

Dragon Poet Review

Fall 2019

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THE GIRL WITH A CHARCOAL HEART

Joshua Grasso

Flora watched the wedding procession from a gap in the battlements. A long train of revelers, a parade of musicians, volleys of flowers from all sides (imported flowers—grown far away only to be trampled underfoot). She recognized the groom, a duke who spoke in obscenities and once burped in her face. The bride, too: her name was Ingrid, and she was pale—paler than ever, today. She heard she was in love with another, but her lands were too important for a love match. The way she carried herself, the limpid movements, the painted-on smile; a mannequin with a broken heart.

Of course, hearts didn't really break—her mother assured her of that. That's just what it felt like when you lost all hope. Luckily it would never happen to her. The curse on her family had continued, unbroken, for six generations. Her heart was the last line of defense. *This castle, this kingdom, the people we rule over—they're all protected by the purity of your heart,* her mother told her. *So long as no shadow of love darkens your pulse, we'll have security and the kingdom will flourish. But should your heart falter and welcome the embrace of a lover...*

Yes, yes, the kingdom would fall—their line would be broken—barbarians would storm the gates. In that case, her mother must have a pure heart, since the kingdom once passed to her, and she delivered it securely to her husband. Which meant...she didn't love him. Even when she greeted Flora in the morning, her mother didn't say it with love; everything in life was a duty, performed with great care, tireless attention, but nothing more—nothing unreasonable. In due time Flora would marry someone anonymous, impeccable, and have children of her own. But she wouldn't love them. She knew better than that.

"Mistress, make haste! Your lessons," her maidservant urged.

A final look as the couple entered the coach to the cries of the drunken assembly; then she scooted down the stairwell and trailed the servant's bouncing skirts to her study. She mechanically recited her grammar, pointed out lands and kingdoms she would never visit, recited histories she would never know. Once her tutor departed, she had an hour to herself so long as she remained in the room. She watched the door close at the servants' exit. Then crept under her bed to remove her secrets.

In an old box which held once her jewelry she now hid greater treasures: her drawings. Page after page of sketches she had transcribed, line by line, with her pencils. She would draw people laughing and drinking and dancing together. Especially him, the man whose eyes followed her like the moon through trees and cloud tops. She never gave him a name, but she loved to draw him in different poses, attempting a new feature each week. This week she was attempting his fingers, slim, almost girlish in their beauty, but strong enough to pluck a lyre until nightfall. Once—she almost blushed to remember—she kissed the shadow of his lips on the page. Surely there was no harm in it, since it wasn't love, it wasn't real. No more than she could get lost in a map, or forget her own language by speaking another.

She paused at a sound—just a cough in the hallway, she thought—before resuming her latest work: a vast horizon glimpsed from the ramparts of a foreign castle. And there, in the distance, was an army led by their greatest general. Soldiers on horseback. Archers and infantry. Even a few dragons flying overhead, commanded by mages in tattered robes. No one could stand in the face of this army. But they weren't on a mission of conquest or revenge. They had come for one purpose: for her. She had been locked away in their deepest

dungeon until she promised to marry a hateful goblin who told lewd jokes and burped in her face. *His head will swing from the ramparts once you see the light of the sun*, the general promised her. The man with the moon-drift eyes.

“Mistress! Your mother will be here any minute and—what’s all this?”

She gasped and tried to fling her body over the page, smearing the charcoal of a ring into its finger. Too late: the servant snatched it away like a poisonous herb.

“By the gods—we’ll be ruined! She specifically forbid such witchcraft!” she cried, snapping up all the papers.

Flora jumped on the servant and tried to wrestle them out of her arms. The servant, of course, proved the stronger and dashed for the window with the entire pile.

“No! Please—you can’t! It’s all my work! It’s everything I have!” Flora shrieked.

Throwing open the shutters, the servant tossed the papers out the window in handfuls. The delicate pages fluttered in wind for a moment, like a bird taking its first leap from the nest; then toppled over towers and into trees and out of sight. Flora screamed and grabbed desperately for the papers, but one arm was sufficient to hold her at bay. A final toss sent charcoal eyes and fingers to oblivion.

“Now, now, don’t take it so hard—it’s for your own good,” the servant said, nervously. “You’re one of the chosen, my dear. This kingdom’s security relies on you. Think what would happen to us if you fell from grace!”

But Flora had never cared for the kingdom. They had always used that word—*care*—while filling her blood with ice. Even now, the idea of all the people, all the lands and history, it meant nothing to her. Just so many blank pages.

“The important thing is that we’re safe, that you’re among people who can protect you. Just as you protect us,” she said, pressing her hand. “Now go and get dressed.”

The servant slipped out the door, closing it quietly. Flora could hear her just beyond, whispering with the others. Mocking her pain. She could never understand what they meant to her, how much she had lived in each line, the charcoal like blood from her veins.

Flora pushed a stool to the window and reached to the shutters, unlocking them, letting the breeze fill the room. Somewhere down there, they were scattered like breadcrumbs—a path to salvation. She had only to find them. She could almost see his face, his eyes, reaching out to her, telling her to jump. *Don’t worry, I’ll catch you. Then we’ll burn down the goblin’s palace!*

She coughed against the heaviness of her heart. Felt the pieces slowly mend with the promise of hope. She just had to be strong. A single leap to free her from the kingdom and her mother’s protection. She just had to let go.

She fell. For so many years, it seemed. And there he was. The general bore her away from the castle and she was never seen again. With a month the castle had fallen; barbarians had overtaken the land. The line of her forefathers was dust.

SOOTHING THE NAUSEA

Jacqueline Jules

In the weeks before her first treatment,
I called every day with a new reminder.

Did you ask your doctor about this?
Are you sure he knows about that?

After all, I was the expert,
having nursed my sister to her grave.

Amy needed an advocate, someone
not as close as her husband or son
who were still too shell-shocked
to control a situation I knew too well.

A grim diagnosis, a reason to grieve.

I stood by the window, late into the night
screaming at a universe so cruel
to choose another kind and caring soul
as if Heaven needed her more than Earth.

And in the morning, I called Amy
with more internet advice
on how to fix
what could not be fixed.

Until the day she started chemo and she asked me
to bring a bag of what she really needed—
club soda and crackers, ginger and green apples—
recommended remedies to soothe the nausea
over a world which makes us cry.

MONA'S MOTHER

Jacqueline Jules

“My mother died when I was young,” Mona tells us at least once a month. It’s her watershed event, like Lisa’s divorce and Barbara’s breast cancer, the one that channeled her life in one direction rather than another.

Does she mention it too often? The shadow that follows her in the same world where you can no longer come home for Thanksgiving or call me on my birthday?

Or does she offer a gift instead? A clue to how she colors her choices, so we understand why she meditates, teaches yoga.

I try not to mention your absence. As if unlocking myself would imprison someone else.

And then I hear Mona tell us again about the mother who died when she was ten, and I feel the power one life has on another, no matter how many years have passed.

QUAKER CREEK, IN AUTUMN

Robert Milby

October's Pokeweed berries dyed my thoughts magenta.
Cabbage Moth ghosts wander.
The creek runs high; scraps of lost hay, floating in cold currents.
Ochre Sumac leaf, submerged.
A week before October's fete, where Matron Harvest is announced,
Damp breezes comb grey clouds for sunbeam quills,
to enshrine her in verses; of bronzed and blushing tapestries.
Onions stand pungent; stacked in rough, dark wooden crates.
Goldenrod's glory is fading. Harvest Moon—waning.
The creek is a manic descendant of Spring's flashflood!
Drying grapes lean over brambled banks;
hanging from young Swamp White Oak,
whose slow, spreading grandeur;
gnarled limbs; encrimsoned leaves,
witness stark hues and tannic aromas of Autumn's oil paints.
Moulds, mosses, and lichens, frame every portrait.
Frost-burned ferns, bow for snowflake currency; a winter portent.

