

Kitchen Sink Magazine



Issue V

Fall 2021

Editor's Note

Fall is approaching.

The fall can be a major influence and a Muse for the arts, as we notice nature changing daily, the end of a season, the birth of another.

Writers and artists, if anything, notice the world and its constant change, expressing it in their own manner—a manner that communicates the human condition and the natural world, in all their parts. The arts make us all larger, more aware. Celebrate them!

Maybe we all can better notice the constant flux of the seasons, the trail of time, the body aging, or birth bringing the body into this world. A poem can do that. Or a short story. Or a painting. Or a photo. It all communicates something new, a new way of seeing.

Kitchen Sink Magazine is paperless, free, and available to everyone online. So take a look—you'll like what you find here.

We hope this edition moves you, challenges you, and brings you happiness.

Stay safe and well,

Robert Allen

Poetry Editor of *Kitchen Sink Magazine*

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The Judas Tree ~ Isabelle B.L

I'm like a dangling marionette in a photo I found while emptying my mother's house. A Judas tree in the background, its flowers dancing. My mother is holding my arms. My mother sporting a pageboy hairstyle, bell-bottoms and a peasant blouse. Uncommon creases on her face.

Don't hang from the Judas Tree!

If someone asked me to attribute an object, a word, a sentence about my mother, that would be it—Don't hang from the Judas tree. I must admit, sometimes it was: Don't hang from that bloody/damn/dangerous tree.

A Judas tree stood at the public gardens among the chestnuts and eucalypti. A place to hop, skip and jump. I used to run away from my mother to climb and hang from the tree before she caught up with me. Judas hung himself from a tree like this. I enjoyed hanging upside down from the Judas tree. The difference between Judas and me was clear: one wanted to die; one wanted to live. It was a non sequitur, but my mother never saw it that way.

On one spring day, I got to hang longer because a fellow parishioner had stopped my mother to talk, probably about a fundraiser my mother had organized. She had an eye on the lady and an eye on me. I saw her head slightly turn in my direction. Her face flushed more than usual. She never needed make-up as long as she had me. I knew what she was thinking:

How many times have I told you, not to hang from that bloody Judas tree!

But this time I refused to stop hanging because I wanted to see if her face would explode—it was that red. I also wanted to cry. I was in between slate steeples and clay roofs. Church taught me to obey elders because they knew best, and I loved my mother, who fed and clothed me when no one else would. Call it the age of reason, but I figured I could tell her how ridiculous she was acting and still love her. Obeying, no. I wanted to keep hanging.

I explained to my mother without stopping for a breath like a paragraph without commas and full stops, that just because something hangs, doesn't mean there's a link with Judas. I gave examples. Handbags from shoulders, piñatas from ceilings surrounded by colourful balloons and for five years, my father's long, winter coat which hung on the coat rack in our hallway. This last example cost me a week's television viewing. It was the grand-final and my team was in it!

She pulled me off the branch and kept pulling all the way home, but I wanted to give her more examples. Crucifixes hung too. They dangled from our necks, sat between her breasts and when she bent, the golden crosses floated into nothingness, twirled and returned to its intended and stable position. Multicoloured glass rosary beads hung from frail, rheumatoid arthritis affected fingers. I especially liked the Amethyst beads. I never knew what my mother's favourite colour was, and it wasn't the time to ask.

My mother made connections and associations. If her daughter hung from a Judas tree, she would betray like Judas betrayed Jesus and

end up in damnation. I thought disobedience was what my friends got punished for. Not doing their homework. Swearing at the table. Pushing and pinching a brother, pulling a sister's hair. But hanging from a tree? And this wasn't even *the* tree that Judas hung from. She linked disobedience with what I couldn't see. What she couldn't see. Abstraction. Obedience meant obeying a father. An appointed Father that ran the church. Her biological father. *The* one and only father of all.

She reminded me God was watching, but I was wondering if Judas was watching. I looked up at the blue sky, the ceiling, the corrugated roof, but I couldn't connect the earthly elements with heaven. I tried Judas. Eyes fixed on the tall blades of grass, searching within the emerald stems, the soft wool fibres in my bedroom, the stepping stones leading to my front door—no sign of inferno. I could talk to Judas like I could talk to one of my friends. Maybe he wasn't in the inferno, but just there in the same way others imagined Jesus to be there listening. The more I heard, don't hang from that Judas tree, the more I swung and hung, the more I swung and hung, the closer I felt to Judas. I went to Judas when my mother called the school, demanding a meat-free day on Fridays. I went to Judas when she wrote a letter to the Sunday school teacher calling for examinations to make sure children understood Bible stories. I went to Judas when I couldn't sleep because my mother had read a list of what God does to children who disobey. As to my sin, she was washing her hands of the matter. She then told me the story of God's people *washing their hands* of a murder they didn't commit and cited the chapter in the Bible: Deuteronomy 21.

This thought of life being a test caused my stomach to churn. Words were hard to swallow and foods indigestible. When I asked questions like why this beautiful Judas tree at the park can't receive love, she said it's called Judas. And Judas betrayed. It left me with many more questions, so I went to Sister Mary and Sister Magdalene, who only said that the Judas tree became the Judas tree only after Judas betrayed. It went from a sturdy tree to an invertebrate—shrub-like. I disagreed, they stared, their faces motionless. I explained to them the Judas tree at the park had a limb just perfect for hanging. I hung back and forth, lifted myself, smelt the pink blossoms and jumped. I went to my science teacher who flew off on a tangent talking about trunk and branch health. When I spoke to Judas, he didn't answer, and I figured it was because the matter was closed thousands of years ago and to just get on with it. At 13, I couldn't rely on humans for answers. It was the invisible man that provided clarity. There was no need to prove a point to my mother anymore. There was no need to seek answers when I, deep down, knew what was right. I knew the truth.

My mother buried her head in *The Glorious Book* throughout childhood. While I was devouring *Mr. Men*, she was reading about Moses. When I was laughing out loud with Roald Dahl, she was reciting *The Book of Job* and when Elizabeth Bishop left me gasping for more, my mother was at *Revelation*. *Patience of an Angel* was and still is my favourite poem. I like rebels. I reflected under the Judas tree about the Judas' of this world. People that ask why but know when to stop. Turn the other way. Make mistakes. There was a long spectrum. My mother and religion on the left. Me and spirituality on the right—a relationship doomed. We could never be friends, but I looked at her

with an inexplicable urge to wrap my arms around her wrinkly neck—I refused to disconnect from my mother.

Years later, I revisited that same spectrum. Perhaps she had shifted closer to me on the right. Leaving religion behind, but both religion and my mother had no plans to budge. My mother and I had one adage, from Montaigne, that we lived by:

Everyday travels towards death; the last only arrives at it.

We both knew that was true, but she postponed colour, vibrations in nature, screeching Lorikeets, the tranquillizing song of the Willie Wagtail, the aromas from freshly baked choc-chip cookies, white noise. Earth was all about a stopover. I used my five senses and watched, listened, inhaled, tasted the sweetness in Jellybeans, the sourness of lemon slices dropping into a teacup, the burn of a hot pepper and the rugged bark of a tree against my smooth, hairless then pimply skin. Earth was my destination.

In her fixation on the past, she was disappearing from the present. Making illogical connections. She lost me way before I packed my bags for independence and moved far enough. Eight hundred kilometres away from my mother, to be exact. The day I left, I wanted my mother to cry much like the mother in the picture book, *Love You Forever* who stands on the porch watching her son leave. I never owned the book. I used to read it at my best friend's; her mother used to read it to her, even as a teenager. I wanted the non-fictional mother to stand on the porch with a hankie and wave goodbye to me but she just looked up from the sacred words, smiled and said, “call me when you get there.” Her desk overflowing with notes on Deuteronomy, The Gospel According to Mark, and Psalms. She knocked hope off that

spectrum. Marvellous thing about earthly life is you can measure it: area, length, mass, time, volume, love and priorities.

