Please. He’s my son. I’m just—” Bill felt like his heart had squelched out its last heave of blood and gone to a wrinkly, shriveled state.

The woman tucked an arm around the boy, cupping his right ear like her hand was a helmet. As if Bill might explode, tear her and her child into a million pieces.

“I don’t mean any harm.”

Her face wrinkled. Not the right thing for him to say. The only person who would say that was one who meant hurt. Bill took a step back, misjudging the distance and tripped, his foot catching on the lip of the front stoop. Bill tumbled down, his elbows scraping the concrete walkway. He let out a noisy howl and a number of choice words.

“I think you’d better go,” the woman said. Then she was gone, along with the boy, the door slammed shut.

“Don’t care if I’m alright, huh?” Bill said, wincing as he gathered himself. He shook his head and checked himself out: abrasions on both palms, his right arm ripped to shreds. He felt a twisty pain in his right foot. A sprain, maybe? He limped to the truck and sat there, the air conditioning coughing out shitty, tumid air, and let it spray on his face and busted hands until the blood dried. Cupping his hands around the wheel sent a Morse code of pain up his arms, so instead Bill pulled out the schnapps and took a drink. He stared at the pint and then dribbled some of the alcohol on his left hand and howled at the sting. He threw the bottle onto the bench seat.

He called Carnegie.

All it took was a few quick taps of the screen. His hand hurt cupping the phone, but he ignored the pain as the phone rang and rang. Then there was his son’s voice, and Bill was off and running before realizing that he was leaving a voicemail. The phone beeped at him mid-rant, catching him off-guard. He snapped his mouth shut and it was like he’d flooded an engine and couldn’t start again.

Night was already falling, and fast, as though once the sun started its downward arc it picked up speed, a diver rocketing toward the horizon. This was Bill’s least favorite time of day, when the impending gray of night sheathed the sharpness of the sun. It

doused Bill's vision with a slurriness that made him feel tilted and off-kilter, unable to get the ground balanced and quiet beneath his feet. It filled him with a strong, sharp lonesomeness.

His phone rang.

"Hello?" he said.

"Dad?"

Bill said nothing, his tongue bricked and uncooperative.

"Dad, did you call me?"

He worked his jaw loose and said, "You didn't tell me your mother died."

Now Carnegie was the silent one.

"Well," he said finally, "we weren't sure you deserved to know."

"She was my wife!" Bill could hear the drunkenness in his voice, a sloshing lacquer, a cocktail of schnapps and rage and sorrow. "She was my wife. I should have known."

"Then you shouldn't have left."

At first, Bill thought Carnegie meant back when he was a kid, after Bill jostled him around. Then he realized: running from the hospital.

"She was dying, Dad. And you couldn't even stick around to say goodbye."

"I said goodbye," Bill said, but even he could hear the falseness in his voice.

"Fine, Dad. You said goodbye. Then you got your chance. What else did you need?"

Carnegie hung up before Bill could think of a thing to say. He stared dumbly at the phone. His hands throbbed. Bill groped for the schnapps. He gripped the pint tight; the glassy smoothness felt good against the pulling, painful scrapes on his skin.

Unscrewing the cap, Bill downed the last bit with a tiny cough, a minty tingle on his tongue. He shivered and extricated himself from the truck.

He marched back up to the house and banged on the front door, fists bursting with pain with each slam against the thick wood. The sidelight rattled.

This time, the woman opened the door only a sliver. The boy was nowhere to be found.

"What do you want?"

"Please," Bill slurred. "I need to find my god-damn son."

“You need to leave.”

“Please. I just have to find him.”

The woman was trembling. Or maybe that was just the tilt-a-whirl of Bill’s vision, smish-smashed by the schnapps that seemed to have pooled behind his eyes.

“You need to go. Or I’ll call the police.”

Bill tried to shove at the door, but the chain pulled tight. She gasped and stepped back, and then, as soon as Bill reeled away, slammed it. He could hear the lock snapping into place. Rather than slumping away, Bill pressed his palms to the door and moaned.

“Carnegie. His name is Carnegie.”

When no answer came, he set to thumping, again and again, like a ticking clock.

He was still pounding on the door when the police arrived, a single car, its light whirling carnival red and blue. He didn’t notice, too busy with the thudding rhythm of his hands on the lacquered wood, his low groan a tribal chant, no longer words and barely even sounds. A thin dribble of spittle had glazed out through his lips. When he was wrenched away, arms violently twisted as the police bullied him from the porch, he saw his saliva had left a tiny, dime-sized stain on the wood. It would evaporate with time.

As the cops pulled him toward their car, murmuring something about Miranda Rights, the front door opened. Bill looked up, his vision wobbly. The whole world had gone dark. A streetlamp buzzed with light and bugs. The little boy was back, suctioned to his mother’s leg as she watched Bill get carted away. He caught her eye, which was clear and dry. This brought to Bill a new sorrow, a dragon in his chest. No one, it appeared, would give him a single tear. There was no one in the world who knew what it was to be him, adrift and pitched. His head was being gently pushed down so he didn’t thwack it against the cruiser’s frame. No one could ever know how sorrowful things had become for him, how much time had been slucked away, memory torn into burnt parchment, because otherwise there would be no end to the tears that would be shed.





Maria Kornacki *Yellow Leaf* photography

Sadly for Chester Bly, the few available girls in the county passed him by early and often. When it came to matrimonial prospects he was shit out of luck. He was homely, shy, as bow-legged as a wishbone. He had one big eyebrow across his forehead; underneath it, the rest of his face sagged as if it had melted before it had a chance to set, giving him a hangdog expression he couldn't shake any more than he could tame the cowlick stuck like loco weed to the top of his head. Consequently, Chester was as lonely as a stray calf a canyon and a half from his herd. He filled his days running the Circle-D ranch with two part-time boys he could ill afford, caring for his ailing parents until the day they died. By then his twenty-fifth birthday was hard upon him.

Sonoito wasn't much in those days; it still isn't, but then all that distinguished it from the vista of saguaro cactus and cottonwood trees were the wide flung adobe ranch houses. The handful of settlers made do with what they raised themselves and traded for what they needed. Any piece of fancy ribbon or special hardware, or dry goods they might need became an excuse to head into Tucson to the general store. If he didn't have what they needed, Ben Skroog, the proprietor, pulled out the catalog he kept on his side of the counter so it didn't get thumbed to death for no good reason.

Chester's birthday fell on a chilly Wednesday in October. The air was sharp with a threat of coming snow. He got up before the sun, made coffee, herded the cattle to a pasture of grama grass, washed up, fed himself, and then clutching his mother's Bible to his chest he knelt beside his bed.

"Lord," he prayed, "I am lonelier than Adam before You made Eve out of his spare rib. I would give anything for a wife and helpmate to ease my burden and end my loneliness. I have struggled to keep faith waiting for you to work your mysterious ways but seeing as it's my twenty-fifth birthday I can wait no longer so forgive me if you disapprove of my ways, but if you can see fit, help me find a fine wife to call my own."

He hadn't prayed since his ma died. She would not have approved of his intentions but he saw no other option. It was time for a trip to Tucson.

Skroog glanced up, spit tobacco juice, and overshot the spittoon, narrowly missing Chester's boot.

"What can I do for you this fine day, Chester Bly?"

Hat in hand, Chester hemmed and hawed. Words were his Waterloo in the marriage wars, but he couldn't allow false pride to stand in the way of a wife and family. He pressed forward with steely determination.

"I have put it off and put it off but I can put it off no longer, Mr. Skroog." He dropped his voice to an urgent whisper. "No gal in the county will marry me. What's a man to do?"

"Get yourself a Pima gal."

"I would if I could, I have no problem with natives as you well know; but I promised ma on her death bed to marry Christian."

"I understand, Chester, and I'm sure glad I'm not in your shoes, but what the hell has all that got to do with me?"

Chester reached behind Skroog, took the catalog, and thumbed through it, and pointed. "I would like to order that one, Mr. Skroog."

Skroog laughed so hard he swallowed his tobacco.

"It says right there." Chester jabbed the page with his finger. "\$47.50 with no additional charge for delivery."

Skroog spit, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and flashed every stained tooth in his mouth at Chester.

"I don't know how to tell you this, son, but the girl's not for sale. Just the contraption she's wearing."

Chester turned as red as a cardinal, shook his head, and backed away, too embarrassed to speak.

"Hold on there, boy." Skroog reached under the counter and pulled out a cheaply printed broadsheet. "There's no crime in it. You're just barking up the wrong tree. Here's what you need."

"What is it?"

“Why, this here is the *Arizona Territorial Matrimonial Gazette*. These ads are from men like yourself or the women looking to find them.”

Chester eyed the broadsheet filled with pictures of young women, middle-aged widows, prosperous merchants, and camera-shy cowpunchers. His lips moved as he read the ad beside a young woman’s face. “I am young and lonely. I have no fortune save my good looks and a warm heart. Any gentleman who can appreciate these qualities will find in me an affectionate and devoted wife. Do your best for me.”

“It’s all lies, of course,” Skroog said. “Every whore from St. Louis to Kansas City is a refined church-going lady once she starts hunting a husband out west. They must truly believe that the menfolk out here are as stupid as the mules they ride. Maybe one in a hundred is true to what she writes.”

“My chances here are zero; one in a hundred don’t sound bad at all.”

“That’s the spirit. Fair warning, don’t go by the pictures, and whatever you do don’t send money on ahead. That’s the surest way to lose your gal *and* your money. Let her come on her own steam; it proves she’s motivated.”