SCHOHARIE GHOSTS

(AT THE APPLE BARREL CAFÉ, OCTOBER 6TH, 2018)

Robert Milby

Route 30—rural rain arriving.
Limousine became locomotive through the red flag stop sign.
Eighteen to the impromptu barrow; two claimed at the Apple Barrel.
A birthday brewery sojourn; suits and dresses are now shrouds.
October's crimson darkened golden Birches to wet shadows.
Sisters and brothers—cool grass beneath their feet; cold rain upon their heads.
Ghosts from the Mohawk River!
Ghosts from old New York farmlands!
Revenant families recall with a shiver, their own youth,
and the living's spans— brief time for blood and flesh.
Thief time buried wheels in the mud.
Marsh slime and dark water; harrowing clouds from above.
But one Crow, watched as tragedy's witness.
One Vulture served as tragedy's mistress.
A permanent detour, beneath the frost line through clouds of endless rain.

DIABETIC GHOST CAFÉ

Robert Milby

“One night I thirsted like a prince; then like a king; then like an empire; like a world on fire.”
-from *Diabetes*, by James Dickey (1970)

Darkdamp; mould kingdoms— old room perfume; sweet breath;
and I am colder in house, than buffeted by the courtyard October breezes.
Pungent urine—a potpourri of inner world. Moaning rises; endless chewing of bread,
as chairs vibrate—patrons sit at a cluttered table; metal spoon, like coins dropped against
ceramic
saucers; muted by fluid in tired cups. Plates and mugs, invisible.
Coffee: perpetually brewing; gossip, and the hint of armpit, onion-damp shirt; stale acetone;
ozone, and the cigarettes...Coffee; doughnuts; crumpling of cellophane;
the whisper of match-strike; sulfur blended with paper smoke.
Gagging commences in this torpid chamber of blindness, sadness, and lost time.
The ghost’s indigestion—held in stasis above cracked, old linoleum—
chairleg stained— black scuff marks.
Voices from the entrance hall! Voices from the darkened pantry;
cash register’s aggression.
Moaning in the bathroom sepulchre; toilet flushes—indiscriminately.
Insomnia has her transitory naps, but sugar mania; mood-swings—
are tormented by the leafless Ash, scraping a cloudy window;
fly tracks and grease of endless cooked meals.
I emerge from the swoon of beckoning ghosts in the geriatric café.
Not with an urge to run; nor a mantra in clear, Autumn air.
Not to walk, but to drive to a distant bakery—to find more coffee; and pick the scab,
of a sugar-junkie’s haunted delirium.

SUNDAY MORNING ENCOUNTER WITH TURKEYS

Paul Bowers

They look like a Baptist choir taking
the stage in a hurry

dark robes fluttering
wings wild with the messages

they carry
on sheet music

tucked inside their sleeves.
When we edge closer

they transform
into a running chorus

and teach us
in their swaying motions

lessons in ecstatic worship
on this broad, lonely field

before the final flying aria
and their rising exit

over the tree-line
scattering whole notes of praise:

leaving us, their silent congregation,
blessed, but behind.

INSPIRE ME

Yvonne Carpenter

Sing to me, Green Muse.
Tell of fierce pilgrims
striving out of gray scarcity
toward lush pastures.

Shout of nymphs with pretty braids,
strong armed youths who
felled trees and plowed the prairie.
Tell me the way they died.

Pour out myths from wide mouth jars
of swaying golden fields
and scythes smelling of sweat
from decades gone.

Write of stubborn women
and rogues in stiff hats,
their small wars
and deep affection.

Remind me of long walks and tall tales,
hoop snakes, mouth to tail, rolling down hills.
poison soup, shouting preachers, and
murderous neighbors with ravenous hogs.

Whisper to me of banjo, canoe,
and swimming hole.
Show me the floods and fires,
dreams and failures.

Sulky Muse,
bring me out of the gloom
into bright light.

STORM EFFECTS SUMMER'S END

Anca Vlasopolos

but for the storm the oriole feeder (you rushed indoors)
jelly hardening orioles a week ago gone for the year
would still sway in wind baffle tapping farewell in Morse code on the pole

but for the storm the large hanging pot (you in a hurry took down)
petunias cascading all the bright days
would still wobble its charge turned to brown stalks

but for the storm the humminggirl
parents gone brother gone too jewels shot into southern space
would not suck at nectar as if this were her last meal

but for the storm—its name my long-dead mother's—pounding
in my shattered brain these dancing wires—lit electric bursts—
would not blind me ducks in eel grasses eluding my ocular pursuit

EATING GRANITE

Beth Ann Mock

We draw the load to the lease. Black
fuel pops from the Red Bed Plains
like Chinese lanterns. Our final run
at oil makes us

rich and we hoot, beat blankets, scale
whole species of fish no longer
in existence. There were
so many of us once our breath

was currency. Now naming owns
everything. We cook up granite
mountains, cut cloth from the lake,
summon cabbage from heat,

then tine the rock into bones
until we are full. Most of us
are gone tomorrow for better
horses already bought up north.

The rest of us, we claw rock,
our hair fingering along ledges like eyes.

NEVER LEAVING NO-HEART PASS

Beth Ann Mock

As soon as we reach No-Heart Pass, our Chevy
fails us. My drunk girl yanks her shirt
up and cackles from the cab. I lie down with her,
wrestle kisses on her wrists.
She rasps that her fingers can pass,

any day, for ten lost gospels and orders
catfish to sink at her dry feet. My girl,
kicking her legs apart as if
they could be the arms of witches,

grabs at the gravel for her shirt: it's gone
in our truck guttered to a halt.
She can always leave our drinks
behind with her unwashed hair and voice,
high above the silt. This girl, moon-painted, all mine,

knows pouring salt on a small cross keeps storms off.
My girl, my girl, spits three times,
when panicked, to keep evil away.
I'll bring her back to me

using trotlines. Her red shirt will wait
as long as it takes to net her up
to me again. Waves will clinch her back
until she begins to blink. This rough
little sleeper in the water, always
my girl in channel and under hook.

COWARD

Paul Juhász

We were discussing the Sudan in class,
the Lost Boys, the genocide,
my righteous indignation at our collective apathy,
when he asked the question:

“If this is so important, if this is so wrong,
is truly Evil, as you claim,
then why aren’t you doing anything about it?”
His smugness a challenge.

I debated kicking him out of class,
but instead, I answered:
“Because I don’t know what else to do,
and until I have a better answer, I’m telling *you*,
in the hope that you’ll think of something better.”

His face left no doubt about his measure of me,
In his eyes, I was a coward.

But what does he know?
He’s just young, naive, unplugged.

But then,

when Trayvon Martin was assassinated,
I simply shook my head in disgust,
I may have said something protesty at the dinner table.

When Eric Garner was choked to death,
left on the sidewalk like last week’s trash,
I wrote an angry post on Facebook.

When Sandra Bland was arrested for driving-while-black,
her murder in a jail cell three days later whitewashed as suicide,
I made my profile picture her beautiful, smiling face.

When Trump was elected, I wrote a poem.

When this week’s school shooting occurs,
I’ll hug my sons, and pray
the lottery keeps passing us by.

I don’t do these things because I don’t know what to do.
Because I don’t have a better answer.

I know what the right thing to do is.
But I hide within the privilege of whiteness,
It's comfort, it's reflexive assumptions,
and I try to ignore the shame
of not wanting to lose that.