I'm surprised she kept the photo with me dangling like a marionette. Displaying it would have been a sign of disrespect to her God because it had a Judas tree in the background—she should have torn it.

I took the photo and slid it into a brass frame. It now sits on my bedside table. When the funeral director asked what my mother would have liked to be buried with, I thought of the photo, I wanted to punish her for all her:

Don't hang from that Judas tree

but that would have been cruel.

I naturally chose The Bible. The coffin had a satin lining, but my mother wouldn't have cared if it had been velvet, taffeta or a plain, old, yellowed bed sheet. I folded her dead hands on The Glorious Book, Amethyst rosary beads decorating her fingers. How perfect! Both objects illustrated her life.

That afternoon, after the funeral, before my 6.00 p.m. train back to my university room, I sat under the Judas tree. I didn't feel like hanging, but for old times' sake, I did and it felt right.

Bowen's Island Restaurant ~ John Milkereit

Sun-bleached shells outside,
a porch piecemealed, a tacked-on dock
like a tentacle. The front door, an ancient
secret.

The oyster room is oblong, cinder-blocked,
packed with old boxes and appliance parts
cast in mildew shadow.

Newspaper pages scatter as a tablecloth.
Cocktail sauce in a Pepsi bottle, a plain box
of already-opened saltine sleeves dump
on a rickety table with mismatched chairs.
A snow shovel pitches oysters into a fireplace.

Knives thrown down. No gloves. Cuts
inevitable from the muddy, sharp shells
you try to unhinge. You can write graffiti
on walls, stale windowpanes,

or the jukebox spinning 78s, Patsy Cline,
five plays for a quarter. Chrome edges

reflect back, remind you of deviled words
lived in regret for everyone you once loved.
They hold out their hands, whisper for a dance
in the corner under the lime-yellow light bulb
as steam seeps and grooves.

If only I had known our last time was our last time ~ Kathleen Kelly

It was 22 degrees outside, ice coated his windshield and a layer of snow concealed the top. I clicked unlock on his key, desperate to escape the cold despite having only been inside of it for 20 seconds. The moment I shut the door, the new car scent blanketed me, his new air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror of his used Jetta. Beneath that new car scent, the hints of organic hand soap, lavender and rosemary, drifted delicately, and I was afraid that any move I made would break that fragile fragrance. The note of cigarette smoke crept up on me, entangling around the strands of my hair. I'm not sure if those scents were even there at all, but I could smell them as if he was sitting in the passenger seat. I sobbed all at once, like a Jane Austen character, the tears spilling out of me. He would've cackled at that bookish reference, not knowing who I meant, but calling me a nerd because of it. He would've said a more suitable reference was a Desperate Housewife or Claire Danes whose chin shakes in the most offensive way that no one could possibly feel bad for her. He'd tell me to quit it, reaching over to hug me. He would whisper that my tears would stain his fabric seats, and he'd glance at me, searching for a smile.

I gripped the steering wheel. His smooth hands, clean, trimmed nails, gripped this same wheel countless times before me. Or just the left hand, the right always made sure the music matched the scenery, the mood, the destination. I turned the knob to the radio, skipping past today's hits to soft rock. Mazzy Star crooned out the speakers--I knew he'd like this one. I turned it up, loud, like we used to. I stared at the windshield; the ice had created tinted windows like the kind we'd

joke about, and this space felt warm, a place where I could fade into him, where a smoky voice waltzed with a smoky cigarette.

His empty Monster can sat in the cup holder, the only evidence that this car had been driven recently. For a moment, I decided not to pick it up, as if this was a crime scene and I must leave all fingerprints exactly as they were, as if placing my own fingerprints atop of his own would incriminate me in some way. But I did it anyway, placing my fingertips in the way I imagined he held this can while he drove. I smelled the opening, not sure what I was hoping for. Proof of his life. Anything. I put it back in the cup holder, spinning it so the big green letters faced the way they were when I entered. I didn't want to be the one to throw him away.

Dating Rules for Women over Forty ~ Sascha Goluboff

In your journal, write your first two online dating rules. *Choose men who read books. Skip men who text LOL.*

You exchange cell phone numbers with Simon, a tennis coach who emigrated from England. He calls while you're cleaning up after dinner.

“Why’d you like me?” Simon asks.

“Because you read *All the President’s Men*.” You cradle the phone between your neck and shoulder while stacking dishes in the dishwasher. Your twin sixteen-year-old sons have disappeared to play video games.

“You’ll go out with me?” he asks.

“Sure.”

“I’m shorter than you.”

You stare down at the greasy casserole dish in the sink. “How short is short?” you ask.

“5’7.”

“That’s not *that* short.”

“You like short guys?”

Remember your first boyfriend in high school who was three inches shorter than you. Say, “Short guys try harder.”

He laughs, hangs up, and texts you an “LOL” GIF.

Think about how you’ve always had a thing for John Cleese. Write dating *Rule #3: Disregard the LOL rule if the guy has a British accent.*

The next day, Simon texts while you're in the cereal aisle at Walmart.

"What kind of cereal do you like?" he asks.

"Rice Chex."

"Boring! Go for a bowl full of O's. LOL."

An elderly woman attempts to pass, but you're blocking the aisle. She gives you the evil eye. Scoot closer to the Grape Nuts.

"Send me a picture," he texts.

Snap a photo of yourself looking sexy but not too sexy.

"I want to see more," he texts back. "Let's trade body shots."

Go to the restroom. In front of the mirror, strike a pose in your Saturday-morning-errand-running outfit.

Back at the cart, you receive a picture of him wearing a towel draped low around his waist.

He calls. "What do you think?"

"You're buff."

"Thanks. I've got some wild pictures from a show. I usually don't send them to girls I haven't met, but you seem nonjudgmental."

Feel flattered. Tell him you're game. Turning down the condiments aisle, your phone dings. It's a photo of a woman with blonde hair wearing red lipstick and a black sequined dress.

"Who's this?" you text.

"Me."

Tell him he looks beautiful, then block his number. When you get home, cross out your first three rules. Compose a new *Rule #1: Don't date anyone prettier than you.* Thirty years of marriage and sixteen years of mothering definitely took their toll. Nonjudgmental will only go so far.

You're on a first date with Zeb, a tall computer programmer, at the Rusty Bucket restaurant.

You order a beer. He orders a soda.

"I don't drink alcohol," Zeb says, stirring the ice in his glass. "But I don't mind if you do."

Say thanks, and take a sip.

"I used to drink a lot during my marriage," he says.

Make a mental note of *Rule #2: Steer conversation away from your date's past addictions.*

Ask if he has any pictures of his kids.

Scrolling through his phone, he says, "The drinking started when I was in college. One summer, I followed the Grateful Dead. That led to other substances."

"Did you find a photo?"

"Here's Mac, the oldest, suited up for a football game."

"He looks like you."

“Do you know that the red hair-blue eye color combination is the rarest in the world?”

“Really?”

“The two younger boys resemble their mom – brown hair and brown eyes.” He scans the menu. “I’m going to get the chef’s salad without cheese. Doctor’s orders.” He puts down the menu and looks at you.

“I’ll get the burger,” you say. “Fruit salad instead of fries.” Take another sip of beer.

“I had a heart attack two years ago,” he says. “Got a stent. The worst was the bladder cancer. A year and a half ago.” He stares at you.