Skroog leaned in close and personal. “I’m not naming any names, but you would be surprised to know how many righteous and upstanding men use this. Take it home. You never know what the blind turkey might bring.”

The first thing that caught Chester’s eye was the black-bordered notice on the front page: “Due to the large number of mail-order brides coming into our Territory and the often hasty marriages pursuant, many complaints have been lodged by disappointed spouses. By the authority vested in me I hereby declare that any marriage into which a man is seduced by the use of false hair, cosmetic paints, artificial bosoms, padded hips, or any other artifice or deceit without the man’s knowledge, is null and void on his say so. Judge Faber P. Dopp.”

Sceptical but determined, Chester carefully read each ad and gazed thoughtfully at each face. He wasn’t looking for the pretty ones; there was no mileage in it. Let her be as plain as him, so much the better. He would have considered an older woman but he was hoping for a family to work the Circle-D for another generation or three. He saw no clues as to which of them might make a good workmate or a fecund bride, only

whether they sewed or went to church or played the piano. Some were extremely specific: "Any gentleman from twenty-five to fifty years of age, no shorter than five foot ten and weighing two hundred pounds or less, who is a man of his word, intelligent, with an income of no less than \$1,000 per annum, and finds himself in need of a wife and housekeeper, feel free to reply. Christian only."

Chester was four inches short for that one. Others were just plain wrong. "Widow lady, 54 years of age, of independent means, wishes to form the acquaintance of a middle-aged gentleman, sober, religious, and gainfully employed, with a view to marriage."

Then he saw her eyes.

She said she was 19 but she hardly looked 17. She lived in Joplin, Missouri. She wrote "I am alone in the world. I clerk at Meyer's Dry Goods. I seek a husband with a ranch or farm. I'm used to earning my keep and I'm not afraid of hard work."

First off, she didn't say anything about being religious or pretty, nor did she have her sights set on a prosperous and upstanding Christian gentleman. That was all to the good. Secondly, she said nothing about his height, his house, or his income, only that he should have a ranch or farm and she wasn't afraid of hard work. There was plenty to go around at the Circle-D.

Her eyes mesmerized him. He tried to study her face for clues to her character but her eyes kept drawing him back. She wasn't dolled up like a fashion plate; her black hair was parted in the middle and swept back from her face into a profusion of curls tied with a ribbon and a rose. Her eyebrows, fine and black, arched gracefully to frame the elusive eyes that offered everything and revealed nothing. She was neither girly cute nor Sunday school prim. Her features were broad, proud, and her full lips were slightly parted as if she were about to say something and thought better of it, while her eyes silently spoke volumes that resonated all the way down Chester's spine. It was possible she might have Mexican or Indian blood, although she didn't look Mexican or Indian. She wore a small cross around her neck, which squared him with his mother. She could be lying, of course. Maybe she didn't work for Meyer's Dry Goods or wasn't as pure as the driven snow. Chester didn't much care. Her eyes hooked him. She wanted nothing he couldn't deliver. He wrote to her that very night and posted the letter in the morning.

"I own a cattle ranch with thirty head on Sonoito Creek not far from the town of Tucson on the Santa Cruz River in Arizona Territory, as beautiful a land as the Good Lord ever created. I am honest, hardworking, and with the right help I can expand my herd and the general prosperity of my household. I am not much to look upon but I hope that won't disappoint you too much; I make up for it in other ways I trust you will learn to appreciate. If you are interested, please respond post haste. I very much want to be married by spring."

"I don't much care what you look like as long as you are possessed of a fair and generous disposition," she replied. "My hands can help you grow your ranch so long as we partner up in life the way it should be."

Chester never offered to pay for her travel nor did she ask. As soon as she bought a ticket she sent Chester the particulars of her arrival. "Can you ride a horse?" he asked. "The Circle-D is 60 miles from the Tucson stage station. I could bring the wagon but it will take twice as long," to which she simply replied that she could ride.

The stationmaster came out to watch the stage creak and rattle into the station corral. She wasn't hard to spot as she gathered her skirts around her knees and slowly stepped down into the dust. The driver followed behind her with a single bag. Chester wondered why she had so little luggage and was thrilled that she didn't have more.

He approached, his head down, hoping to soften the shock of his appearance. Before he ever looked up he lifted her bag and said, "If you'll follow me this way please Miss Nichols...."

"You can call me Dorrie." She followed him, her face veiled from the dust, so that only her eyes showed beneath her straw sunhat.

"Are you hungry," Chester asked when they reached the horses. He set her bag down, clasped his hand behind his back, and stared at his shoes, unnerved that she was a good two inches taller. He knew it was important for a man to be taller than his wife and even if made no difference to him it might to her. If it did, she didn't show it.

"I'll eat when you eat," she said. "And you can look at me. I won't bite." She pulled her veil aside so that he could see her face. He raised his face until she could

see him clearly. When she didn't bolt he was emboldened. He looked into her eyes and she said "you're not as bad as all that."

She smiled and all the speeches he had memorized flew out his ears. He struggled for words. "Do you have anything more suitable for riding that you might change into?"

"No, I don't," she said. "I didn't have call to do much riding between my rooming-house and Meyer's Dry Goods. But I assure you when I tuck up my skirts I can ride as good as any man, any ordinary man, not a cowpuncher like you."

Chester blushed so hot and red that his scalp started sweating.

"Well, alright then," he said. "We'd best be on our way."

The road followed the river south of Tucson.

"If it wasn't for those funny little trees I'd think I was on the moon," she said.

"Those are called mesquite and pretty soon you'll get real used to them."

They traveled south twelve miles and camped under a stand of cottonwoods on the riverbank. At dusk the dying sun lit orange and purple fires on the surrounding mountaintops. Chester unloaded Dorrie's suitcase and then the supplies from his packhorse. Dorrie stripped off her shoes and stockings, splashed her face and arms and waded in the river while Chester laid out their blankets and supplies. He chopped and split a pile of firewood with a small ax and scraped out a handful of splinters for kindling. Dorrie watched him strike flint to steel to start the fire and then add logs in an intricate lattice.

He handed Dorrie a leather bladder to fill from the river and when she returned he his washed his hands. While Chester cooked a pan of salt pork and beans, Dorrie foraged along the riverbank, gathering tender greens in her skirt. She plucked the pink flowers from their centers, tore the leaves, and mixed them with the beans.

"I never tried that before," Chester said, half in awe and half dubious.

"Neither have I," Dorrie said, "but they sure taste good."

"We call that miner's lettuce. I personally don't have much taste for greens."

"That's about to change," Dorrie said. "I was raised on greens. That's all we had."

Chester watched her eat with gusto and they lingered over coffee as the stars came out. When the orange moon rose over the mountains, Chester made Dorrie a bed of boughs and leaves.

"I reckon we have plenty of time to get to know each other," he said, so that she understood that he was a patient man. "You need your sleep. Tomorrow is a long day's ride."

Dorrie leaned forward and kissed him gently on the forehead.

"You're a good man, Chester Bly, and I am much obliged."

Chester's intent was for them to keep a respectable distance until the justice of the peace married them. He had no close friends owing to his general shyness and solitary way of life; he hadn't gone to church since his ma died so no one outside of Ben Skroog even knew he was bringing home a wife. He saw no reason to make a fuss and print a notice in the newspaper. Everyone would know in no time.

Dorrie made herself at home without upsetting the balance of Chester's life. "Your place is neat and clean, Chester," she said, "and I'm happy to relieve you of some of that burden until such a time as we set up our household and you show me what my real work will be. Then we'll figure out how to best share the load."

Her words were music to his ears. She was becoming his friend en route to becoming his workmate en route to becoming his wife and the mother of his children.

Summer swept in with prodigal beauty. Flowers splashed the banks of the creek and rolling meadows with color; mesquite and cottonwoods grew over every rise and wild roses scented the riverbanks. The air was drenched with sweet golden light. Chester was mending the west pasture fence. He stripped off his shirt. The sun was hot on his back but the cool breeze dried his sweat. Dorrie walked between cottonwoods whose blown seeds gathered like snow on the riverbank. She scooped a canteen of cold creek water and brought it to Chester. He poured it into his mouth and over his head and shoulders, shaking his head like a hound bolting from a pond.

"Much obliged." He grinned, wet and happy. "That's exactly what I needed."

Dorrie said nothing. Her eyes were on his torso; she reached out and touched him lightly. "Your body is beautiful," she said. "Clean, hard, manly."

Chester turned away, blushing violently.

"You shouldn't sell yourself short," she said. "You have a lot to offer and I am grateful you're willing to share it with me."

"You are more than I ever dreamed possible," he murmured. She barely heard him. Taking his hand she pulled him toward the house. He trembled with fear. When he tried to speak, she silenced him. She led him into their cabin and kissed his lips, his eyes, his neck, and chest.

"I thought we were waiting," he said. "Until we got hitched."

"We are."

She unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his pants, and sank to her knees, her eyes never leaving his, and every time he tried to speak she shook her head ever so slightly and he thought better of it. He had never had sexual relations of any kind before, save those with his own hand. The way she gratified him with her mouth was beyond imagining. He wept tears of unknown origin, overwhelmed by feelings heretofore unfelt and sank into his chair, his pants around his ankles, seeing stars.

Dorrie smiled. "We can save the rest for our wedding night."