But with every effete gesture,
every paltry statement of indignation,
I see the face of that smug student,
and I'm forced to recognize the truth:

I am a coward.

And so, I'm telling *you*.

VISITING FORT WAGNER

Paul Juhasz

There are no parking lots.
You have to park in a residential *cul-de-sac*
and walk a half mile to the beach.

There are no gift shops.
Even Walden Pond has a gift shop.

There's not even a marker.
Actually, there is one: about shorebirds and their nests.

I was prepared for the fact that Morris Island
and the site of the fort is under water,
the Atlantic filling in for Sandburg's grass,
whitewashing the landscape of the heroic and the horrible.

But I was not prepared for the nothingness.
nothing that celebrates, indicates, fabricates,
nothing that breathes what happened here.

Nothing of Robert Gould Shaw or the 54th Massachusetts
Nothing of their brave assault on the Confederate fort.
Nothing of the proof, clear and incontrovertible,
that all men were created equal,
that black lives do indeed matter.

Shaw's parents said of the mass grave here,
where Shaw was buried "with his niggers"
to the mocking delight of Confederate victors,
that there was "no holier place" for their son to be.

But this holy place is now under forty feet of ocean water,
near a narrow, unmarked stretch of sand.
Erased from the landscape by Nature,
and from our minds by choice.

As I sit on a rock and ponder this erasure, this void,
a man approaches, several cotton T-shirts slung over his shoulder.
He asks if I'd like to buy one.

“To save the lighthouse,” he adds,
pointing to a thin strip of land jutting into the water
at the end of which stands a frail, lonely, desolate structure,
intended to guide a people who no longer come for guidance.

“You’re too late, brother.” I reply. “The lighthouse is already gone.”



MARIO LOPRETE

Mario Loprete (painting on concrete)



blue nude
a graceful curve
of her dream

BLUE NUDE
John Zheng (photograph)



LUMINESCENCE
Robert Ferrier (photograph)

INTERSECTION AND PROBABILITIES

Robert Ferrier

There's this intersection, Imhoff
and Highway 9. Six p.m. Saturday
Russian Roulette.

Westbound drivers, buzzed by
a six pack at Lake Thunderbird
squint into a blinding sun, dream
of weekend revelry.

A southbound driver, like me,
hurries to see their loved one in
a nursing home past the light.

There is no other good route.
Rationalize chances of a collision.
Less than one in a hundred. Not
a serious problem.

At bedtime, a nagging thought. In
a year I traverse the intersection—
going and returning—400 times.

TREEHOUSE

Carrie Close

Charles took another sip from his warm PBR, stealing a sideways glance at his best friend James, who was sitting at the other end of the brown leather, L-shaped couch, Stacey Newton giggling on his lap.

Stacey was supposed to bring a friend for Charles, but when she arrived, she claimed not one of them had wanted to come. Charles didn't believe this. She'd had it out for him since day one. He didn't think she much liked having to compete for James' attention. Well, the joke was on her, if she thought James would ever choose a bottle blonde, brain dead, bimbo over his best friend.

When Stacey started kissing James' neck, making wet, slurping noises, Charles decided he'd had enough. "I'm going for a walk," he said, pushing himself up from the hole he'd been wearing in James' couch.

James had the decency, at least, to mouth an, "I'm sorry," before redirecting his attention back to Stacey.

Charles shivered and took the last warm sip of his beer. It was beyond him, *who* in their right mind would name their sweet, innocent baby, *Stacey*. His mouth always felt sticky after saying it, like it left behind a residue he couldn't spit out.

He grabbed a couple more PBRs from the mini-fridge, before exiting the basement through the sliding glass doors that let out onto the backyard patio. The warm summer air hit him in a rush. The sudden change from the cool of the basement made him dizzy, and he had to lean against the glass for a moment to let his head clear.

He cracked open one of the fresh cans of beer, and let the cold liquid pour down his throat until it was more than halfway gone. He sighed and wiped his mouth.

He was about to go back inside and tell Stacey to leave, when he caught the scent of cigarette smoke in the air. Intrigued—no one in James' family smoked—he cupped his hands around his eyes and peered into the darkness.

There, at the far end of the patio, was a small figure balled up in a lawn chair, holding a cigarette to her lips.

Charles smiled. He strode over to her with noiseless steps. "Aren't you a little young to be smoking?"

His voice made her jump.

"You must be Clara's friend, Marnie. James mentioned his sister was having a sleepover."

When she saw James, she relaxed, and took a long drag from her cigarette. On the exhale, through a stream of white smoke she said, "Oh, it's just you."

Charles sat down in the chair closest to her. "Just me? You're not worried I'll tell on you?"

"No."

“Why’s that?”

She turned her wide gray-blue eyes on him. “Because then I’d have to tell James’ parents that he snuck a girl into the house.”

He wanted to say, *Clever little shit, aren’t we?* but he bit his tongue.

“It seems we’ve come to an impasse.”

Charles sighed, deciding to change tactics. “I’m sorry, Marnie. I was just teasing. I would never tell on you.”

She continued smoking, as though he weren’t there.

“Do you think I could bum a smoke?”

She shrugged, pulling a pack of American Spirits from the pocket of her pajama shorts. She removed a single cigarette with slender fingers and handed it to him, without looking at him.

Maybe it was the heat, or the beer, but he couldn’t help himself. The voice in the back of his head whispering, *she’s only thirteen*, was fading by the minute.

“Want a beer?” he asked her, offering her the extra can he had brought outside with him.

“Aren’t I a little young to be drinking?”

He pressed his lips together to keep from laughing. *What a little fucking smart ass*, he thought. “One beer won’t hurt you any.”

She shrugged, but accepted it. “How come you’re not inside hanging out with your friends?”

“How come you’re not inside hanging out with Clara?”

Sighing, she replied, “Clara’s sleeping.”

“Well, James and Stacey are . . . I thought I’d give them some privacy.”

She took an irritatingly small sip of her beer. Charles had to fight the urge to tip it up.

“Why aren’t *you* sleeping?” he asked her.

She turned her whole body to look at him. Her eyes, reflecting the moon light looked like slivers of ice. “What do you want from me?”

“Jesus, Marnie. I’m just trying to have a conversation with you. Why do you have to make it so difficult?”

“You’ve never tried to have a conversation with me before.” Her face was all eyes, and cheekbones, and pouty lips. She was wearing a Weezer band tee, with no bra—her small nipples pressed against the loose fabric, and her pale legs glowed white in the moonlight.

“Marnie, has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?”

She made a strange sound in the back of her throat. “You don’t mean that.”

Charles wanted to slap her, but instead he reached a hand up to touch her cheek, lightly caressing the soft skin with his thumb. He smiled as she grew warm and pink beneath his fingers.

“Why would I lie to you?”

She parted her lips, as if to say something, but then closed them again.

“Marnie, can I kiss you?”

Her large eyes widened a fraction more.

Charles leaned in slowly, taking his time. Marnie stayed perfectly still as he brushed his lips against hers. He kissed her softly at first, and when she didn't object, he cupped her doll like face, how fragile she felt in his hands. He coaxed her lips open with his tongue, licked the tops of her teeth. “I want you,” he said.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Charles laughed softly this time, brushing her bottom lip with his thumb. He scanned the yard, his eyes falling on the old tree house that hadn't been touched in years. Standing, he took Marnie's hand and pulled her up with him. “I'll show you.”

Marnie didn't protest as he pulled her across the shadowed lawn, into the black of night.