Compose an addendum to *Rule #2: There’s only so many times you can redirect the conversation.*

Say, “That must have been awful.”

“They put a tube up my urethra.”

“Ouch.” You suck in your breath.

“Exactly,” he says.

The waitress arrives to take your order.

After she leaves, Zeb says, “I like you, Sarabelle. You’re even prettier in person. Give me a kiss.”

Stand up, lean over the table, and kiss him on the mouth. He tastes like root beer.

Discover *Rule #3: Kissing is like riding a bike. You’ll adjust to the new specs quickly.*

After dinner, you stroll hand in hand back to your minivan. He pulls you close, wrapping his arms around your waist and nuzzling your hair.

“Let’s drive somewhere,” he says.

Stop at a convenience store so he can buy a pack of gum. He hands you a piece as you pull out onto the road.

Park in an abandoned gas station, roll down the windows, and turn off the car. Spit your gum into a tissue and drop it into the cup holder.

“Come here,” he says.

Unbuckle your seatbelt and shimmy onto the center console.

While making out, your tongue hits something hard by his right cheek.

“Don’t you want to spit that out?” you ask.

“Nope,” he says, pulling your hand towards his crotch.

Touch skin, look down, and say, “I didn't expect that.”

“I haven’t been with a woman since the surgery. Don’t know if I can get it up. You willing to try?”

It’s been a long time since you’ve done this, but he’s been through so much. It’s the least you can do.

After a while, he cries out. “Christ! Got any lotion?”

Retrieve some lotion from your purse and try again.

“Shit.” He sucks in his breath, doubles over, and moans. “This isn’t working.”

Slide back to your seat, and say, “I’ll drop you off at your car.”

He nods and zips up his pants.

When you return home, write *Rule #4: Steer conversation away from your date’s medical problems.*

You find Josh, a new man, online. You prepare dinner with him in his narrow kitchen. You mix the sauce for the salmon, and he slices the cabbage. He’s on his third glass of wine while you’re on your first. Consuela, his elderly Chihuahua, waits for something to drop.

Your first date for lunch at a brewery culminated in a tour of his basement where he roasts and packages his own coffee. You ran your hands through crates of smooth hard beans. Ethiopia. Peru. Kenya. By the time you left, it was 11:00 P.M.

“I’ve been reading *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*,” says Josh, who’s been on a spiritual journey since his wife left taking everything but Consuela. “It says we should strike a balance between meditation and daily activities, which is exactly what I’m doing. I run, roast and deliver coffee, and meditate.”

The first time you fooled around in his bedroom, you spied a Buddha statue in the corner. You also noticed Consuela glowering at you from her side of the bed.

“A girlfriend will make my life more balanced,” he says.

Smile because it feels wonderful to be wanted again, and say, “I’m all for balance.” Tell him that the sauce is ready.

He dips his finger into the sauce and holds it up to your mouth. You lick some off. Ginger explodes on your tongue.

“Come outside, baby,” he says. “Let’s get the grill started.”

Revel in the glow of his calling you baby until you realize he’s talking to Consuela. She yips and trots behind him to the deck. Notice a blue recycling bin overflowing with beer cans, all similarly crushed. Hope he’s not an alcoholic.

After dinner, retire to his bedroom where, in a fit of passion, you flail over onto Consuela’s side of the bed.

“Shit,” you scream. “Consuela just bit me.”

Josh turns on the light. Pull down your underwear to show him your left butt cheek.

“Relax. No blood.” He strokes Consuela. “She’s overprotective.”

Return to making out, but keep your eyes on Consuela while she keeps hers on you.

Ten minutes later, extract yourself from under Josh after he passes out. Consuela immediately takes your place. Gather your things, and leave.

Realize Rule #5: *Reality always bites you in the ass.*

You're in bed with Andre because you don't want to be alone on your forty-third birthday. A retired Freudian psychologist, he treated you to a hamburger while you bought several rounds of beer, and now you fiddle with the axe charm around his neck imagining it's a Nordic symbol for virility and honor. You find it strangely alluring that he claims to have been the strongest man in Pennsylvania once and gardens wearing flip flops.

Andre engages you in intellectual conversation, inventing his own words like "nudicity," "blasphemotocracy," and "rectologisms." Spending time with him, you've become increasingly aware of *Rule #6: When dating a man proficient in psychoanalysis, be prepared to hear all his secret sexual desires.*

Andre runs his hand down your back. He grabs your ass.

"I'm a butt man," he says.

"Butt man, breast man, leg man," you say. "Why do men have fetishes for body parts?"

"Freud wrote that the fetish is a substitution for the penis. The son notices that his mother lacks a penis, and this causes a fear of castration."

Sigmund, his white cat, jumps on the bed and rubs himself against your legs.

"The boy is interested in that substitute body part," Andre continues, "which can't be the female genitals since they directly represent the stigma of male repression and castration." While Sigmund purrs and rubs against you, Andre strokes your posterior. "No one else knows that he has this particular fetish, so he can access it readily for sexual satisfaction."

Anna, the female tabby, jumps on Sigmund's back, and they roll off the bed in a tangle of hisses and sharp nails dragging across the floor.

"I'm glad you're open to this type of conversation," he says, kissing your neck.

Say, "It's so very interesting." Squeeze his biceps.

After the cats' screeching dies down, he says, "You know you want it."

"We talked about it. No sex, yet."

"Not that."

"What?"

"A carrot."

"I'm not hungry."

"No, up your butt. All my girlfriends liked it."

Sit up, and say, "I have hemorrhoids. Ever since the twins were born."

"It's organic," he insists. "Straight from my garden."

Imagine him naked, digging up carrots in the moonlight.

Ask, "Didn't Freud also say that the fetish gives the boy an excuse to claim he's not a homosexual?"

Andre grunts and rolls away. "I'm going to the bathroom," he says.

As he walks by, you see a vision of your grandfather, Pop Pop Shlomo, once a heavyweight prize fighter. He's been dead for twenty-one years.

You remember sitting on Pop Pop Shlomo's lap when you were a child, tracing the scars on his face and hands with your fingers. He'd narrate each injury, listing opponents' names, the rounds, and whether he won or lost.

Realize that he taught you how to love a broken man and sketch out a map to the next one.

While Andre brushes his teeth and gargles, run through the dating rules in your mind. Cross out each one with sorrowful relief.

Andre turns off the hallway light and slides into bed, snoring soon after. Let the alcohol wear off and sneak out before daylight.

When you get home, throw away your journal. Delete your online dating accounts. Search the attic for that picture of you on your eighth birthday, standing with Pop Pop Shlomo outside the Tastee-Freez, his gnarled hand on your shoulder while you lick a chocolate ice-cream cone.

Place it on the mantel as a reminder.

This is the way you were.

It doesn't have to be the way you are.

You have a choice.

Sprinkler ~ Jerry Durick

Set the sprinkler going, time it.
This is summer, this is heat.
The feel of drought
Is upon us
As if our yard were becoming
A desert dry wasteland
A regular Lawrence of Arabia set
Getting ready to stage
What, what would it be
A battle or a sandstorm, cinematic effects
At their best, but
No it's just us setting the sprinkler going
Watering the lawn, the garden, our two
Tomato plants, one zucchini vine
Sunflowers etcetera, etcetera.
In our small attempts at fighting off
The inevitable
We set a sprinkler going, set a timer,
Set our hope – and time it.