Suddenly Chester couldn't get married soon enough. He visited Earl Biggars, the justice of peace who was also the local undertaker and arranged for him to marry Chester and Dorrie on August 5, between a funeral and an autopsy. To Chester's surprise, Dorrie fretted more about what he was wearing than her own fixings. On their wedding day she helped Chester get dressed and then sent him to gather acacia and scarlet bee's-blossom for her bridal bouquet. "Follow your nose," she said. "Make sure they smell pretty."

By the time he returned with her flowers Dorrie had changed. His jaw slackened and he almost dropped the flowers. She wore a simple white dress with tight long sleeves; each sleeve had thirty-two pearly white buttons and she had not asked him to help her button them. She had no jewelry but her simple silver cross. She had pulled her hair away from her face, braided it with flowers and wrapped it around her head under the veil she had bleached as white as winter clouds. Her eyebrows arched above her eyes at a slight angle of apprehension; their happiness could vanish in an instant but for the moment it was theirs in all its evanescent perfection.

After the ceremony they ate beefsteak and black beans at the Chuck Wagon and walked home, hand in hand, savoring the last lingering thrill of anticipation. Dorrie undressed Chester as if he were Jupiter himself and she his cupbearer, delivering godly bliss. She unbound her hair, unbuttoned her sleeves, and slipped off her dress, leaving on the cotton camisole she wore underneath.

Chester was puzzled.

“But I thought...”

“Not tonight. My timing was off. The curse is upon me.”

She leaned forward to kiss him and all thoughts vanished into the stuttering incoherence of ecstasy. In the morning he had no idea what had happened, nor did it matter. Whatever it was had been better than he ever deserved or hoped for. She was everything she said she was, and she never ceased to raise the bar of his admiration, both by her enthusiastic devotion to the flourishing of their ranch, and to the endlessly inventive sex play that left him as contented as a bee in clover. Life was so good that Chester was afraid to tempt fate. But the last important piece of the almost completed puzzle of his life was still missing: a family to work alongside him and in turn to become stewards of the Circle-D.

So it was that he said to Dorrie “I’m not getting any younger. It’s time to start a family and there’s only one way to have a baby.”

“I can’t have babies,” Dorrie said.

The words tore his dreams like eagle talons.

“Why not?”

“I never got a good story. The doctors I saw couldn’t rightly say, except that maybe it was the rheumatic fever as a girl which didn’t make much sense since lots of girls who had rheumatic fever had plenty of children. I don’t know, Chester. It just is.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I was afraid you wouldn’t marry me. Are you going to divorce me?”

“No. Never. I love you more than everything all put together. It’s a shock is all...”

“We can adopt all the hands you need for the farm.”

“Take someone else’s mutt?”

“Give someone a loving home who might never have one.”

Chester's head spun. He had everything he had ever wanted except his own children. He questioned how much that really mattered and suspected that their love for each other outweighed everything. He hugged Dorrie and began to undress her as she had so often undressed him, and she let him until he came to her cotton pantlets and she stopped him.

"Don't," she said. "I'm cursed tonight."

"I don't care," he said, his eyes cloudy with passion. "What's a little curse between man and wife?"

"No."

"I want you the way men have had women since God created Eve."

"You can't."

"Why not?"

A long and painful silence stretched between them, almost to breaking.

"Because I'm not a woman."

Chester gaped at Dorrie. The air was sucked out of the room. She glared back fiercely. Her voice was empty of all safety and certainty. She was scared.

"Well of course you're a woman," Chester said.

"No, Chester. I'm not. I'm a man... A man who is very good at being like a woman until you get down to the plumbing."

Tears streamed down Chester's cheeks and onto his chest. His lips trembled and his mouth moved producing only sobs.

Dorrie dissolved into tears. "I'm sad too, Chester. I love you, I truly do. I can't help it. You made it so easy."

Chester shook his head in desperate incomprehension. "I loved everything about you. Everything. You were the best thing that ever happened to me."

"I still am, except for one thing."

She embraced him as he sobbed like a shattered child. He yielded at first, out of pure sad love, and then pushed her away, out of stark fear.

"What were you thinking, Dorrie?"

"I had to get out of Joplin, Missouri before I ended up dead on the street."

“What if I was some dumb sodbuster who threw you on the bed that first night and pulled up your dress and pulled down your panties no matter what you said.”

“I guess I’d have to kill him. Or he’d kill me. But it wasn’t a dumb sodbuster. It was you. I picked you from all the others because you sounded like a good man, not just a hungry one who wanted a cook or a punching bag. You said you fell in love with me the first time you saw my eyes in the *Matrimonial Gazette*.”

“I didn’t know then.”

“Does it matter?”

“Well sure it does.”

“You know how happy I can make you.”

“I can’t, Dorrie. I just can’t.”

Chester dressed, and without another word charged out through the door.

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t be gone too long. The cows still need to be rounded up.”

Chester splashed along the riverbank, his mind an incoherent jumble. All he wanted was for it to be yesterday, before this ever happened, when he was happy with his lot in life, a man in love. The ruins of his life swirled over a precipice and plunged into irresistible eddies. He was drowning.

A painted redstart sang high in the green canopy of alders. Redstarts were rare but the Apache who lived in the mountains said they were abundant until the white men scared them away. Chester recognized the bird’s delirious song. He had heard it once before, when he was harvesting pinyon beans with his dad and Na-boo-shi-ta, a Chiricahua medicine man.

Chester scoured the branches for the bird chattering on high. Suddenly its bright scarlet breast burst through the branches like a Roman candle. It flew and landed where Chester could see it, chattering incessantly. Flapping its wings it traced a lazy spiral in the air, nattering at Chester all the while, then darted ahead, invisible, singing, until Chester followed and as soon as Chester neared the bird fluttered up and away, leading him through a box canyon, behind mist at the foot of the falls, up a stairway of boulders that tumbled down a million years ago.

Atop the boulders a ledge jutted out from a sheer cliff. The rim was thick with pinyons. The redstart perched high in the branches and sang to Chester until he walked through the trees and saw, enclosed in a rough palisade of pink and yellow sandstone, a hot spring gushing from the deep inside the mountain. The bird circled above, singing, drawing Chester toward the pool of steaming water. Chester was baffled that he had never seen the hot spring before. He stood at the edge of the pool and the chemical effervescence of the mineral salts tickled his nose. The dense mist over the pool thinned in the breeze until Chester saw someone sitting on the far side, his back against the mauve stone, his long hair spread around him like seaweed. Chester recognized Na-boo-shi-ta.

“Long time no see,” Na-boo-shi-ta said. He was much older and the worse for wear but Chester immediately recognized his extraordinary beak of a nose and the blue Yankee cavalry hat atop his monumental brow.

“I grew up here,” Chester said. “How is it I never seen this place before?”

“You have to be invited I reckon.”

“By who?”

“Some squirrel, or maybe a red bird most white eyes would pay no mind.”

Chester chuckled. “None but a cowpoke with no sense at all.”

“Your pa was a good man, for a white eyes. I trusted him and I trust you. That’s more than I can say for the rest of you squatters.”

Chester nodded. “I can see your point. Always have. But you know what? One way or the other we all get fucked.”

Chester heaved a portentous sigh.

“Come on in,” Na-boo-shi-ta said. “The water’s fine. You’ll feel a whole lot better.”

Chester stripped down and stepped gingerly into the steaming water, fierce at first, and then ineffably soothing. The anger and sadness knotting his stomach since Dorrie ruined his life with her secret started to loosen. He could breathe again.

“Now what’s eating you, son?” Na-boo-shi-ta asked.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

“Last night my new wife told me she was a man.”

“Could be worse.”

“How?”

“She could be dead.”

The words stung like a bee. Chester realized he wasn't angry she was a man as much as he was angry that he had to lose her. Na-boo-shi-ta slid down until the water lapped at his nostrils. He inhaled deeply and exhaled.

“Magic,” he said.

“What?”

“This place, these fumes, us, everything right here this minute. It adds up to magic. A man can think clear for a change. Now, what's the real problem?”

“I want Dorrie to be a woman.”

“Well that ain't about to happen.”

“What do I do now?”

“Do you love her?”

“More than anything.”

“Keep loving her.”

“But.”

“No buts. Just love her. My people had two male squaws I can remember. One of them was just a damn good squaw but the other one had special powers. Our ancestors talked to her all the time. Pretty soon it got so we didn't know what we'd do without her. She saved us a lot of grief.”

“What happened to her?”

“That's a long story for another time. What I'm saying is that nobody looked down on the man who married her. She was special and she made him special. They were both respected. We both know that white people are all screwed up, but I'll tell you one thing I have observed. They believe what they see. They're stupid that way. If they think she's a woman, she's a woman. Any reason why they would doubt it?”

“Nobody has yet. At least not that I know about.”

“If somebody around here suspected something you'd know.”

Chester gave serious consideration to Na-boo-shi-ta's words because as far as he could remember Na-boo-shi-ta had never steered neither him nor his pa wrong. But as soon as he walked back into his cabin he was blinded by anguish and fear.

"How did this happen, Dorrie?"

"Are you asking how I got this way?"

Chester nodded, blinking back fresh tears.

Dorrie sat on the edge of the bed, her hands in her lap. Staring down at her fingers behind a voluminous curtain of shiny black hair, she spoke softly.

"My mother was a whore. She didn't want me unless I could make myself useful so I figured out how to be useful. I learned what I know at a very young age. The funny thing is all I ever wanted was a good man to love me."