BORN AGAIN AS A CHERRY TREE

Madhu Kailas

I kneel down and bend forward awkwardly
to say new prayers

of finding lost things. I reconstruct old pleas,
litanies of an aged frame

in twisted pain, and porous bones
breathe lightness into gravity.

Forgive me, for ages I look outward
for meaningful things to come.

Forgive me, I cannot reach you
long after the celebrations have begun.

Forgive me, I cry over things
that are not real.

The sun is real, its golden rays and warmth are real.
Music in grains of wood is real.

Your hiatus is a universe, and my anguish is real.
My prayers come alive and you are born

again as a cherry tree. You have
infinite pink flowers printed all over your lovely body.

GRIMM TEETOTALERS

Yvonne Carpenter

i. Earned Grief

“Come hear Uncle John's Band playing to the tide, come
on along, or go alone, he's come to take his children home.”
-- Grateful Dead, Uncle John's Band

103 years, wheelchair bound, deaf plus blind
in another world, Mother passed on last week.

Light touch, fine line between living clean, too
austere -- flood of tears then fears – am I kind?

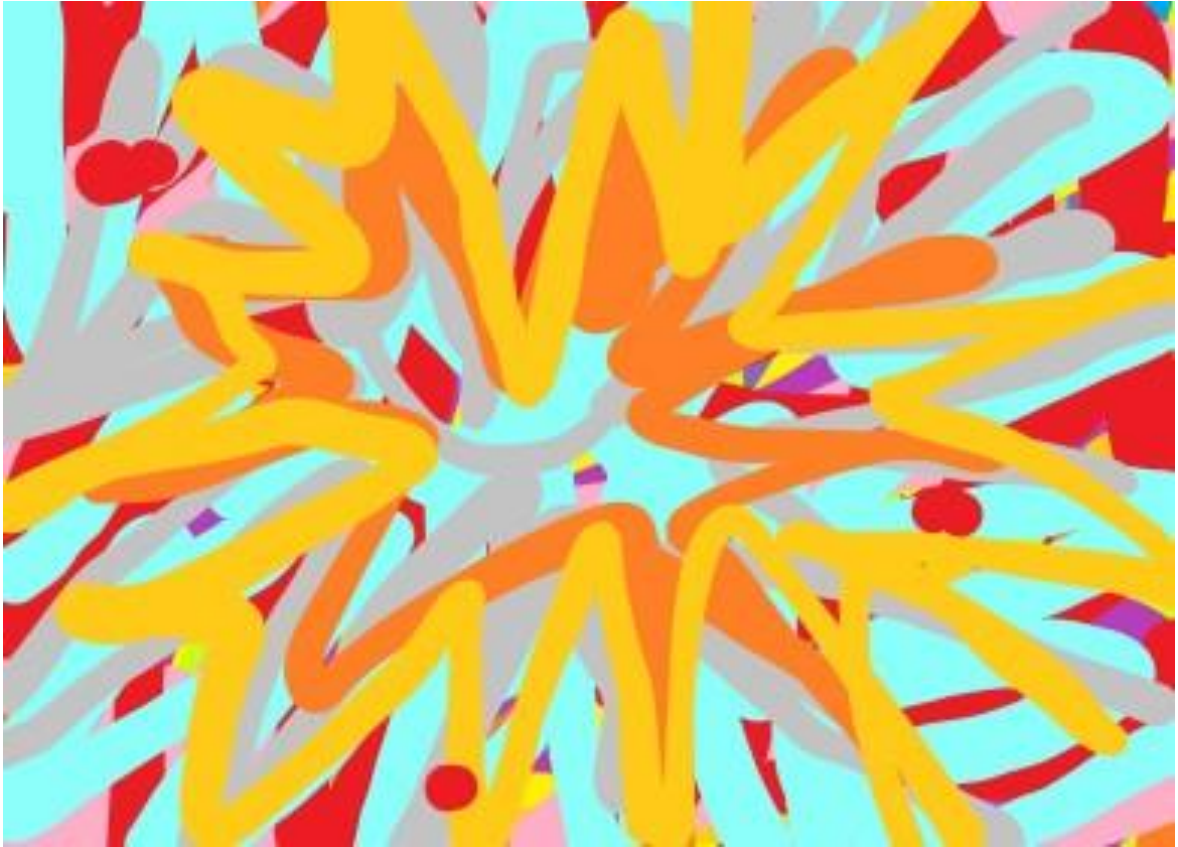
Last parent passed, good half as any to finish up
wonder if'll be happy again, can I relearn laughing?

ii. Two Weeks After The Hour Of Mother's Funeral

Slowly slipping into that quicksand
of a missing will with siblings
butting our sharpest horns
over interlocking trusts
I must keep in mind Real Prosperity
isn't having my 102 year-old mom
outlive her septuagenarian son
no less g-d forbid his kids.

iii. Way Better Than Dog Ate Homework

Sister,
apologies
-- so sorry
we missed
getting back
together after
a long & rocky
absence initiated
by me after I just
got plain tired of
your not showing
up first figuratively
then literally -- I know
this time's all moi fault
with no text or phone call
but there's one duzie excuse
which can never be used again
since my last parent was passing on
exactly when should've met at Peet's.



CONTROLLED COMBUSTION

KJ Hannah (digital art)



JULY SNOW
KJ Hannah (digital art)

WHAT THE RED DIRT TOOK

Brionna Duke

When we first moved here,
honeysuckle seeped
through open windows,
fresh cut hay greeted
our lips as we stepped
into sleepy sunshine—
stretching its long arms
across flat horizon.
It went on forever,
the green and blushed
sky joining together,
it was holy and matrimony
and if there was a god
this was it.

But then the dust came. It tore
through sealed windows, choked
tender honeysuckle, filled
our lungs.

The baby couldn't breathe.
I couldn't breathe.
I couldn't save
the baby.

We couldn't see
the sun anymore.
Pastels were swept
away, brown consumed
everything and anything
that was still good
to eat—
cupboards were bare.

You wanted me to leave
with you, we could see
the sunset again if we went
far enough west, but I was too tired.
The dust packed
my insides until I couldn't move,
I couldn't leave.

Now I watch crows scavenge
brittle bones of our home, pluck
the eyes from our scarecrow, mock

her as she sways
in dead November fields,
I rock my chair, hitting
it against the wall to break
the silence.

MUD

Brionna Duke

When I think of farms,
I think of mud.

I think of smearing
it over my sun-freckled cheeks and running
with it, battle-bound,
between bare toes.

I think of mud bombs, their sting
as bits of dirt slap
skin, of digging
mud holes, aged dirt cementing
my nails.

I think of praying
for heavy-bellied clouds then blaspheming
heavy rains that pack
the earth hard as wax—
so thick it smothers
the fig tree.

I think of mud
stains that crawl
up worn walls of my home, how it steals
food from my mouth.

When I think of mud,
I think of how there will be
nothing left to do but smear
it over my weathered face, like icing
a cracked cake, go battling
into my mud grave, and let
the tired dirt decompose
my nails.

RED BRICK HOUSE ON THE LAKE ROAD

Brionna Duke

Wood creaks
as grandma shifts
in her chair, lifts
her coffee cup.

My eyes trace
galloping painted horses
half hidden behind
her fingers while she stares
through the kitchen window
at gold tipped clouds
in a mauve sky,
amber sun sinking
behind the old gold hill,
while cattle scattered like crows search
for something green
in September.

She sighs,
coffee steam spirals
under her breath.
“At least I know I did one thing right
in my life. When we built this house,
I wanted this window here.”

SPRING SPRING

Mike Lewis-Beck

I saw a man with a lunch pail
and my morning got light.
I saw a stand of daffodils
on a green, next to a yellow bus.