Practicing Punk Kid ~ Samiksha Ransom

the photo-man finally yells, *statue!*

as fast as he can. goes snap, snap, snap

on my way out he whispers, *she's a tough one.*

a lady looks at me and nods.

i am twenty-three now and not fond of children
save the ones whose eyes are feral or
placid.

i am still a practicing punk kid

my business is to Flout
Defy
Transgress.

if cake needs three spoons white sugar,

i sneak in four.

if somebody needs a mocha

big tea leaves. i brew black chai with

if somebody hands me a map,

i get lost.

it is my habit to tear the instructions off

the box of Brownie Mix and
Maggi.

i hate moderation.

it's either black

or white

mountain tops or valleys

double or nothing.

some people find it amusing
matters.

to instruct me on various

i think of them as the

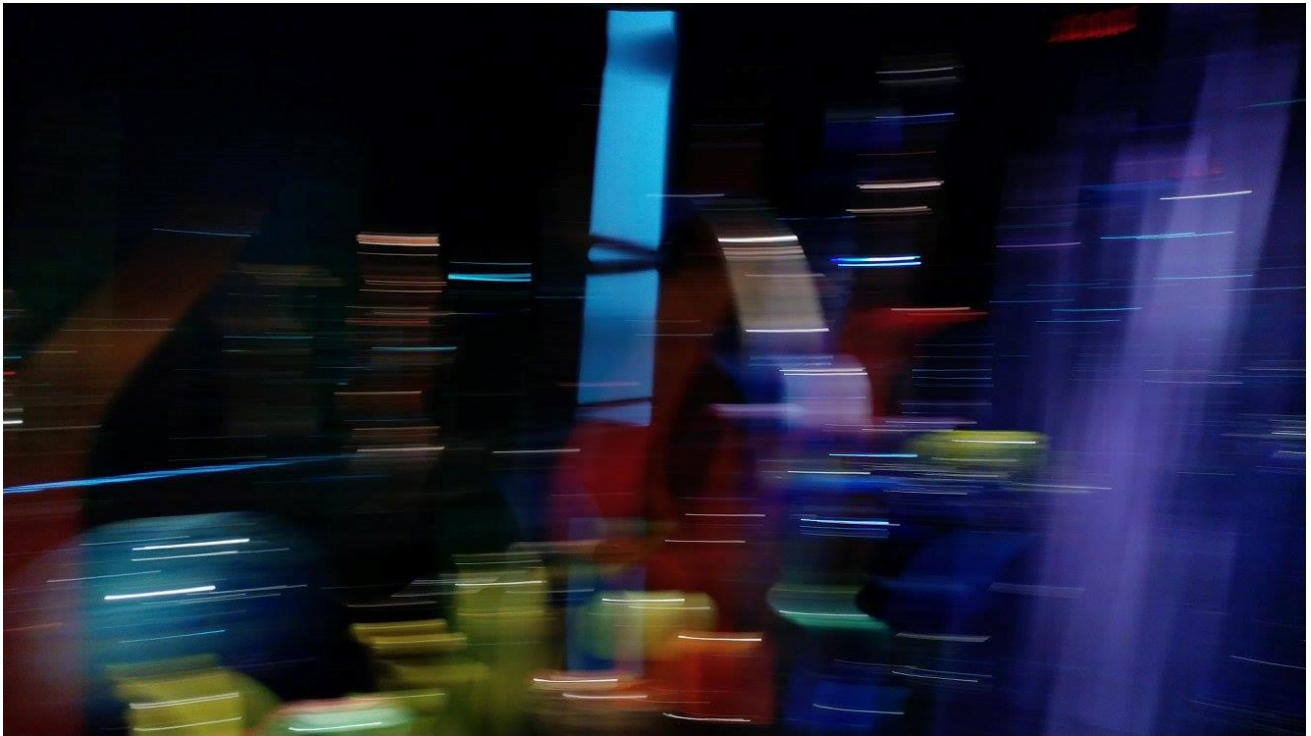
photo-guys telling me to

*watch the birdie**

and quickly shut my eyes.

*The phrase “watch the birdie” was used by early photographers to engage a child-subject’s attention by using bird props in order to capture a proper photograph of the child.

Abstract 5 ~ Carl Scharwarth



A Class in Gratitude ~ Laura Gaddis

Written collaboratively by Laura's Spring 2021 introduction to creative writing class at Miami University

Ice cream. Orange chocolate chip ice cream. Cheese (and crackers).
The first cup of coffee in the morning. Coffee. Sausage, egg, and
cheese breakfast sandwiches. Skyline Chili. Ribs. When I cook a
quesadilla myself without burning it. Baking. Chipotle bowls. Cold
pizza. Eating Fast Food. Eating good food. Harvest cheddar sun chips.
Sea salt and vinegar chips. Chocolate. Succulent Honey Crisp Apples.
Chocolate Long John Doughnuts. Black Tea. Chocolate chip cookies.
Food. **Good food.**

&

Pugs. My dog. Dogs. Seeing my dog. Puppies. Petting puppies. When
people let me pet their dogs. Dogs getting excited to see me. Cats. My
cats. Butterflies (figurative and literal). Pugs.

&

Watching baby birds being fed outside my kitchen window.

Climbing trees.

Swimming in the ocean.

Sunflowers. Red roses. The scent of lavender.

Sunshine. Sunny weather. The warm of the sun
on my face. Sunshine on my skin. Sunrises and
sunsets. Sun showers. Orange sunsets. Playing
horseshoes in the summer.

Midnight waves against a beach shore.

Stargazing with my friends.

Thunder storms. Summer
rainstorms. Sleeping during a
thunderstorm. **Rainbows** after a big
storm.

Fall weather.

Snow days.

&

Watching Catfish on TV. Watching cinema and television. *The
Nightmare Before Christmas*. Theatre and comedy. Horror movies.
Romantic movies. Music. Music. New music. **Singing**. Singing along
to the radio. Singing in the car with the windows down. Blasting music
in the car. Dancing. Listening to Mac Miller. When MGK has a new
song.

&

Hugs.

Seeing my sisters. My sister.

The unconditional love of my family.

Time with **friends**. My best friend. Hugs from my family and friends.

Being surrounded by friends. Hearing my friends laugh. Walking with
my friends. Playing games with my friends.

Being around close friends. Being with friends. Late-night gaming with
the boys. Seeing an old friend.

Having a drink with my friends.

Getting compliments from strangers. Random **compliments**.

Random **acts of kindness**.

People remembering small details about me. Knowing that
people love me.

Video games. Beating my roommate in mario kart. Playing Pokémon
Go.

Having an engaging conversation.

Laying on the hood of a car next to her, turning my head, seeing her
eyes,

and *sharing a kiss.*

&

Surprising family or friends.

When someone gets excited when they see you.

Seeing the people I care about succeed.

Seeing other people happy.

Being able to positively impact other people's lives.

Helping those who don't want help but need it.

Try to solve a misunderstanding successfully.

Taking care of people.

Leading the charge.

Working with kids.

Inspiring smiles.

Spreading Laughter.

Hearing laughter.

&

Being goofy.

Laughing with your friends and family.

Sitting at the dinner table with my family and laughing so hard we cry.

Laughing till my stomach hurts.

Laughing until your stomach hurts.

&

Evoking Emotion.

Seeing older couples out in public. Seeing my grandparents. The love
of an old couple.

Naps. Getting sleep.

Alone time.

&

Freedom.

Having free time. Stressless situations. Opportunity. Knowing that the
world is wide and there is so much left for me to see. Going to bed
excited for your next day's plans. Overcoming fear.

Walking around the airport. Looking forward to plans or a vacation.

Traveling. Traveling. A trip on a sunny day. Driving long distances.

Driving with the windows down. Going to cool places. The farm.

Holidays. Halloween and Scares. Summer break. Doing something out
of the ordinary.

&

Forgetting about it all.

Getting a good grade back. Getting a good grade. Earning money.