"I'm sorry," Chester said. "My ma and pa were as good as they come."

"You're lucky."

"But you don't have no hair on your body, no beard. How's that?"

"Ancient secrets passed from generation to generation. Lotions and potions. Candle wax. Tweezers. Sheer stubborn persistence."

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do any more, Dorrie. Half of me wants to love you and the other half wants to beat the tar out of you."

"Go ahead. I deserve it. You were honest and true. I lied to you."

"I can't. I love you."

He pulled her against his chest and squeezed tight. The raw courage it took for Dorrie to come to Sonoito Creek alone on a wing and a prayer being what she was knocked the wind out of him. Her devotion to the land, to the herd, to the tack shed and the barn, to the chickens and the kitchen garden, flooded him with gratitude all over again. He couldn't let her go. He couldn't stop himself from kissing her.

"I will do everything in my power to make your life better," she said.

"I know, just like I know without you my life is worthless."

"I don't deserve you."

Dorrie covered him with kisses.

"It's me that don't deserve you, baby."

In the years to come nobody ever had reason to think that Dorrie was anything other than Chester's mail-order bride. They kept to themselves, as Chester had always done. In time they adopted several sons, local mutts who needed a leg up, and dealt them as fair and honest a hand as life can offer.

Over time everything changes. What Chester and Dorrie did, and how they did it, continually changed, the way a song accrues verses as it is passed from region to region and generation to generation. Their herd tripled in size. They had all they wanted and remained happy together, as if destiny would have it no other way. Then one night, when they were very old, Chester expressed to Dorrie his worry that when she passed the undertaker would discover their secret.

"I'll be dead. What difference does it make?"

"What will the boys think?"

"Our boys love us," Dorrie said. "I have to believe they always will. Besides, Chester Bly, since when are you worried about what other people think?"

"Sure as shootin' that undertaker is going to run his mouth far and wide."

"Earl Biggars? I'll make sure to die on the Sabbath when he's so shitfaced he won't know my asshole from my left nostril."

They laughed and laughed, cuddling in their bed until they closed their eyes and slept together the way they had done for the best years of their lives.





Mimi Calise Peterson *Wildlings* acrylic on canvas

I won't tell you my name

— Seun Adeleke

I live in a small village called Motembi off a tourism coast. We're poor in my village and we depend mostly on foreign tourists that visit the coast. I usually see the *oyinbo* in the afternoon running on the sinking sand by the shore of the beach. Most of them are men with naked chests and *sokoto pempe* that usually interests me. But they were not there some years ago when I was still small small, maybe when I was five. It was when I turned six that the government came to our village and told us they wanted to beautify the coast for tourists to visit. I remember that day. It was the first time I saw the government, men in suits with big big stomach. Papa usually talked about government as if it was a strange god or a big machine that one couldn't see but I saw them that day. They came in black cars that dazzled in the morning sun; their skin shone too; unlike our own that was dry and dirty because we are little little farmers. That day they told us sweet things and papa smiled at me. I was happy that he smiled because he rarely did, maybe because we are poor—very poor.

Some months later, the government came with big big machine that cleared all the rubbish things we had thrown by the sea. They also built some tents that are beautiful, I never saw anything like that before because papa has never allowed me leave our village before and mama too. I remembered one morning; we were in our farm, behind the house, when we heard some noise. I left the farm and ran to the coasts. It was the government and some *oyinbo*. That time, I had never seen *oyinbo* before. They looked like *afin* that must not eat salt. I was very afraid but happy that day. Papa and mama later joined me at the coast. We listened to one man that talked to us on a gramophone. I didn't understand the big grammars he spoke and this made me uninterested. I then turned to the sea and watched its beautiful sight. That morning the sea did not make big noise like before. It was as if the sea knew the people were talking about it and it wanted to listen to their gossips, so it was quiet. After an hour, the people left and we returned to our farms and since that day, the *oyinbo* have been coming to our coast and they have changed our life.

In Motembi, our houses are built with plywood and old clothes. Papa told me our village was established many years ago when flood chased them from where they were to where we are now. Papa told me he was a boy then and that, that flood made him lose his cattle and his mama. When they arrived at this place, they had no money to construct real buildings and they made do with cheap wood and old clothes and it has been like that since then till now. Most of us have our small small farms behind our houses. We usually plant vegetable, maize and wheat. We rear domestic animals too like goats, chickens and rabbits.

Mama usually talks about our big sisters that have gone to the big city. They are very rich and everybody envies them whenever they come to the village, especially during Christmas. They look richer than the boys and they have more money to spend. Some of them look like *oyinbo* women that I always see in the newspaper. Their skins are no more black like before, only their legs and knuckles. Mama once told me I would go to the big city when I am older. She said she wanted me to make money to take care of her and papa. I was very happy because I thought it was good, I thought about building a new house too with cement and paint but all these dreams stopped when the tourists came. Our big sisters returned to the village and taught us how they made money in the big city.

I was eight when I heard that some of my friends had been visiting the coast with their big sisters to sleep with *oyinbo* men. They were given foreign money and they, most times, went to the city to change them and buy things. I didn't believe until I was told by my friend, she was a year older than I. I couldn't believe my ears. She told me that some of the tourists like the small small girls more than the big sisters. She even said some of the *oyinbo* men slept with small boys too and I was angry. I nearly vomited when she told me; she was surprised at my reaction. She said I was local because I had never slept with an *oyinbo* man who could take care of me and even send me to school in the big city.

When I got home that day, I told mama but she did not say anything. Her silence meant a lot to me because mama was the good good type that did not like bad bad things. It was later in the evening that she called me and discussed with me. She said many

things had changed and many would still change. She said anybody that allowed visitors into their place and gave the visitors freedom to tell them what to do will witness many changes, good or bad. She also complained about hunger and poverty. She said our people are poor and the *oyinbo* have made them forget their moral past. That evening I saw droplets of tears on my mama's face and I felt sorry. When I slept that night, I dreamt that I went to the big city and returned to the village to build a big house for papa and mama.

*

Things have changed in Motembi since the *oyinbo* arrive on our coast. They do anything they like because of what they bring to the government. Mama told me that the *oyinbo* people give government big money, and so, government allows them to do what they like. All my friends have started going to the coast, even their parents encourage them. Some go to sell roasted maize and get *oyinbo* to sleep with. I am happy that papa and mama have not made me go to the coast but we're still poor and hungry because our farm is small and can't give us enough.

Things changed for me when my big cousin came to live with us. Papa and mama love him and respect him because he usually gives them money. My big cousin is a tall young man that looks like a horse and enjoys going to the coast. Some of our people said he usually connects small boys and girls to the *oyinbo* men and they give him big money. My cousin loves me and always looks at me with the corner of his eyes. Mama once told me that I should be careful with him but I didn't understand what she meant.

One evening, I was playing alone in the house, mama had gone to the coast to sell some roasted maize and my big cousin just returned from the coast. He and my father sat outside on a long bench drinking palm wine. I was not paying attention to them until I heard my name. I moved quietly closer to the door and listened to them. Although, in our custom, it is not good to secretly listen to elders while they talk but I wanted to hear what they were saying about me.

'People are making big money on the coast.'

'Big money but wrong money,' my father said.

'Papa, things are tough. It's either you make money or you die of hunger.'

'Then better to die of hunger.'

I heard papa laugh and they were silent. I waited for them to continue...

'It's money...hard currency. Small girls are buying things for their parents.'

'Then...I don't need the money.'

'Papa, you've been complaining about money.'

'Yes. I have. And what?'

'Your girl can make money for you on the coast.'

'Kai, my only girl and child! Is it just money, what about the diseases?'

'Don't say that...no disease. We have people that take care of the girls.'

'Not my daughter, not my precious daughter!'

'You can make a lot of money. You know I've been telling you this since.'

'How'll I tell my wife?'

'You don't need to tell her.'

'Just leave it to me.'

'I'll think about it but for now, don't touch her.'

I heard my father stand up and move towards the house. I ran to a hidden corner in the room and cried. He didn't come inside as I expected. Later that night, I told mama all what I heard but she slapped me. She said it was bad to listen secretly to elders while they talk. That night, as I lay on my straw bed, I cried and urinated on my body because I wanted its hotness to burn my body. I didn't want to go to the coast. It was later that I remembered that I would be nine the next day.

*

My world fell apart when I turned nine. On the day I turned nine, my big cousin bought me chocolates, sweets and a pink dress that I love so much. Since that day, I always saw him look at me with the corners of his eyes. He looked at me and made me feel bad. He made me feel somehow because I don't like men looking at me.

One afternoon, papa and mama went out and I was the only one at home. Everywhere was quiet and heat was too much inside. I leaned on the window and watched our chickens playing in the sun. I felt like washing myself and I did. After this, I went to lie on my straw bed.

While half asleep, terrible things happened to me. I felt a heavy weight pounding me and I felt pains in-between my legs. I struggled and tried to stand up but I couldn't. A hard hand clasped my mouth shut. I struggled and struggled and the pains between my legs continued. As I continued to struggle, I bit the hand holding my mouth and the heavy weight rolled away like a wheel. I tried to stand up but I couldn't because I was too weak but I saw the face, and I saw the stubble on the chin.

When papa and mama returned and they saw me, they were quiet. I moaned and told mama the person that did *it* to me but she told me to keep quiet. She washed me with hot water and avoided my eyes. She told me that as a woman there were some things she could not say anything on.