Now I sip a double espresso,
inhale its ashen burn,
observe a cinnamon-coiffed lady.
She is watching me

as I think of another redhead
same time of year, this month
when we hunted the yellow morel
in a wood outside town.

We took those mushroom bishop caps
and sliced them, rinsed for bugs
before a sauté of butter and garlic.

I can still taste the garlic on her fingertips.

WHAT CLAUDE KNEW

Walter Borgen

Congested water lilies in the cultivated ponds
of gardens, under foot bridges that lead
through trimmed trees, hedges to herbariums,

down to canals lined with flared, wind-spangled
poplars. Always a broad flat leaf or two balanced
on stems high above the water, as if remembering

an earlier rising, but just now the pond looks like a madly
set table, a feast of rotting greens and yellows. Far from
such civilized gestures lilies hover on northern

lakes. Here the calm face of water is nudged
by pike and walleye, dimpled by sorties of dragonflies,
by a twisting nymph and circling beetle,

and the metamorphosis of clouds suspended
in the capillary tension as they slowly rear into
cumulus. Along the jagged shoreline spruce bristle

into their leaning reflections. In late light, half-submerged
boulders, ringed by bands of dried yellow pollen,
record spring's fall. From behind the verdant

fragrance, a thrush sings clear as water that fills the lake
a second, a third time. Reaching over the canoe's
gunnel, an arm's shadow turns soggy. Fingers

stretch to grasp an amber resonance, as if reaching
through a museum window closed for years. The hand
doesn't come back but drifts off in the lake's slippage.

Distant lily pads are the upturned palms of the others
who grabbed and held a lake's reflections too long, the wrinkled
stalks of their arms holding up an unexpected season.

HEAD STONE

Walter Borgen

Museum scholars contested the bust's authenticity,
a forger's rendition of an ancient past:
thick locks of marble hair flow down
a youthful forehead, curls almost touch
his eyebrows, more like tongues of Vesuvian
lava than hair, more sixties rebellion
or disheveled nineteenth century Romantic flare,
the beard more muttonchops teased
into a satyr's goatee, nothing that conceals
his thin cold lips that cannot speak, and sits restored,
mounted on a pedestal. This perfect
Roman youth would argue against
the genuine Mountains of the Moon dolomite
and cry for flesh—flesh even two millennia later.

How can we know except not one of us ready
to surrender to anything less than caress,
even walking the cemetery rows, following
the carefully selected and highly polished,
the fluted and vined, the angelic and cherubic,
the deeply incised names, the carved
portraits, the photographs, the small video
screens and audio messages tripped by
vigilant electric eyes, all embedded
in marble. The deceased cease the passerby
amid all the daily accounting and ask
is this the real one, death so unoriginal
even when it's authentic.

Two museum busts of young Pompey face each other.

One Thasian surface is not metamorphosed,
not encrusted, not microscopically rounded
by weather. This time it's the bust
with the busted nose and chipped chin,
the less than perfect one that leaves us disbelieving,
but how the unblemished marble does perfect the cold flesh.



FACES

Sarah Yun (photograph)

LEARNING TO LEAN

Cullen Whisenbunt

In Oklahoma, you learn
to lean into the blow
-ing wind like the last lover
you'll ever know

and you're taught
to sleep with a fan on
not because you're hot,
but because you can't
trust the weather enough to sleep
with open windows, yet

when the wind leaves
no bedside to crawl into,
your skin learns to crawl

in the absence

THIS IS NOT TO SAY

after William Carlos Williams

Cullen Whisenbunt

the slide back
into school
has been
a rough one

the semester is near
blooming and
will probably be
delicious but

the days do not
grow longer
in anticipation

they drag each moment
out as if the deadly
sloth of summer is saying

Forgive me
Father
for I have sinned

SUNDROPS,

Cullen Whisenhunt

You grow across the yard
in a crooked line, like first graders
in a schoolhouse, waiting
to be read to, yellow
as the ribbon women wear
in their hair, waiting
for husbands to come home.

I ask my father why,
and he explains his mother
planted you, and that is enough
for him, but sentiment is not an idea
we understand when we are young.

When you opened, I played
hide-and-seek around the house.
When you closed, I played
tag among the tombstones.

Now, your sisters grow on the roadside, soft
as her voice drifting down the pew, pink
as the ribbon she wore in her wig, waiting
to be taken home, bright as ever
against the coming night.

OF A DWINDLING

Richard Dixon

Multiple decades now, the gentle
joyful satisfaction of speaking, writing
and listening to everyday language that
seeks precision and insight, that tries
to elucidate, educate and entertain
is being reduced and replaced by
laziness, social media and *textspeak*

A severe drought of language, sorely missed
lack of communication a fast-spreading plague—
at the dinner table all with their phones out
fixed, thousand-yard stares in place
living in their own universe

*How are you? How was your day? What
are your weekend plans?—* no one
sorely searching for the sparkled gem
in the lost art of sharp, witty conversation —
a blow to those who don't mind, even look
forward to a finely-worded sentence or
a jeweled line from a dynamic poem,
splendidly sonorous and sprinkled
with atmospheric alliteration

Instead, the desecration of good language skills
spelling the unwanted stepchild now
victimized further by close-captioned mauling—
is the dictionary, then, a post-modern dinosaur;
are we doomed to a steady linguistic destruction
has-beens waylaid and broken down
on the road to literary salvation?

JONI MITCHELL

Danielle DeFoe

She holds her frayed pink blanket and runs satin edges through small fingers because she is forbidden to suck her thumb and mother has made it bitter, and the music plays against the sound of the engine and the shifting of gears, and the warmth and the light and the breeze weave their way through the open sunroof, and in the rearview mirror mother's sunglasses are dragonflies—turquoise and purple sequins on translucent wings.

ALL HALLOW'S EVE

Danielle DeFoe

The winds bluster through the streets bending sycamore limbs and rustling walnut leaves and willow branches. Chickens find their roosts. Mothers and fathers set tables for supper. The day grows calm and quiet as the evening approaches and syrupy fall light dims. Windows are illuminated with warm light and doors open with their offerings. Small hands place grinning pumpkins on doorsteps—tiny candles will soon turn the tame things wicked. The scurry of leaves call the children to the street and clumsy feet hurry over thresholds in droves down to the sidewalks, rushing to ring doorbells and to demand and to reach greedy hands into buckets and bowls—such large appetites for creatures so small. They parade in their costumes, laughing and running from home to home, pulling each other with clasped hands to claim their next sweet reward, leaving little brothers and sisters in their dust to be comforted by parents who linger behind. Tonight, eight o'clock means no bedtime because tonight princesses and super heroes and ghouls and ghosts and all fantastic creatures are called to come to play. Tonight is the one night of the year when children will become anything they can imagine. Tomorrow it will be back to school, back to plain clothes and uniforms, back to homework, back to Jane or Thomas or Ashley or Ben; but tonight, yes tonight, is the one night of all nights in the year when all children and all mysterious things may dash about the streets greedy and eager and free as they want to be.