Cashing my paycheck.

Buying new clothes. A fun outfit. A good book. Legos. Fresh pack of
juul pods.

Have a charger when my phone is 1% battery.

&

Just showered hair. A fresh face of makeup. Getting my nails done.

Freshly done mani-pedis.

The smell of birthday candles after you blow them out.

Waking up before the alarm.

Working out. Working out. Swimming. Playing soccer. Pumping iron.

Swimming in the lake late at night.

&

Personal Growth.

Achieving my goals.

Achieving more than I thought I ever could.

The knowledge that I can do anything.

Basking in all the glory.

Comfort.

Colors.

Love.

Myself.

&

Honoring the Norse Gods.

Another Side of the Story ~ Zev Torres

Once upon a time a story
Burst into fragments.
And once upon another time
Those fragments shattered.
And once upon a time beyond that,
Those shattered fragments crashed and collided,
Were ground and burnt.
And in time, the ashes of those shattered fragments
Froze and congealed,
Were impacted by waves,
Crashed and collided again,
Changed form,
Devolved into fundamental particles,
Into myths and fables that,
Over time,
Were collected and cultivated,
Pruned and spruced up,
Interpreted and misinterpreted
Stripped of context and clothed in assumptions,
That morphed into an oblique,
Inverted,
Opaque retelling
Of what appeared,
Once upon a time,
To be a simple story.

Grass Stories ~ Joseph Higdon

Because I had a tall child-sized black oak to climb,
I surveyed the neighbors' lush, green lawn
and wished for a chance to play there
with the neighbor kids
and afterward to lie back in the thick grass
and tell great stories.

But because my bare bedroom
had no electricity, I could not confess,
in any story, that I once
fell asleep with the flashlight on
and cried the next night when I realized
I would stumble in the dark
for the rest of the moonless month
until my next ration of batteries.

And because I slept on a warped wooden floor
with only three old blankets
(one folded into a thin mattress),
I could not understand
others' common complaints
of crawling into a cold bed
and awakening to rise from a warm one.

And because I had small holes in my clothes
(two pairs of jeans and three shirts I alternated),
I only absorbed school kids' constant
sarcastic questions and cruel comments.

I always responded with clown acts
and cried alone in my lonely blankets.

But after several years away, I returned
and once more climbed up the scraggly oak,
much taller and broader. I saw,
just beyond the weather-ravaged fence,
their thin grass struggling to grow
in the dominating shade of my towering tree.

Sirens ~ Mark Konik

If he was that type of guy, Richard would have printed out the email and pinned it to the wall of his office cubicle. The air conditioning system had short-circuited, and each floor of the building had got hot and stuffy. It didn't take long for the emails to get to the Deputy Secretary and then the Union got involved. The lady that Richard shared a partition with smiled at him and told him to check his emails. He scrolled down, '*.... employees were free to leave. We apologise for any inconvenience*'. It didn't take long for Richard to log off his computer and leave.

The mid-afternoon traffic was thick and busy. As he turned the corner, Richard saw a young couple standing at the front of a pub. He was envious of their cold drinks and his mouth felt more parched than before. Richard turned up the air conditioning, so it blasted into his face. Eventually he left the main road and headed towards his apartment.

Veering left Richard could see something on the footpath in front of a playground. As he came closer, he saw that it was a boy lying on the ground with his legs tangled between his bike. Near the bike was clear and orange plastic scattered on the ground. No one else was around.

Richard didn't want to stop, it was too hot to get out of the car. No one would know if he drove passed. The boy looked up at Richard's car and waved his arm. Grudgingly, Richard slowed and pulled up to the gutter, stopped his car and went over to the boy. As he came closer to the boy, he could see that he was crying and that a part of his leg was bleeding. The boy's face was red and wet from the heat and tears.

When Richard finally arrived at the boy, he was already pointing at his leg. Richard instantly forgot the first aid training he'd learnt at work. He couldn't remember if it was a good idea or not to move someone after an accident. The boy tried to get up and move but Richard told him to stay still.

Richard tried to lift the bike off the boy but the boy began to scream which made Richard take a step back and drop the bike. He didn't know what to do, so asked the boy what had happened. The boy just kept repeating, "I wasn't supposed to go riding. Mum said that I couldn't go riding until I finished my homework. She's going to tell Dad on the weekend". The boy was now crying hysterically. Richard assured the boy that his mum wouldn't care as long as he was ok. While the boy was speaking Richard looked at his leg. It looked worse from further away. There was some blood and dirt from the fall, but it didn't look so bad. Richard rubbed the sweat from under his own chin and wiped it on his trousers.

After a while, Richard decided to pick up the bike again and moved it away from the boy. The handlebars were hot. He didn't know if to call the boy's parents, or the police and ambulance, and they would contact his parents. Richard took out his phone and offered it to him. The boy's demeanour changed, and he started to attack Richard.

"Who am I going to call?"

"Try calling your mother," replied Richard.

"I wasn't supposed to be out. Mum hates it when I do stuff like this."

Richard noticed the heat again. He could feel his ears getting burnt. A man across the road waved at Richard. Richard called out for him to come over. The man took his phone out of his pocket and walked away.

The boy wanted Richard's attention again. "Hey, I wasn't supposed to be out. Mum's going to be so mad." The boy had stopped crying. He grabbed the phone from Richard's hand. Richard told him something else, but it was drowned out by a car that was coming up the street. The boy dialled. It rang for a while and went to voicemail. The car stopped across the road and a tall lady wearing black tights and a white t-shirt got out.

She came running toward Richard and the boy and started to scream, "What are you doing with my boy? Get away from him. What did you do to him?"

Richard stood up straight and took several steps back to be further away from the boy. He stumbled on the edge of the cement and started explaining himself to the lady, "I wasn't doing anything. I stopped to see if he was all right. He fell off his bike. I could see that no one else was around."

Seeing that his leg was bleeding, the lady went to her son. She asked the boy what had happened and told him that he was supposed to be at home. The boy's mother wouldn't stop talking and asked him again what happened. The boy grimaced and looked sympathetically towards his leg.

Richard felt the need to explain himself again. "I stopped to see if he was ok. But I think that he is ok. I don't think that anything is broken."

The boy looked at Richard and started to make the situation clear to his mother. “I was just riding to Kyle’s to pick up some homework sheets. Then I remember being on the ground. I think that something hit me from behind.” He was now pointing at Richard. “I think he hit me. And now I can’t move my leg. It’s getting sorer.”

The boy’s mother got up from near her child and started to rush towards Richard, pushing him in the chest. “I’m calling the police. You hit my boy, you hit my boy!”

In the distance Richard could hear a siren. He couldn’t figure if it was coming towards him or going away from him.

After Dining at the Golden Dragon ~ Michael Waterson

It arrives with the check
for a kung pao chicken dinner,
my morsel of Confucian wisdom
baked inside a sugar shell.
Plucking a jade-green sliver
from the crumbled cookie, I read:
Imagination rules the world.

Recited to companions,
digested with smiles and nods,
such pearls are usually then discarded
with dirty dishes.
But I pocket this one, pay up,
step out into an ordinary evening
that presents me
with a pale, almost devoured moon.
Reaching out, I break open
the low-hung crescent,
unfold another fortune:
Here be dragons.

Stripped ~ Jude Brigley

With no photos on the wall, shelves removed, ripped away: the
carpets
rolled, to show the stains of living –

the house stands bare.

The rooms are blind, their voices pinched, serrated, scraped of
meaning,
debrided of their decoration. A dribble of blood revealed upon the
carpet –
soaked in the fibres of underlay. A singular silence shrouds the
memory
as the creaking landing groans

And yet the sunlight on the stair oozes familiar shadows in the hall,
bandaging the lifeless bones of the terraced shell.