My big cousin returned home late in the night on the same day and ate with papa. They later went out and I heard them laughing together under the moon outside. I curled up on my straw bed and fever gripped me. I also continued to bleed until mama used some leaves to stop the bleeding on the third day. I was ill for almost a week and after my illness, papa told me my big cousin needed me on the coast to help him. I knew what he meant; what he didn't say and why mama had been silent in the house because only papa ruled the house. The next day I started my journey to the coast like the other girls in my community.

*

My rounds to the coast were long and short. I grew up within a short time, making many rounds with different male tourists. They told me sweet things that I felt they forgot immediately they left me. Many days I was sick but I still went to the coast dreaming of a day I would be free from all the rounds of touches and pounding as if I was a yam in a mortar.

My brother and papa collected all the money that I made but mama rarely said anything. It was believed that mama must support everything that papa did whether good or bad but I felt it was bad that mama had crawled into her shell like a snail.

After some time, I wanted to run away to the city because my life was monotonous and difficult. I would wake up. I would go to the coast. I would search for customers. Or would get some that my big cousin had already made arrangements with! I would sleep with them and big cousin would collect the money. And would smile at me and pat me! Boring, it was! A cycle of seasons after seasons that I wanted to break until I met Danilo, a Brazilian.

*

I met Danilo one sunny afternoon when the world seemed it would be burnt by the scorching sun. He smiled at me and called me to drink Coke with him. He asked me my name and I told him. He used the words "little beauty" for me. I smiled and looked at the camera draped on his neck. He asked me about school and I told him I had not attended any. I thought he would take me to a hotel room but he did not. We just talked and talked. The wind howling, the sea roaring but his tales remained louder and on top of the din.

He told me about the various places he had travelled to. He told me about the pyramids in Egypt, about those living with the dead in Philippines, about the endless wars in Iraq and Syria. He told me both pleasant and unpleasant tales that made my day. As we sat together I wish I could travel with him and live another life outside my coastal community but I still thought of papa and mama. They would be hungry and nobody would care for them.

Will you travel with me?

Danilo asked when he stood up that evening. I nodded and smiled but he looked at me strangely before handing me a wad of foreign notes. He walked away and promised to see me some other time.

I was surprised that Danilo did not touch me but gave me money even more than those that usually touched me. Lady luck was behind me. I told some of my friends on the coast and they cheered with me but I did not tell anybody at home. Big cousin had warned me that I should not associate with any visitor except to do my thing, finish! If he knew about Danilo, he might beat me and papa would not do anything because of the money papa was getting from him.

I did not see Danilo for many weeks and his image started fading from my memories until one early morning that I saw him on the coast. He bought soft drinks for me and we talked. He warned me never to travel with a man because I could be used as a slave in Libya or Italy. I nodded. I had heard faint stories about these places but I felt it could not be as worse as leaving under the Goliath shadow of my big cousin. As if he heard my thought, he told me life could be far worse than this if I tried it. He told me I ought to be in school that I was too tender for life on the streets but he promised to raise awareness about the paedophilic activities in Motembi and how the government had tacitly supported the activities. He told me he would take my pictures and draw me. He said he would use the pictures for his campaigns. All what he said seemed good but strange like a dream in the afternoon.

Danilo took my pictures and showed me the images he painted of me. They looked like me but he added to my features making my breasts bigger than usual. I told him but he dismissed it. Danilo travelled to wherever he called it and I felt like a lady that her robes were shed by a violent wind in the middle of the streets.

*

Some months later, I turned thirteen and that was when some of my friends told me that they saw some images that looked like me on some foreign stations. They told me the

images were all over the foreign stations shown in local hotels. I did not believe them until I saw them when I went to one local hotel with an *oyinbo* man.

After I saw my images on the channel, I waited and waited for Danilo to return with his promises of good life for me but he did not and it dawned on me that he had stolen my story. Big cousin told me the man won many prizes because he used the images for a photo story or whatever he called it.

I felt betrayed and I promised never to tell any outsider my name or anything about me again. I felt Danilo had done worse than those that pound me everyday. He had stolen my image and my story unawares. I knew Danilo was in another corner of the earth but I would learn to forget him and erase his image from my memory.

I must move on for a better day when the rays of the sun would be mild but I still felt deep within me that something must change. As I walked down the road, the wind blowing the hem of my silk skirt, I made up my mind never to go to the coast for sex things again, no matter what papa and mama said. My body was mine and I would now determine what I do with it. I would no longer be afraid of big cousin. I needed my life back as a child. This was my decision that evening after watching my images on foreign stations.





Brian Michael Barbeitos *Mosaics* photograph

Remembrance

— Helen Beer

It had been a banner year for changes—as though they'd been saved up and dumped all at once, like flooding rains after a lengthy drought—and Lorna hoped she'd reached her quota. She was a creature of habit and routine, and now her life was unsettled to the point of exhaustion.

She rounded the curves of the hourly deck's circular ramp, climbing steadily upwards—perhaps a bit *too* speedily, she conceded, as her tires squealed at the pace. The noise was jarring, as she'd lost her satellite signal as soon as she'd entered the ramp; the classic rock music that had wafted over the airwaves on her drive to the airport had been silenced by layers of concrete. She passed the multiple levels of rental car decks, and finally exited at the fifth level, the second level of hourly public parking, finding a strategic spot near the elevators.

She made her way to baggage claim, past the shuttles farting noxious fumes, bombarded by the ongoing construction chaos and noise, and carried by the momentum of teeming crowds dragging roller bags. She found a seat near the luggage turnstiles, plopped herself down, and waited. She looked down at her watch every few minutes, willing the time to pass, cursing her lifelong habit of being early to everything. She checked her phone for her sister's flight status, refreshed the screen, and was relieved to see the plane was expected early. Of course, she reminded herself, "early" at Charlotte-Douglas meant there'd probably be no gate available when it landed; the plane would likely idle on a taxiway so close, yet so far—a frustrating limbo she'd experienced firsthand one too many times.

She sighed, and stared at the escalators, watching all manner of folk descend. The business travelers—whose ranks she all too frequently joined—wore their no-nonsense, impatient, get-me-out-of-these-unwashed-crowds looks, while visitors wore more hopeful, expectant expressions. She wondered how her sister would appear—older of course, more salt than pepper in her hair—but what of her expression? She concluded Dana would likely be wearing the smirk that seemed to have been permanently etched on her face since childhood.

And she was correct. There she was, a bit heavier than she remembered, grayer than she remembered, moving a bit more deliberately than she remembered; but there was the smirk in all its iconic glory. Lorna found herself standing and waving, like several other greeting parties around her, finally catching her sister's attention.

Neither sister offered a hug in greeting. Rather, Lorna hastily reached forward to take one of her sister's carry-ons, but it was pulled away from her, firmly, before any words were exchanged.

"Hey," Lorna managed.

"Hey," came the response from Dana.

"Anything checked?"

"No, it's just two days... this is it."

"Okay, well... good flight?"

"It was fine."

"So... my car's in the hourly deck," she turned and walked towards the exit, her sister following her. "We'll just beat rush hour if we get a move-on," she said over her shoulder.

The pile-driving equipment drowned out all further small talk, which Lorna welcomed; the drive itself would be awkward enough. The silence continued in the elevator, as they made their way towards Lorna's car, and as she stowed her sister's bags in her trunk. She was mindful to take the ramp slower on the way down, so as not to earn her sister's negative judgement of her driving skills. As they emerged from the deck, an enthusiastic drum solo abruptly rang out from the speakers. Lorna reached for the volume control, turning it down to a more appropriate, soft background level.

"So that Facebook post on my birthday..." Dana began.

Lorna jumped in, cutting off her sister. "You know, sometimes, a song is just a song. No hidden agenda, no subliminal message. I just wanted to share something beautiful with you, something I love, but..."

“The Unforgiven?” Dana interrupted. “I find that an *interesting* choice.”

“It was four cellos, covering a Metallica song. I didn’t even know the title, for chrissakes. I just thought it was a really pretty song.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Dana noted.

Lorna stared straight ahead at the merging traffic as she crept towards the exit booths and took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. “Look, I have a workout session every Friday at noon with a personal trainer. He’s a Millennial, and into Scandinavian metal music, but he tries to accommodate his clients’ musical tastes during sessions. He asked if I’d ever heard of Apocalyptica, and I said I had, but was only familiar with their first album. You know, all their newer stuff is far more metal-driven, and not exactly my cup of tea. Anyway, so of course he queued that first album, and when this song came up, it just struck me—and I remembered how much I loved it. Again, I didn’t even know the title... I was never into Metallica, honestly. But this cover by Apocalyptica—with cellos—was just gorgeous and very moving.”

She turned briefly towards her sister, who stared straight ahead with no response. She inched forward to the booth, inserted her parking stub, and then exited the booth without payment, as she’d just made it out under the critical, first-hour-free mark.

“And *this... this* is why I’d hate therapy,” Lorna continued. It’s a song. Period. One that appealed on a visceral level. I just wanted to share it with you on your birthday. There’s nothing particularly ‘interesting’ about that. But believe what you want to believe.”

Once again, she turned towards her sister. Nothing. She returned her attention to scooting across multiple lanes of traffic towards the airport exit, handling it deftly, as she had so many times before.

“So,” Lorna began once more, “I’ve read your letter over and over since receiving it in May. And I keep coming back to this one question: what does forgiveness mean to you? You say you’ve forgiven Dad. I remember you repeating it to him, like a mantra, while he lay dying in a hospice bed for nearly a week. Yet I don’t see it in practice... you

still feel the need for public shaming. Is this forgiveness thing temporary? Does it ebb and flow? What exactly is its meaning to you?”