A BRIEF LETTER TO VAN GOGH'S BROTHER

Kevin LeMaster

my ideas spill
like sunflower

silken yellows and
browns spread

across an off-white canvas
alive with texture
and purpose
something you
can sell for last month's rent

wet leaves stick
to whatever doesn't dry
there is no purpose

in the back light
of remorse in the
lying down with you
dear brother

in dark corners
on dirty sheets

where foot-sodden earth
wedges between us
can you feel my heart beat
faster as I paint
my world

selling survival one brush stroke
at a time press my unhinged ear
to the wind so I
can finally hear

praise & accolade
but let me finish this race first
so I don't have to see
you following so closely
behind



NOSTALGIA 2
LiJune Choi (drawing)



THE BIZZARE ADVENTURES OF THE SOUL

LiJune Choi (drawing)

SMOKE SIGNAL

Kevin LeMaster

cloudy bathwater
 swirls
rehydrated bits
 of dead skin
down the drain

that day you left
 in bright red sounds
hemorrhaging your reply
 reverberating against
the stone walls of Hell
 everything passes
between us

our sweat
 once melted the dry
summer air
 our fingers
intertwined
 pinned down
by passions shoulders

doors slam shut behind
 our tired rib cage
separating us like
 yellow finches
the bathtub holds
 what we can no longer
talk about

our seamless hearts
 never touch, yet
slight of hand
 keeps producing
you & I together
 but no trick could
make you turn around
 no silence was ever made
that our deaf ears
 couldn't hear

AN UMBRELLA OF HANDS

Kevin LeMaster

the forest floor is awash with dancing light
 an umbrella of bony fingers grab day

like the arms of a large family extending for the last chicken leg
 canopied over a evening piece of sky

light shimmers like catching a glimpse of a buddhist monk's beautiful
 bald head bowed in the shadow of his sun-dried prayer

& I am on my back counting the passing splash
 of connected clouds, each forms its own image

all the imaginary animals strut in parade as if boarding an ark
 before a storm of leaves shatter the earthen floor

when the wind awakens its annoying calm
 it blows fierce like a young child's tantrum

intertwining tendrils wave like a lackluster nosy neighbor
 stretching their toned necks to see what they can see

living to wonder what goes on at the top of the world
 aspiring gods in training, knowing everything about nothing

and nothing about everything

OUTGOING TIDE

Paul Bluestein

Water, tethered to the moon
like a dog on a leash
feeling its pull,
runs out of Perry's Mill pond,
exposing the mud bottom littered
with empty bottles,
sharp rocks
and broken toys.

When *our* calm and sparkling surface
is pulled away by life's centrifugal whirl,
uncovering murky depths strewn
with discarded dreams,
moldering hopes
and lost opportunities,
all we can do
is wait for a kinder moon
to bring back soothing water
to cover and wash our wounds.

THE RITE OF RUNES

Belwoeth Harbright

There is a strange sense of intimacy to the ritual. Both of us are naked, strapped into the high-armed chairs we are bound to. Leather strips of hide are wrapped nine times around each arm and leg; these terminate in an intricate knot of leather that meets in the middle of one's chest. Gaolof's is over his navel; mine secured beneath my bosom, and it digs unpleasantly.

I had never cared for Gaolof much. We had known each other for perhaps all of my years, since we were both younglings. Yet only now was I able to appreciate some of his finer features. I can see the drops of sweat cascade down his naked torso, streaking through the dirt and grime from countless unwashed days on the hunt. The hot night air of a summer that has yet peaked is more refreshing than not. I feel uncomfortable with my own nakedness, on display for all to see. But this is our way.

We are naked to show both of us are the same beneath our trappings: animals. That is the point, the elders say, and the High Priestess insists, but for practical purposes we must prove we have no outside assistance. No glowing wyrdstones that alter the tone of our voice; no carved segments of flesh that offer assistance scribed in blood. Only two minds pointed at each other—two voices flexed and focused in effort.

We are in the clearing our tribe uses for most ritual meetings—a wooden vale of oaks older than our written notes. The High Priestess sits in a throne carved from the oldest oak of all. She is a crone now; withered from years gone by, face lined with wrinkles. She reclines as if perhaps she is part mountain lion. She has always struck me as powerful in her own way—terribly dangerous if disturbed.

Some attendants have lit bonfires at the edge of my vision. Sweetened cedar chips are burnt; the smell of honeyed meats roasting on a spit fills my nose. I look straight across from where I am sitting. Gaolof's eyes and my own meet. He is my enemy; yet of all these people, it is he and I who share the same fate this evening.

Our tribe is not like the older ones, the ones whose gods are made of bear's teeth, the winter's hunger, and darkness. Our Gods are kinder—The Blind God of the Tree, Witan, He-Who-Hung and Lord of the Mountains. I am his priestess-in-training; it will eventually be my job to receive his messages and pass down his rituals, as our High Priestess before me has done.

One of the most important rituals we have is known as the Rite of Runes.

#

And so it was said that Men were given tongues so that they could speak; they were given voices so that they could sing. And Witan, He-Who-Hung, heard their ululations even unto the highest peaks of the most desolate crags. And he was pleased—far more pleased than when his people spilled the blood of their livestock, for it reeked of death and the coldness of the mountains when the frosts came.

And Witan plucked out his eyes so that he could hear forevermore; and with his ears he heard the singing of the stars, and the moaning of the moons, and the wailing of the winds. He heard the sighing of the seas and the whisper of the wheat... and so too he heard the harmony of humans, and was pleased.

But Witan also heard screaming. He heard the crying and the gnashing of teeth and despair. He heard blood spill on the ground, listened as the earth drank deeply of its fill and replenished itself with darkness. He listened to the bones that rattled beneath the earth in the darkest of caves as the dead who lay in the deepest reaches lay unfulfilled, tormented by their regrets.

And so Witan wailed down the mountain peaks:

“Hark!” he cried. “No more bloodshed!”

And Witan listened to the night sky, and heard the call of the constellations, and these he passed to his people. And those who listened heard.

#

Heavy drums tear through the summer night. They are elk and deerskin, harvested and stretched tight over rounded, carved wood. The sound reverberates through my insides, singing to my skin and sending blood from my face through my body to my toes.

The beating and the pounding of drums. The High Priestess waves a hand. She gestures at me. I nod at Gaolof, and raise my voice. A high note pierces the sudden silence of the circle. It sounds foreign in the night air to my own ears, but long have I trained in the ways of our words. I sing to the runes, and they respond—lifting themselves from the lowered seats to each side of me and forming themselves into constellations that glimmer like fireflies in the forest around us.

A white gate; the entryway to our hovel. Silhouettes of our family. My father. The reeds reach up to escort him to the underworld. My mother, ailing, who turns to dust. Myself and Heimdaln, huddling alone against the world. The rocks twist and tilt, shaking and clearing as they hover. A black-and-blue panther prowls at the cave entrance, hungry and impatient to come inside. The beast rearranges itself into the very face of the man who sits across from me—a caricature in floating stones, with a beard that barely manages to amplify what’s already there. He is made of shadows; his form twists and he becomes a fiend on two legs, some monster that steals in and steals away Heimdaln. I show myself, the river pouring from my eyes, my robe and gown shorn in despair. The me-that-is-song-and-rocks falls to its knees, and darkness overtakes the circle as the rocks clatter back to my side.

There is silence. In the torchlight, outside our circle, I can see Heimdaln, tow-headed and downcast. Allis Lughain shines on his tears.

Gaolof opens his mouth, and his voice is heavy and raw. His is the voice of a warrior—thick and complex, almost hoarse. He sings the song of the runes, and makes his own a hailstorm of red and white fire that hover before him as a shield. Before my eyes the history of our people is played out—I see the night sky, the mountains, and the people who worshipped and sowed the earth with their lifeblood. I see the highest crag of them all—

Jhotan—and a lonely tree jutting into the heavens. I see Witan, majestic and holy, glowing with celestial fire, hanging from his right foot in the bows. He plucks his eyes out, and throws them into the night sky.

They become the moons. My brother's silhouette is shown as Allis Lhugain, the lesser moon, a glowing sphere in the night sky greater in position than even the sun itself. Gaolof is beneath, worshipping it, singing his own songs to it. The moon grows wide; it expands, swallowing all other colors and images, and again we are at a white gate.