Pantheism 1 ~ Cynthia Yatchman



Gasconade ~ Carla Cherry

Beginnings

excite me except

March and April's

fickleness

this tug of war

windstorm versus

rainstorm

winter coat versus

spring jacket

sniffing, sneezing.

Itchy eyes.

A cold.

My parents taught me

valor of patience.

I

await

cherry blossom

perfume floating

debris fields

of pink petals

robins in

steady song

my windows

explosions of sunlight.

I

hold on

hang on

eruption of leaves

from buds

like babies bursting

through birth canals

Tulips

Roses

will open

invite bees

to siphon nectar.

Oh, the gasconades of

orange.

Yellow.

Red,

like my hair

when we first met

four Mays ago .

So inclined towards the sun,

my clothes

will get lighter

tighter.

I will

open up

invite you

to siphon nectar.

Table for Two ~ Adrian David

Brandon walked into the restaurant, passing the ‘Reservations Only’ sign with Krista on his arm. The whispers among the patrons became a dull roar. A sea of suits and dresses surrounded him. Adjusting his tuxedo, he approached the maître d’ by the host’s station.

“A table for two, please.”

Krista rested her head on his shoulder, peering up at her boyfriend with starry eyes.

“A table for two?” The maître d’ rubbed his forehead. “Do you have a reservation?” His stare was cold, anticipating the answer.

“Certainly, I called ahead. My reservation should be right there.” Brandon reached over the counter and slipped the gentleman a fifty-dollar bill.

“Oh yes, I see. Right this way.” A smile played across the maître d’s face as he directed him to a cozy table by the window.

The restaurant was decorated for Valentine’s Day—each table was adorned with a vase of roses, pink wine glasses, and heart-shaped candy resting neatly beside the plates. The air was singing with romance, courtesy of mellifluous violins. The lighting was intimately dim, and the rich scent of roses accentuated the ambience. Patrons held hands, feeding each other candy. The sharing of flirtatious looks full of promise surrounded them.

Krista tucked a strand of curly hair behind her ear, stealing a sultry glance at Brandon as he seated her himself. The candlelight washed a soft golden glow across his face. Holding the neck of the

champagne bottle in one hand, the maître d' laid it out for approval. "May I suggest our finest Blanc de Blancs for this evening?"

Brandon's eyes scanned the bottle. "Yes, that would be lovely."

The maître d' nodded and popped the cork of the champagne. The bubbly sparkled like golden sunrays blazing on the horizon as he filled the glass, slow and steady.

"Thank you." Brandon pointed to his girlfriend's glass, "She doesn't drink. Right, darling?"

The maître d' furrowed his brow, flashing a tight, thin-lipped smile before nodding and slipping away.

"Happy Valentine's Day, my love." Krista beamed at her beau, making Brandon feel ten feet tall. "So glad we're celebrating together. We needed this."

"Yes, we did." He stroked her cheek.

"To us." He raised his glass. "I'll never love anyone as much as I love you."

"Same here. I've been looking forward to today." Lips parting in a smile, she kissed his palm. "I'm happy you could make time for me this year. You're such a busy man." Hurt clouded Krista's eyes.

Brandon's breath hitched. He'd screwed up. Again.

"I haven't had any other option but to be a busy man. Work's always been hectic for me." He sighed. "Building a tech start-up without a rich dad or an angel investor isn't exactly child's play."

"Well, here you go again." She rolled her eyes. "You have your reasons for everything."

“It’s not a reason. It’s the truth.”

“I understand, but the least you could have done is return my calls while you were at work.”

“Listen, Kris. You know how work’s been for me. I did what I had to do to take my company to the next level—insane work hours, all-nighters, back-to-back meetings, demanding clients, the whole nine yards.”

“All right, but I still miss the old you—the cute, bright-eyed guy who asked me out the very first day at Caltech.” She cocked her head. “Somewhere along the way, he got lost. After that, it was work, work, work. You never had time for me.”

Brandon stroked his chin, his eyes filling with regret. “I was doing all that for you, for us, for our future. You know how much I love you.”

“If you want to have a relationship, you need to nurture it. Like you nurtured your company.” A slight frown betrayed her plastic smile.

“Let’s forget the past and start over.” He brushed aside her concern. “And look forward to making a life for us together.”

Taking a final sip, he motioned to the maître d’. He then flipped through the menu and ordered a chicken alfredo penne platter. As the maître d’ left, Krista crossed her arms. “Come on, Brandon. You keep forgetting. I have a gluten allergy.”

“Oops, my bad!” He shook his head. “Let’s order something else.”

“I always come second. Never mind, I’ve lost my appetite.” She pulled out her phone and began to fidget on it. With a slight groan, Brandon buried his face in his palms. Minutes of awkward silence filled the time as he waited for his food.

Before long, the order graced the table. He picked the penne with a fork, taking frequent trips to his mouth. On half-heartedly finishing the meal, he wiped his lips with a napkin and glanced at Krista, who was still busy staring at her screen. He tapped his fingers on the table to grab her attention. “Kris, I’m sorry.” Holding out his hand, he waited, hope written in his eyes for her to give in and drop her hand into his.

“I’ve heard that a gazillion times.” Sarcasm dripped from her words.

“No, I really am.” He squeezed her fingers. “I shouldn’t have made work my first priority. And I failed to understand your true worth. I’ve been a dick.”

“And an absolute one at that!” Her words were harsh, but the sides of her mouth twitched, hinting at a smile. “No argument from me.”

“I’m sorry for everything, Kris.” His chin quivered, and his voice lost its power, barely escaping louder than a whisper. “I am.”

“Do you mean it?” She raised a brow.

“With all my heart.” He nodded.

Krista sucked in a deep breath and beamed as she exhaled. “Finally! Apology accepted.”

He released his grip on her hand. “And I have something else to say.”

She leant in closer.

“I know this is going to be cliché as hell.” Brandon dug out something from his pocket as she peeked, trying to make out what it was. “But here we go!”

The conversations in the background stopped as he dropped to one knee. “Krista.”

The other customers turned toward Brandon and spoke among themselves in hushed voices, their attention focused on him. Unboxing an exquisite diamond ring, he gazed up at her. “Will you—”

“Yes, yes, yes!” she squealed in delight, cupping her face in her hands. “Oh my God, I can’t believe this is happening!”

Slipping the ring onto her slender finger, he got to his feet. Her amber eyes locked with his, and her warm breath brushed against his stubble. Their lips met, the heat between them rising as their hands clasped together. Brandon felt a tingling sensation as he lost himself to the flurry of passionate kisses. This moment was everything he’d longed for.

After what seemed like an eternity, the couple broke away from each other. Brandon gazed into his fiancée’s eyes, the woman he would spend the rest of his life with. He pulled her chair out for her to sit before taking his place across from her.

“Let’s go to your place.” Krista winked as her high heels played footsie with him under the table. “I’m badly craving dessert tonight.”

Brandon blushed, serotonin racing through his brain. “As you wish, madame. From now on, I’m all yours.”

Wasting no time, he dug out his debit card and paid the bill, leaving a generous tip.

“Shall we?” He linked his arms with Krista’s and headed to the entrance.

The maître d’ escorted another couple to their table, watching Brandon’s back as he stumbled his way out to the parking lot. He blew a breath out and shook his head when the restaurant manager joined him at the host’s station.

“What in the world was that all about?” The maître d’ shrugged, a bewildered look engulfing his face. “I mean, he tipped well, but... seriously? I felt like a jackass taking his order. And the way he kept looking at the empty chair? Man, made me and the other guests uncomfortable. Glad that weirdo’s gone.”