She paused, expecting a response after wading into such ripe territory, but still received none. She maintained the silence, save for the dull, rhythmic notes of music coming through the car’s audio system, serving as white noise, and nothing more. The traffic grew heavier as she merged onto the interstate, although it was still an hour shy of official rush hour. Charlotte was like that; the volume of traffic seemed a constant, and Lorna wondered where all these folks were heading to, or from, at three o’clock in the afternoon. She hadn’t seen her sister since their father’s funeral and it dawned on her: she didn’t really know her sister, or her sister’s husband, or her sister’s children. She didn’t know the adult her sister had become, only the one pieced together, and colored, by vagaries and assumptions, through awkward correspondence. And she realized that she didn’t really *miss* her sister, as much as that realization saddened her, for the relationship itself came with far too many conditions. The traffic eased a bit as she exited onto the ramp leading to the outer beltway. And as she merged into the far-right lane, she found herself glancing at the blurred faces in passing cars, wondering what made those strangers sad; it was probably family, she concluded.

Lorna finally broke the silence. “You know, I ache for you. I’ve always hoped you could put into writing what you felt was done to you by Dad. Maybe you have, but I’ve never read those words. What I’ve heard you say throughout the years was that there was ‘inappropriate touching.’ And look, I remember childhood vividly—the colors, the smells, the stings, the bruises, the scraped knees, the yelling, the tears. I remember Dad’s drinking, his manic highs, his melancholy lows. And I remember Mom’s distance, her coldness, her resentment of Dad’s behavior. And I remember your words to me: ‘dumbo, ‘fatso,’ ‘stupidhead.’ And I remember your closed bedroom door, shutting me out.”

She took a deep breath and paused once more, maneuvering through the traffic, and positioning herself in the center lane before they passed the mall. The volume of vehicles grew steadily, and the traffic began to creep.

Lorna crinkled her nose at the heady aroma as they passed the wastewater treatment plant—momentarily smiling to herself at the joke she would've cracked with anyone *other* than her sister in the car—then gathered her thoughts once more before continuing. “What I don't remember, and what I hope you can detail, is when, where and how you feel Dad abused you. Because, over all the years, I don't remember ever seeing it, or hearing it.

Hell, one of the craziest memories I have from childhood involves a teenage babysitter and her friend, who stripped down, and made us ‘play’ with them, having us crawl under them, through their open legs. I remember their pubic hair. I remember their laughter. I remember feeling confused. I remember the sun filtering through the windows. I remember them demanding that we not say anything to our parents... even if I don't remember the specific repercussions they'd threatened us with, *if* we were to share what happened. I *do* remember feeling fearful, though. I come back to this memory every single time I try to remember anything ‘inappropriate’ that happened in childhood. And believe me, I've wracked my brain for literally decades. *That's* what I remember.”

She felt the warmth of her face flushing as it always did under stress; she glanced at Dana but saw only the smirk. Always the smirk.

Lorna stared at the brake lights of the car in front of her instead—on, off, on, off. She cleared her throat and continued. “You know, with all the coverage of the MeToo movement... and all the stories shared, well, things have come rushing back to me—all the men who've grabbed me, hurt me, belittled me, dismissed me. I saw their eyes, I felt their grasp, I heard their words; their anger was overpowering, suffocating. It was as though they were in the room with me, taking my breath from me. The details, the details, the details—they were so vivid they made me cower. But they can't hurt me now. I am beyond their powerful grasp. And those men? Dad wasn't anything like them. He was sensitive, compassionate...” she glanced at Dana, saying to her directly, “and he never hurt *me*. Look, I specifically chose a profession where I would be surrounded by men—having to prove myself with my own talents, my own worth, my own

knowledge, my own strength. It's tough, but it makes me feel as though I can conquer anything."

"Well, good for you," offered Dana. "You're not me."

Lorna took a gasping breath attempting, but failing, to regain her composure as her face's redness betrayed her. She focused on the brake lights once more, their regularity somehow comforting, meditative in their rhythm—on, off, on, off. "Look, I don't know if any of that makes sense to you, but it's what keeps me functioning. It's what keeps me sane. It's what allows me to accept myself and others, flaws and all. I've never wanted to hurt you. If I have, I'm sincerely sorry."

Dana was watching the brake light dance playing out in front of her, too, then began to speak without ever shifting her focus. "You never replied to my letter. And forgiveness is about the person who forgives, letting go of the feelings that keep them tied to the pain. I've told you Dad sexually abused me. But I appreciate the apology."

Lorna wished the ride could be over, but there were still many miles—and years—to cover. "No. You never did tell me that. *Ever*. And you didn't address my other points. Why the need for continued public shaming of Dad when he's dead, and after you said—repeatedly—that you'd forgiven him? He died thinking you had. Again, I don't understand a form of forgiveness so temporary, one so easily revoked. It carries no weight, no meaning, then, does it? So, what purpose does it serve? That, in a nutshell, is why I've been so reluctant to respond to your letter. And here's the thing... I still don't know what form the 'sexual abuse' took—or where or when—or why you're reluctant to express the details in a written form that could potentially give you closure. Or do you not *want* closure? Do you have a *need* to punish yourself, by clinging to something so obviously painful to you? Why? That's what I can't understand. Can you explain it? I know I couldn't live that way... it would eat me alive."

Dana angled her head to face Lorna. "I have no interest in discussing Dad with you. I don't have that kind of relationship with you. I wrote about how you treated me after Dad's death. What I did or didn't do with Dad was between him and me. Your treatment of me is between you and me. I accept you don't get it. And I forgive you for

it. My closure and my healing process are *mine*, not to be dictated by anyone else. I wouldn't judge *your* healing process. And it all comes down to judgment—you don't seem to be able *not* to judge. You seem to forget I'm a therapist who's specialized in trauma treatment for the past thirty-seven years... not just your sister."

Lorna gripped the steering wheel, steeling herself for the reply, but not taking her eyes off the road, and brake lights, ahead of her. "Well, shit. Of course, there it is... how can I *possibly* forget you're a therapist? And *because* you're a therapist, how can you honestly be in a position of objectivity when it comes to your own trauma? Was it objective to dismiss and judge—yes, *judge*—those who raised questions related to the legitimacy of recovered memory therapy? Is it objective to insist that your own mother fly to you, across the country, and undergo the same recovered memory therapy, by the same therapist, when she—and numerous friends and former colleagues of hers in the mental health field she consulted—felt you were being victimized and taken advantage of by an unscrupulous practitioner? I'm not a therapist, but that didn't—and still doesn't—make sense to me."

"Well, just because it doesn't make sense to you..." Dana began.

"No, you don't get to interrupt me," Lorna said, "let me finish. You know, I was—and am—a part of the narrative of your relationship with Dad, because you *made* me a part of the narrative. You made us *all* a part of the narrative. *Your* narrative. Our entire family dynamic was irrevocably changed by *your* narrative. So, to say that you have 'no interest' in discussing Dad with me carries a bit of irony with it, doesn't it? But I'm not a therapist, so perhaps that's not a legitimate feeling. So, getting back to forgiveness... your need to be forgiven, and to bestow forgiveness on others, is dictated by you. It isn't judgment that makes me question the legitimacy of this 'forgiveness' of yours; it's your actions. It's your words. It's your Facebook post to the entire goddamn world, five years *after* Dad's death, on his fucking birthday, saying that he sexually abused you... after you had 'forgiven' him, and after all those years of never calling it that. Is that, in your experience as a therapist, a healthy action? Because I honestly don't know. I'm not a fucking therapist."

"No, you're not," Dana offered.

“Got it. Fine. But this whole judgment thing... I'm judging *you*? You've judged me for literally decades when I couldn't reconcile my childhood experience with your own, or because I asked you to provide details that might help me remember what you remembered. But I'm just your sister, not a therapist, so perhaps what I see, and what I remember, and what I read, and what I felt—and feel—couldn't possibly be legitimate. But since you're the therapist, I am genuinely asking; I want to know: where did my memory of the babysitter come from? Oh, never mind. I'm just that dumb-fatso-stupidhead, who happened to share a beautiful piece of music with you on your birthday. And opened a fucking Pandora's Box. And you know something? As far as Dad's death is concerned? I was grieving.”

Dana muttered, “And I wasn't?”

“Of course, sure,” Lorna conceded, “but my grief came from a deep-seated, unconditional love for the man. And a part of me felt I was betraying you by feeling that grief, and that love. But you know what? I loved him, I *still* love him, and I miss him. That can't be erased. But this whole nonsense of how I 'hurt you' after he died? It's because I didn't share that small amount of life insurance money he left me, and me alone, right? The money he told me he wanted to go to his grandson, the only grandson he was able to have a relationship with over all those years? And because I honored his wishes, I somehow '*hurt you*?' Why... because he didn't pay you reparations, or some damn thing?”

“Well, about that... don't you think it would've been fairer to have shared?” Dana asked. “Fair? Really?” Lorna asked.

“Yes, really,” Dana responded.

“You threatened not to come to Dad's funeral if Mom came, even though she'd spent the better part of twenty-five years married to the man... and wanted to pay her respects. Was *that* fair? Do you know how much that hurt *her*, not to come, not to see her grandkids, not to have some closure in her life, just so she could avoid causing further conflict? But again, what the fuck do I know? I'm not a therapist.”