I see a panther walking back and forth. Within the hovel, Heimdaln and myself are huddled. But now, the panther is facing out. It's keeping the darkness away.

The stones fall, skittering, and all is silent. Tears sting my eyes.

This is my people's way. Only when we hear can we see; and I see now Gaolof's place.

I do not sing back. I suspect he knows he has already won.

#

"Thank you," Heimdaln says, afterwards. I have yet to approach either of them; after being unstrapped, I clothed myself again and walked to the edges of our celebration space, beneath a tall tree that muttered quietly in the wind. I needed time to collect my thoughts. Others of our tribe dance in the distance around a bonfire that glows brightly.

"I wish you both well," I say, after a moment passes. "You mustn't stay away, you know."

"I won't have to," Heimdaln says. He turns and looks in the distance, at his betrothed. Gaolof is smiling, standing near a table, laughing and care-free. "He'll protect us both now."

For the first time, I see Gaolof and smile.

#

The rest of the night is revelry. We drink from meadhorns the ale we have saved in reserve. It's bitter and tastes of grains and the sea. Wild boar is skewered and roasted, served in hanks with cheese and fresh bread from the day before and the day before that. Milk pudding—condensed, thickened, warm and filling, is served at last in ladles.

We do not fight in this tribe. We sing. We feast. We make merry. We listen to the words of Witan, as he listened so long ago. We love. We embrace. We enfold into our arms those whom we squabble with.

I pity those who do not. How awful their lives must be.

ELIZABETH

D.A. Simants

When the one you love is dying, your love grows while they shrink. Their fingers, once so plump, so colorful, so normal, wither away like the stem of a rose, shrinking, wrinkling, greying, until they feel like knives wrapped in a thin cloth threatening to push through. When you hold their hand, you dare not squeeze too tightly, lest their bones pop through their flesh and stab into yours, leaking lively red blood which they no longer possess. Has their blood grown old? Is it dry and grey too?

They were always complimented on their hair. It was a fiery red. A falling curve surrounded her forehead like a halo, bouncing lines danced across her shoulders. And now - now her hair is like straw. You're afraid to touch it, as if it'll break under your fingertips. You have nightmares. Her hair will snap in two, stabbing into her cheeks. Her mouth will dissolve, depositing her broken jaw on her chest. Her eyes will sink, her skin will melt, her barely beating heart will become visible through her ribcage. She'll die, she'll die, she'll die, and you'll remain here as if nothing had happened, as if you had never loved this woman who was taken from you, as if the world hadn't given you your greatest hope just to snatch it away again.

But still you love her. You still dream about growing old together, older than this. About traveling the world, having children, buying a home. She's far too young, it's far too soon for her to look this way. Beauty is a fickle thing.

And deep down you feel selfish. There are children diagnosed with her same cancer, children who will never grow up, go to school, feel their first loves like you felt yours. She isn't losing a body, she's losing everything, an entire world full of dreams is crashing down, the sky is quite literally falling, and all you can do is sit here and watch as she shrinks and shrinks and shrinks. You should be mourning a world, not staring at a body, and yet you can't help yourself, can you? She isn't dead yet, the world is still there. The body isn't, not really. Maybe she'll shrink until she's nothing at all.

And then there's you. You're healthy. After she dies, you'll live on. How long will you live? A dozen years? Two dozen? Three decades? Four? Will you live long enough for your memory to fail you, will you forget that she ever existed? Will you remarry? You couldn't imagine it now, of course, but years of isolation can change a person, not to mention her blessing. She doesn't want you to be alone, she said. She wants you to find someone new, but who could come after her as anything more than a pale reflection?

You watch her thin neck as she struggles to breathe. And you're more lost than she.

THEIR SPLIT SECOND

Raymond Luczak

Except for Saturdays and Sundays, every morning's always the same. His hungry cry wakes Joanie up around the same time, like clockwork; she dresses herself while changing the baby and dressing him for the chilly weather outside. The baby wails, hungry for his milk. The mother lifts the velcro flap of her blouse, sits down in her rocking chair, and nurses the baby. Gently, yet greedily, he suckles the milk as she rocks with sighs and looks out on Loring Park's two ponds. Each suckle is a seamless second.

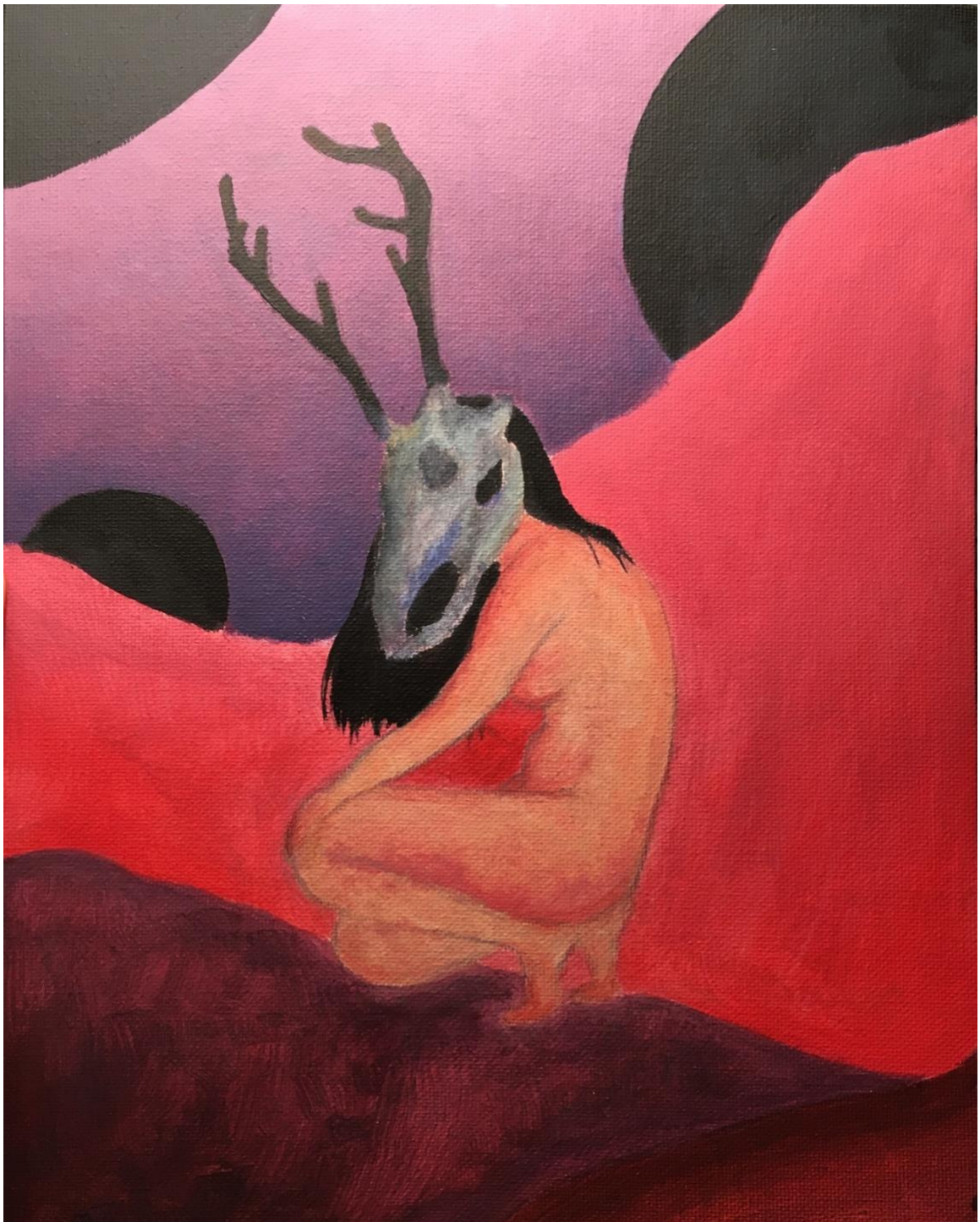
It is 6:30 AM, and the sun is starting to seep through her opaque kitchen curtains. Now in her early 30s, she thinks about the baby's father; how she once loved him from afar, and then up close. It had started as a silly thing—really an affair with a married man, which suited her just fine. She was in the process of divorcing anyway, and she hadn't slept with anyone since her husband left. A fling. A few nights of uncorked laughter and coy glances, with bawdy one-liners tossed back and forth like a warm potato between them that week the advertising agency where she worked—only a brisk fifteen-minute walk away to Butler Square, formerly a huge warehouse converted into an elegant building with a desirable address—landed its second million-dollar deal. Then that split second of his casual touch when it dared not to leave the hand, the arm, the neck. Then the desperate clutching of flesh. Clothes crumpled almost as if the floor had swollen into the bottom of their wastebasket. Their bed was a piece of sliced bread gone stale; when they were done, they wiped the crumbs from their bodies and pretended not to know each other, splitting the second he crossed the threshold back to his nether world of wife, kids, and job, about which thankfully never cared to elaborate. But he was so handsome, so kind, so unlike her ex-husband. She remembered his utter impotence when he was faced with the evidence of his physical cruelty against her, cross-examined in the ugly fluorescent lights of that courtroom, and the incontrovertible fact of her young pregnancy. He actually seemed relieved when the judge ordered him to pay a higher alimony rate than expected, and he didn't—couldn't—look at her when he approached her lawyer's table to affix his signature to the papers; then she, hers.