His manager smirked as he checked the reservation list, modifying information as he did. “You’re too new to understand.”

“To understand what? That he needs to keep his crazy ass home?”

“That guy, the one alone at the table with the engagement ring?” The manager leant his hip against the host’s station, emitting a long sigh. “He’s the co-founder of a big Silicon Valley start-up. Wanted to be the best. Strived for excellence and big payouts, but didn’t realize what it would cost him.”

“His sanity?” The maître d’s bark of laughter caught the attention of some patrons in the dining room. He lowered his eyes and chuckled nervously, worried he’d overstepped a line with his boss.

“No,” the manager heaved a melancholy sigh. “His relationship. He and his girlfriend were regulars here before he started his company. Came in once every month or so. His work interfered with their life together. He neglected her. She slipped into a depression she couldn’t get out of, and he never saw. She committed suicide five years ago today. Valentine’s Day.”

Eyes closed, the maître d’ recalled his own experience with losing someone to suicide. He felt horrible for the way he’d spoken.

“He lost it. Couldn’t cope with her loss.” The manager blew his cheeks out. “Blamed himself for her death. He still hasn’t come to terms with reality. Been showing up here every fourteenth of February, bribing his way into a forgotten reservation and hallucinating her here with him. Poor guy’s been trying to live the dinner he never had with her. His lost love took everything from him. I don’t think he’ll ever recover.”

The maître d’ stared out the restaurant entrance and sighed.
He knew he wouldn’t.

A Dawn ~ Sreekanth Kopuri

of sips and doors
a lost duckling
waddles into a terrible bleakness
under the drums of the sky

a scattered earthworm
drags its broken self
across the drenched road

a silent fledgling
in the dripping nest waits
for the unknown mother

the neighbour's cow lows
into this deafening silence
of painful absences which
creep into another dawn
nibbling at the edge

The Audience ~ Thomas M. McDade

France-Soir News and *Musique Magazine* posters hang off kilter
On the window and green door
Of a storefront that's the setting

For a busker in his early teens
Bowing a violin that's very shiny
But its case is void of bill or coin
He wears jeans that are faded

A grey sweatshirt, thick red yoke
Across shoulders clear to cuffs
According to my musical acumen
He's doing a Vivaldi season smart

Justice but he's working too hard
To flash some joy from the piece
Across his face to boost perhaps
His audience beyond a mere trio

Next to him, a sign warns no parking
Cartoon tow for non-French readers
One spectator is all but lost behind it
Focused most is a goateed man

In a sweater with fat stripes
Blue and red, and deep V-neck
The crocodile logo over his heart



Accurately pegs the last observer

A woman in a khaki trench coat

Her pained face suggesting

This child should try archery

Strings Attached ~ Bruce Meyer

The supposition was they were married. Otis was a sailor in a navy tunic with a bib down his back and a crackerjack boy hat on his tufted black hair. Louise had blond pigtails and wore a Swiss maid outfit. They would have been happier together if Switzerland had a navy. In the short time they were together, I amused my sister by encouraging the couple to dance. We used the pair to act out scenes from our own life with Otis playing the father and Louise serving as the mouthpiece for our mother. The story lines were familiar but when I asked my sister what the marionettes should say she simply shook her head. So they said nothing to each other.

They could only dance one at a time. Their feet clacked on my sister's night table when she woke, ill and crying in the night and I had to give her the medicine she had been prescribed for her pneumonia. My mother looked after her during the days. My father was away. I was only ten but was given the nightshift and the morning off from school. I had promised the woman who owned the marionettes that I would look after them. It was bad if they tangled each other's strings.

The friend who brought them wanted the couple back as soon as my sister recovered. The pair hung among the dolls in her yellow room until my sister became tired of watching them try to tolerate each other. They spoke, but only if I made them. Their maker never gave them moveable mouths. I could lift their arms, their legs; could make them sit or salute, but they were reticent by design rather than choice.

Their faces were not happy faces: they were frozen in looks of concern. Otis and Louise were unsure whether my sister would recover. The scarlet fever had gone to my sister's heart and caused rheumatic fever, which led to pneumonia. Maybe they felt they deserved better. I wasn't great at animating them. I didn't know many

sea shanties, and those I knew were about drunken sailors. Louise didn't like that. I could tell she was growing bored.

One night when I sat up to give my sister her medicine because our father was away on a short string and my mother was at the end of her tether, I untied the strings to set them free, but Otis and Louise, if that was their real names, each fell into a heap and stared at us as if they did not know what to do. My sister looked at them and began to sob. They had ceased to love each other and bowed their heads as if to beg forgiveness.

White With a Chance of Raining Red ~ Kushal Poddar

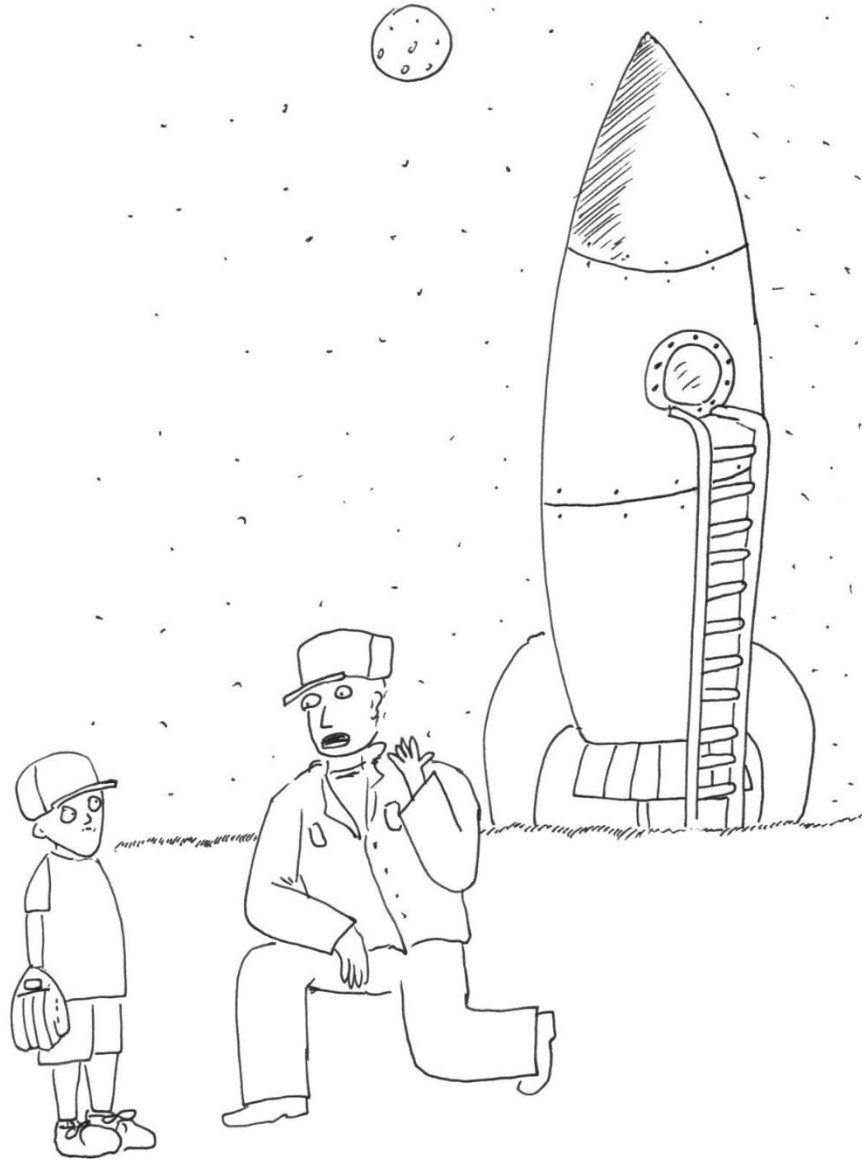
Memories metamorphose,
now a billow clouds fragmenting,
now a colony of gulls blasting out
into feathers,
into the open white of my eyes.