Lorna tried her damndest to control her shaking body, but it was futile. She was relieved to see the Providence Road exit sign ahead, signaling the journey was coming to an end.

Dana turned to look at Lorna directly once more, the smirk missing from her face. “We are done. You just can’t stop.”

“That’s fine. I’ve more than said my piece. And after Mom’s celebration of life tomorrow morning, you’re on your own. You can take a goddamned Uber to the airport, for all I care. You’ll have a certified check in hand. Mom insisted on leaving you *something*, because she saw how you behaved towards me after Dad died. She didn’t want to create more conflict... that’s why she left a separate amount to cover your travel costs, too.” She paused, then continued, glancing at Dana. “*That’s* what occupied her thoughts in her final months.”

Silence was restored.

Lorna exited onto Providence Road, merging across three lanes of traffic, inching her way to the second set of traffic lights. She turned left into Waverly and wound past the stores, offices and restaurants towards the Hilton Garden Inn. She pulled up to the entrance, extricated her sister’s bags from the trunk, and pointed across the way to a three-story brick building. “That’s where she’s lived the last five years, by the way. We’ll have the ceremony in the gathering room, just off the lobby at ten o’clock sharp; there’ll be a lot of her friends there. It’s just a couple blocks’ walk, or you can call them and have the van driver pick you up.” She pulled a business card from a back pocket of her jeans and handed it to Dana. “Here’s their number; ask for Danny. And for tonight?” She pulled out a pre-paid credit card from her other back pocket and handed it to her sister. “There’s two hundred bucks on this. There are at least a dozen restaurants within walking distance where you can get dinner, or you can grab a bite right here in the Garden Grille and charge it to the room... *that* would be covered by another credit card they have on file.”

Dana tucked the cards in her pants’ pocket and stared straight at her sister. “So, how much is ‘*something*?’”

Lorna opened the door to the backseat of her car and fished out a large manila envelope from a seat pocket, holding it out to her sister with one hand, as she shut the door with the other. “Here’s your copy of the damn will. Read it for yourself. I think you’ll find it’s more than fair—since it’s all about fairness to you, right? And for once, think of someone other than yourself, and don’t make a scene tomorrow... can you do that,

please? Can you at least play the part of grieving daughter for an hour? Oh, just a warning—it's probably not a good idea to even acknowledge Don with polite pleasantries. He's been practicing his 'here comes the vulture' speech for weeks but promised me he wouldn't launch into it *if* you didn't approach him."

"Sounds like Don hasn't changed one bit." Dana took the envelope from her sister and stared at it. "Why didn't you call me when Mom was dying? And why did you wait so long to call me after she was dead?"

"That's two questions. But that's covered in the will, too. I'm all talked out."

Dana turned towards the hotel's entrance, awkwardly tucking the envelope under one arm, while slinging both carry-ons over her other shoulder. "She was my mother, too, you know. But I'll plan to leave right after," she said to the glass doors in front of her.

"So, are you still seeing Dr. Bennett?"

Dana pivoted to face her sister. "No. She left Portland years ago."

"And was that before or after the multiple malpractice lawsuits came to light? And was that before or after the details came out at trial, documenting her involvement in that wave of false memories related to satanic rituals? And was that before or after Dr. Bennett admitted, under oath, to suggesting memories under hypnosis 'multiple times with multiple patients?' But you knew all that, didn't you? And still..."

But Lorna realized she was speaking to Dana's back, as her sister retreated through the whooshing glass doors. "You seem to forget I've been an investigative journalist for the past thirty-five years... not just your sister," she said to her own reflection in the glass doors.

Lorna turned, climbed back into her car, and maneuvered her way through the busy parking lot, turning up the volume on her satellite radio station once more. As she waited at the traffic light to make the turn towards home, she glanced at herself in the rearview mirror and realized *she* was wearing a smirk. Her eyes darted from the mirror, to the digital clock on the dash, and back to the mirror once more. "Nineteen more hours," she said to her reflection, "then you can move on." A polite toot from the car behind her roused Lorna from her thoughts, and she realized the light had turned green. "I'm moving," she said, with a quick wave of acknowledgment to the driver behind and made her turn towards home.

Happy Holidays!



Melissa Poole *Happy Christmas* digital collage 2015

Contributors



Poetry

Jason Arment served in Operation Iraqi Freedom as a Machine Gunner in the USMC. He's earned an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. His work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The Rumpus*, *ESPN*, the *2017 Best American Essays*, and *The New York Times*, among other publications. His memoir about the war in Iraq, *Musalaheen*, stands in stark contrast to other narratives about Iraq in both content and quality. Jason lives in Denver, where he coordinates the *Denver Veterans Writing Workshop* with Lighthouse. Much of his work can be found at:

www.jasonarment.com

Daisy Bassen is a poet and practicing physician who graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University's Creative Writing Program and completed her medical training at The University of Rochester and Brown. Her work has been published in *Oberon*, *The Delmarva Review*, *The Sow's Ear*, and *Tuck Magazine* as well as multiple other journals. She was a semi-finalist in the *2016 Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry*, a finalist in the *2018 Adelaide Literary Prize*, and the winner of the *So to Speak 2019 Poetry Contest*. She was doubly nominated for the *2019 Best of the Net Anthology* and was doubly nominated for a *2019 Pushcart Prize*. She lives in Rhode Island with her family.

Constanza Bernad nació en Aínsa (España) en 1954. Estudió en Huesca, Zaragoza y Madrid, licenciándose en la Universidad Complutense en Filosofía y Letras, especialidad Literatura Hispánica. Profesora de Gramática Histórica en el Colegio Universitario de Cádiz, España y profesora de Lengua Española en Nürnberg y Köln, Alemania. Profesora de Español para Hablantes Nativos y Literatura Hispánica, Community College of Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1985 a 1989. Bernad organizó cursos de lengua española para alumnos y centros privados, dio recitales poéticos de su propia obra. Publicó en la revista *Kammaleon* el relato breve "El caballo azul." Escribe poesía y relatos cortos desde temprana edad. En la actualidad está jubilada, vive en Aínsa, continúa escribiendo y pintando.

Patricia Boyer Claeys graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Manchester, U.K., and completed a Certificate in Poetry from the Writer's Studio of the University of Chicago. Her first collection, "Lovely Daughter of the Shattering," was published by Kelsay Books in 2019. Forthcoming work: "Literary Mama," "Pirene's Fountain," "Origami Poetry Project" and "Aeolian Harp Anthology 5." Her second collection, "The Machinery of Grace," is due from Kelsay Books in 2020. She was twice nominated for *Best of the Net*. Find her at: www.patriceboyerclaeys.com

Tanya Erickson is a junior at North Dakota State University, pursuing a bachelor of university studies degree in creative writing.

Ian Ganassi's work has appeared or will appear in numerous literary magazines, including, New American Writing; The American Journal of Poetry; First Literary Review-East; Clockwise Cat; and The Yale Review; among many others. His poetry collection Mean Numbers was published in 2016. His new collection, True for the Moment, is forthcoming from MadHat Press. Selections from an ongoing collaboration with a painter can be found at: www.thecorpses.com

G. Timothy Gordon DREAM WIND is forthcoming, Autumn 2019 (Spirit-of-the-Ram P). Work appears in AGNI, AMERICAN LITERARY R, CINCINNATI R, KANSAS Q, LOUISVILLE R, MISSISSIPPI R, NEW YORK Q, PHOEBE, RHINO, SONORA R, TEXAS OBSERVER, among others. EVERYTHING SPEAKING CHINESE received RiverStone P Poetry Prize. Recognitions include NEA & NEH Fellowships and nominations for Pushcarts and NEA Western States' Book Awards. Gordon divides professional and personal lives among Asia, the Southwest, and Maine.

Laura Handley is a poet.

Ryan Kelley is a writer and documentary filmmaker from New York. His film, *Dixie*, premiered on PBS stations nationally in 2017. His fiction has appeared in *The Tulane Review*.

Kenneth Pobo has a new book out from Duck Lake Books called *Dindi Expecting Snow*. His chapbook, *Your Place Or Mine*, won a chapbook contest from the *Alabama Poetry Society* and will be published in 2020. His work is forthcoming in: *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Switchback*, *Paris Lit Up*, and elsewhere.

Carla Schwartz is a poet, filmmaker, photographer, and blogger. Her poems have appeared in *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Aurorean*, *Bluefifth*, *Eyedrum Periodically*, *First Literary Review - East*, *Fourth River*, *Fulcrum*, *Cardiff*, *Common Ground*, *Gyroscope*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Inkstain Press*, *Leveler*, *Lost River*, *Mojave River Review*, *Mom Egg*, *Naugatuck River*, *Oyster River Pages*, *Paddock Review*, *Panoply Zine*, *SHARKPack*, *Silkworm*, *Solstice*, *Soul Lit*, *Submittable*, *Sunlight Press*, *Sweet Tree*, *Switched-on Gutenberg*, *Tales from the Forest*, *Triggerfish Critical Review*, *Varnish*, *Weatherbeaten*, *Wild Word*, *With Painted Words*, and *Zingara Review*, among other journals and anthologies.

Tom Squitieri is a three-time winner each of the *Overseas Press Club* and *White House Correspondents' Association* awards for his work as a war correspondent. He reported from all seven continents, always writing as a voice for the voiceless. His writing and reporting have been published in an array of newspapers and magazines. His poetry has appeared in *Ariel Chart*, *The Raven's Perch*, *The Literary Yard*, *Eskimo Pie*, *The Stardust Review*, *Wanderlust Journal*, *Shanghai Writer's Workshop*, *No Strings Attached*, *Style Sonata* and *The Griffin's Inkpot*. He writes most of his poetry while parallel parking or walking his dogs, Topsy and Batman.

Pamela Summers is a constitutional and civil rights lawyer from Alabama. In 2018 and 2019, her work has been recognized or published by about 30 journals or publishing

houses in the US, UK, Scotland, Ireland, and Singapore. She was selected for 64 *Best Poets of 2018* (Halcyone/Black Mountain Press) and was a 2018 *Pushcart* nominee.

Ryan Tilley has placed two poems in *Writer's Digest* contests, had his poetry recently published by *New York Literary Magazine*, *Flare: The Flagler Review*, and *Genre Urban Arts* and has won runner-up five times in *The Saturday Evening Post's* bimonthly limerick contest.

Bhodi Tims is director of the MS Program in Herbal Product Design at Maryland University of Integrative Health. His recent poetry publications:

In Search of Blue, The Blue Nib, 2019. Book: The Acoustic Properties of Ancient People, Finish Line Press 2018. Theory of Air, Biophony, Water Lilly at the Edge of a Dream, The Unspeakable Sense of Connection and The Acoustic Property of Ancient People, Syzygy Poetry Journal, 2015. Bone Seed Lilac, Broadkill Review, 2015.

He also led a workshop, Mining the World of Science for Ideas and Language to Expand Your Poetry, at the 2019 Bay to Ocean Writers Conference.

Marcus M. Williams is known mostly as Marcus Emel. He is a writer, performer, creator, and producer in New York City. He came to New York City in an effort to start anew and to allow his creative dreams to flourish. Three years later he is toiling away, taking each moment for what it is and digging into the fun of it all. *Avocados and Toilet Paper* is part of that discovery of the fun. With so much going on in the world, anyone can use a quick break.

In *Avocados and Toilet Paper* he wanted to create the scene. he likes to call this piece a visual postcard to Alabama and a visual love letter to New York and the diversity of communities that exist. It is a celebration of culture, newness, and the regularity of it all.

Jonathan Yungkans is a Los Angeles-based writer and photographer with an MFA in Poetry from California State University, Long Beach. His work has appeared in *Anastamos*, *Oyster River Pages*, *West Texas Literary Review* and other publications.

His poetry chapbook, *Colors the Thorns Draw*, was released by Desert Willow Press in August 2018.

Visual Arts

Marsha Banas was always drawing as a young girl growing up in Iowa, creating new places, animals and people on paper. After 25+ years as a graphic designer, she now spends more time painting with oils and building resin clay sculptures with beads, recycled jewelry and found items. Primarily a self-taught artist, she has attended numerous art classes in watercolor, pastel & color pencil, but came to love the thick, boldness of oil paint through her series of fun whimsical dog portraits. Now she is loving her new found home in Silver City, NM and is a proud member of the Grant County Art Guild.

Brian Michael Barbeito is a poet, essayist, and landscape photographer. Recent work appears at *Fiction International* from San Diego State University.

Melinda Giordano is from Los Angeles, California. Her artwork has appeared in magazines such as Pearl, Amelia, new renaissance, The Altadena Review, The Bellowing Ark, Cactus Heart Press, Written River and The Sonder Review. Her work was also included in the 2018 “Pen & Ink” exhibit at The Union Street Gallery, in Chicago Heights.

Maria Kornacki is a photographer. Her work has been published in Sonder Midwest, Local Wolves, Genre: Urban Arts No.8 Print, and Remington Review.

Ginger Lawrence has been an artist all her life but just discovered printing a few years ago. It seemed a natural fit. She was born and raised in San Francisco and now lives in North Carolina, having moved from one coast to another.

Keith Moul is an indoor/outdoor photographer.

Leah Oates has B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design, an M.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a Fulbright Fellow for study at Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland. Oates has had solo shows in NYC at Susan Eley Fine Art, The Central Park Arsenal Gallery, The Center for Book Arts, The Brooklyn Public Library and in the MTA Arts and Design Lightbox Project. www.leahoates.com

Mimi Calise Peterson graduated from Philadelphia College of Art with a Bachelors in Fine Art Painting, 1984. From 1986 to present She has shown her work in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., Bahamas, Denver Co., and Silver City, NM. She is currently represented by the Light Art Space Gallery in Downtown Silver City, NM.

Melissa Poole Growing up dyslectic before it had a name in the hot, sandblasted landscape of west Texas and with grateful summers in cool and colorful mountains of northern New Mexico, drawing, painting, and a vivid imagination became Melissa's way of navigating the world. After graduating with a BFA in painting and a minor in English Literature, she moved to New Mexico full time. For twenty years she had a small gift gallery of fanciful toys, religious folk art from around the world, and represented the works of other folk artists in Santa Fe along with her own work christened *Trashique* taking kitsch to a high art form.

A self-taught lover of Photoshop and Illustrator, finding vintage public domain photographs to take apart, reassemble and embellish with great delight, Melissa Poole currently delves in digital collages.

Brian Pottorff began sculpting and painting when he was teaching school on the Navajo reservation. Back then, his guides were the sandstone rocks and vague ideas about how abstraction could reflect the land forms of that place without direct representation.

Since then the materials he works with have expanded to include stone, metals, wood, sawdust, paper and almost anything else as long as it suggests

some use in art. The guides have multiplied beyond geology, too. Zen Buddhism, minimalist economy, mathematics and jazz improvisation play their parts now. The resulting objects are artifacts of the artist's attempts to understand.

Fabio Tasso was born in Savona, Italy in 1990. He accomplished a BFA at the Fine Art Academy of Genoa and an MFA in Carrara, where he developed the first of his sculpt-making processes. During his studies, in 2012, he lived and taught in Nepal, focusing also on the connection between emptiness and fullness in art. Winner of numerous competitions, he joined in sculpture symposia, artistic residences and started his artistic activity between Europe and the United States. Since 2015 he has been a professor at the Fine Art Academy of Genoa, teaching Life Drawing, Artistic Anatomy and Sculpture.

Prose

Seun Adeleke is a Nigerian writer. He has a first degree in English and a master's degree in Literature from his home country. He writes stories that question the degrading of humanity by fellow humans. He is also a teacher in the northern part of Nigeria.

Joe Baumann holds 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 is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Gateway Review: A Journal of Magical Realism*.

In 2019, he was a Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction Writing. More information is available at: joebaumann.wordpress.com

Helen Beer sells for a living. She's had success in short story contests, with multiple placements in both *Moondance Film Festival* and the *Screencraft Cinematic Short Story* competitions. Her work has appeared in *Literary Potpourri*, *FRIGG*, *Typishly*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Persimmon Tree*, *The First Line*, and *101 Words*, with forthcoming pieces in *Sky Island Journal*, *Haunted Waters Press - From the Depths*, *STORGY Magazine*, and *Defenestration*. When not working or writing, she enjoys the Zen-like tranquility afforded by time spent riding her horse and mucking stalls.

Thomas Davison obtained his doctorate degree as a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership, and his MBA from Franklin University in Columbus Ohio. Dr. Davison has been teaching entrepreneur focused business coursework as an adjunct instructor for MTC (Marion Technical College). He is currently teaching at two prison facilities in Marion Ohio, including: NCC (North Central Corrections) a prison run by a private company, and MCI (Marion Correctional Institute) a state-run prison facility. Dr. Davison has been deeply moved by his personal observations and interactions with his incarcerated students. While teaching in the Ohio prison system he has been motivated to create poems and short stories about the day-to-day lives and experiences of his students.

Ben Gilbert is the Founder of The Blue Space Co-operative. He lives in the UK. Publications: *The World Peace Journals* (2013) Garuda Books, *No Place Like Home* (2013) Garuda Books, *Mumbo Jumbo* (2015) Garuda Books, *Al Khadra*, *Poems with Meaning*, (2013) UnitedPress, *Lumpit*, *short story* (2019) Poached Hare Journal, *#National Sex consensus Board* (Nov 2019) Scarlett Leaf Review, *When the North Star Falls* (Dec 2019) Fear of Monkeys Journal.

Lydia Isaies After 30 years as a federal government environmental lawyer, Lydia is now retired. She is a voracious reader and has recently begun writing. Lydia grew up in Puerto Rico, but raised her children in Pennsylvania. She married a gringo who after 38

years of marriage can still make her heart beat faster when she spots him across the room. His hugs are still magic.

Larry Mellman was born in Los Angeles, CA, graduated from UC Berkeley, lived in Italy for five years and currently resides in St. Paul Minnesota.

Anthony R. Pezzula is a writer of plays and short stories. His short stories have been published in such publications as *Midnight Times*, *Aphelion*, *River Poets Journal*, *Pens on Fire*, *Battered Suitcase*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Crimespree Magazine*. His plays have been performed around New York State's Capital Region, New York City, Connecticut, New Jersey, Chicago, San Diego, San Francisco and Tampa. In 2011 he received a Meritorious Achievement in Playwriting award from the Theatre Association of New York State (TANYS) for his one-act play *Home Again*. He lives in Colonie, NY with his wife Valerie.

John Potts is a Sydney-based writer. His fiction has been published by *Microfiction Monday Magazine* (US) and *Tincture and Seizure* magazines (Australia).