A thin blade of rays draws a line
as if brain will snort the blood,
throw back itself, sneeze a bit may be,
and tell me to plummet in the purgatory.

If this is a memory I am not here
in the present to recall it,
and if I am not here, it is not a memory.

I burst across the white of my eyes.

I'm leaving because the Superbowl is over ~ Josh Poole



Josh Poole

"I'm leaving because the SuperBowl is over."

Author and Artist Bios

B.A. Brittingham was formerly of New York City and South Florida and is currently a resident of Southwestern Michigan and a writer with an interest in photography. Images and words share diverse yet remarkable ways of telling the world's stories—both the gritty and the gorgeous. One hopes such pictures will aid in counterbalancing the distasteful upheaval of today's headlines.

Isabelle B.L is a teacher and translator currently living in New Caledonia. She has published a novel inspired by the life of a New Caledonian politician. Her work can be found in the *Birth Lifespan Vol. 1* and *Growing Up Lifespan Vol. 2* anthologies for *Pure Slush Books* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. Her work is forthcoming in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Ample Remains*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, and *Five Minutes*.

John Milkereit lives in Houston and has completed a M.F.A. in Creative Writing at the Rainier Writing Workshop. His work has appeared in various literary journals including *San Pedro River Review*, *The Orchard Street Press*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. Lamar University Press published his last collection of poems entitled *Drive the World in a Taxicab*. He is a 2021 Pushcart nominee.

Kathleen Kelly is a mother of three living in the Boston area with her husband and her children. She teaches high school English, a course on social justice, and professional development on equity. Her work has recently been published in *In Parentheses* and *So to Speak*.

Sascha Goluboff has a PhD in Anthropology, and she is a Professor of Cultural Anthropology and the Director of Community-Based Learning at Washington and Lee University. She obtained her MFA in Writing from Pacific University in 2021.

J. K. Durick is a retired writing teacher and online writing tutor. His recent poems have appeared in *Literary Yard*, *Black Coffee Review*, *Literary Heist*, *Synchronized Chaos*, *Madswirl*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, and *Highland Park Poetry*.

Samiksha Tulika Ransom is an Indian poet and writer. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Tint Journal*, *Colorism Healing Writing Contest 2020 anthology*, *Verse of Silence*, *The Open Culture Collective*, *LitGleam* and *The Woman Inc.* Samiksha is also the managing editor for *All Ears* magazine. She can be reached on Instagram @samiksha_ransom.

Carl Scharwath has appeared globally with 170+ journals selecting his poetry, short stories, interviews, essays, plays, or art. Three poetry books, *Journey to Become Forgotten* (*Kind of a Hurricane Press*), *Abandoned* (*Scars Tv*), and *Lake County Poets Anthology* have been published. His first photography book was published by *Praxis in Africa*. His photography was also exhibited in the Mount Dora Center for The Arts and Leesburg Center for The Arts galleries. Carl is the art editor for *Minute Magazine* (USA,) has a monthly interview column with the *Venetian Bay Neighbors Magazine*, a competitive runner, and a 2nd degree black- belt in Taekwondo.

Laura Gaddis is currently an MFA candidate studying creative nonfiction at Miami University (in Ohio). She has been published in *Thin Air Magazine*, *The Avalon Literary Review*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Scary Mommy*, *Tiny Buddha*, and *The Mighty*. She resides in Oxford, OH with her husband, daughter, and pug Rocky.

Zev Torres is a writer and spoken word performer whose work has appeared in numerous print and on-line journals including several *Great Weather for Media* anthologies, *Breadcrumbs*, *Red Coyote*, *Athena Review*, *Verses of Silence*, *Mad Gleam Press' PostStranger*, and *Three Rooms Press Maintenant 6* and *Maintenant 12*. Since 2008, Zev is the host of Make Music New York's annual Spoken Word Extravaganza, and in 2010, founded the *Skewered Syntax Poetry Crawls*.

Jospeh Higdon is former house painter and high school English teacher, now working as a trainer in mass production. He has had poems and short stories published in small college magazines, local newspapers, a library anthology, and a poem in *Boned*.

Mark Konik is a writer from Newcastle, Australia. His plays and short stories have been published and performed in Australia, The UK, The US, UAE, Canada, India and New Zealand. The short film he wrote, *A Million Times Before*, was produced in San Francisco and was selected for several film festivals in Europe and North America.

Michael Waterson is a retired journalist originally from Pittsburgh, PA. His varied career includes stints as a forest firefighter, San Francisco taxi driver, and wine educator. He earned an MFA from Mills College. His work has appeared in numerous online and print

journals, including *California Quarterly*, *Cathexis Northwest*, *Bookends Review*, and *Santa Clara Review*.

Jude Brigley is Welsh. She has been a teacher, an editor, and a performance poet. She is now writing more for the page.

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. With an M.A. in child development and a B. A. in education, she has a strong interest in art education and teaches art to adults, children and families in Seattle. A former ceramicist, she studied with J.T. Abernathy in Ann Arbor, MI. though after receiving her B.F.A. in painting from the University of Washington she switched from 3D art to 2D and has stayed there since, working primarily on paintings, prints and collages. Her art is housed in numerous public and private collections and has been shown nationally in California, Connecticut, New York, Indiana, Michigan, Oregon and Wyoming. She has exhibited extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, Seattle Pacific University, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers, and the Pacific Science Center. She is an affiliate member of Gallery 110 and is a member of the Seattle Print Art Association and COCA (Center of Contemporary Art).

Carla M. Cherry is a veteran English teacher. Her poetry has appeared in publications such as *Anderbo*, *Ennoia Review*, *Random Sample Review*, *MemoryHouse*, *Bop Dead City*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *433*, *The Racket*, and *Raising Mothers*. Carla is studying for her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at the City College of New York. She has written five books of poetry; her latest is *Stardust and Skin* (iiPublishing 2020).

Adrian David writes ads by day and short stories by night. He dabbles in genres including dark humor, suspense, psychological drama, slice-

of-life, romance, military fiction, and everything in between, from the mundane to the sublime.

Sreekanth Kopuri is an Indian-English poet from Machilipatnam—a colony—in India. He was an alumni Writer in Residence at Strange Days Books Greece. He recited his poetry and presented his research papers in many countries. His poems and research articles were widely published in journals like *Heartland Review*, *Nebraska Writers Guild*, *Poetry Centre San Jose*, *Underground Writers Association*, *Word Fountain*, and *A New Ulster*, to mention a few. His book *Poems of the Void* was the finalist for the EYELANDS BOOKS AWARD. Kopuri is presently an independent research scholar in Contemporary Poetry, silence, and Holocaust poetry. He lives in his hometown Machilipatnam with his mother teaching and writing.

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Kushal Poddar is an author and a father. He edited the magazine *Words Surfacing*, authored seven volumes, including *The Circus Came To My Island*, *A Place For Your Ghost Animals*, *Eternity Restoration Project-Selected and New Poems*, and *Herding My Thoughts To The Slaughterhouse-A Prequel*. His works have been translated in ten languages. Find and follow him at amazon.com/author/kushalpoddar_thepoet. His author Facebook is <https://www.facebook.com/KushalTheWriter/> and his Twitter is <https://twitter.com/Kushalpoe>.

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