The wall of ice between the newly divorced never thawed. The check from him simply arrived around the 17th every month. She is still surprised that he never asks after the baby, but then again, he knew it couldn't be his. When the hospital clerk asked upon the birth for the name of the father, Joanie hesitated, then said, "Can you put down 'Unknown'? Fathers are lousy in this world anyway." The hospital clerk gave her a quizzical glance and said, "All right." A few minutes later, she had the freshly-minted birth certificate and the baby all bundled in swaths of white and pale yellow next to her in her car. Not once did she allow herself to feel alone.

Even though her parents had initially pestered her about the identity of her baby's father, they chose instead to shower mother and child with gifts, for which she still feels

grateful. She and her sister, already a mother of two and the wife of an energetic attorney angling for a partnership after only three years at his firm on Marquette Avenue, have become so close that she keeps forgetting they hated each other growing up. But babies: There's still so much to learn, to know. In the electricity of their telephone conversations, they breath babies. Suggestions. Anecdotes. Rumors. Comparisons. Worries. Encouragement. Sighs of relief. Night after night. Her sister has even offered to take care of her baby boy once a week so she can use some of that babysitter money for bills still unpaid since her stay in the hospital eight months ago.

Rocking in her grandmother's creaky chair and nursing her boy's insatiable greed for milk, she ponders the odd fact that she's actually looking forward to the Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow. For the first time in years she feels welcomed—no, *needed*: now that she has a baby of her own, her parents, who lived a 90-minute drive south of the city, have all but demanded to take care of him for the entire weekend. It was almost heartbreaking to see how much her parents *needed* to be needed after their retirement, so she just couldn't say no. And for free, too. No matter that she was a divorcée daughter who violated her father's Catholicism greatly, or that she was now a single mother. Maybe she would find a man better than her husband, but she doubts it. Of course, she still feels the pangs of want, of hopelessness, when every morning she has to steel herself for that split second when the baby's father comes around in her office and asks how the baby is doing; he still thinks her ex-husband fathered her baby. She says fine and asks how his kids are doing, and he repeats variations of the same answer, sealing their split second once again.



I LIVE AS BONES
Sarah Richter (painting)



JAPANESE MILITARY COMFORT WOMEN VICTIMS

Choon Yoon Lee (drawing)



POWER
Choon Yoon Lee (painting)

REVIEW: IN A FIELD OF COTTON: MISSISSIPPI RIVER DELTA POEMS

Ken Hada

In a Field of Cotton: Mississippi River Delta Poems. Larry D. Thomas. Photographs by Jeffrey C. Alfier. Redondo Beach, CA: Blue Horse Press, 2019. ISBN:9780578466200.

“Writing a poem” Mary Oliver suggests, “is a kind of possible love affair between something like the heart and the learned skills of the conscious mind” (*A Poetry Handbook*). In Larry D. Thomas’s latest collection, both parts of Oliver’s formula are involved. Thomas loves his subject – life in the Mississippi River Delta, rich with cotton fields tended by hard-luck characters, whose labor is alleviated by music and their own vibrant resilience. Thomas adds to his respectful admiring voice, his veteran skills as a craftsman – tightly controlled lines, well-chosen, poignant terms, suggestive, abbreviated, at once imagistic and whole, yet totally credible.

We know Thomas because of his west Texas *oeuvre* (with a few exceptions: *The Woodlanders*, *The Lighthouse Keeper* and *Lobsterman’s Dream: Poems of the Coast of Maine*). Like those predecessors, his style is consistently managed, both informative and evocative without exploitation of writing style or material. In this latest collection, however, Thomas remembers his deep familial roots located in cotton country. Like his Texas works, the poet never intrudes while elevating commoners and the landscape in which they abide. This book, then, is a tribute to family heritage balanced between their labor and the ironic beauty of their existence.

Like works set in the Chihuahuan Desert, Thomas excels as an image maker. His lines are purposed, existing as brushstrokes of various color, contributing to the overall impression confronting the reader. His considered craftsmanship is noticeable, again and again, in the careful way he refuses to overstate the obvious, nor exploit a possible implication, all this while evoking tremendous feeling, awakening passion from the slumber of the commonplace. Thomas is something of a broker who brings together reader and subject matter, enlivens each to a newfound value.

The book of twenty poems, divided neatly into three sections followed by an epilogue poem, is augmented by the photography of Jeffrey Alfier. His twelve color photos (including the cover photo) of abandoned buildings midst the colors of southern vegetation, form its own narrative – an echo to the leading narrative of the poetry. Each narrative displays its own understated glory, and the combination of photography and poetry combines to make *In a Field of Cotton* a most satisfying discovery.

THE MILKBONE DEPOSITION

Jen McConnell

The room where they held the deposition was warm and dense, like the last cup of coffee in the pot. They brought in a box fan when my soon-to-be-ex-wife complained about the heat but it wasn't helping. And the clicking of the blades was just making me drowsy. I shifted in the hardback chair, willing myself to stop sweating.

I'd just finished my shift, so I was still wearing my warm weather postal uniform: blue shorts, white polo, blue shoes, white socks. The last neighborhood on my route was close to the lawyer's office so I drove there without changing. Maureen wouldn't move the meeting time, hoping that I'd be late, another ding against me.

"Why don't we get started," Russ, my lawyer, said. He had worked for my dad a few times over the years. *I'm a business lawyer*, he said when I called him up. *Better a business lawyer I know, than a divorce lawyer I don't*, I told him.

As Russ and Maureen's lawyer said legal things to each other, I scratched at the stitches on my thigh. They were just scabbing over. From experience I knew this was when they itched the most.

I already knew what the lawyers were saying: Maureen wanted more than half of the savings we'd built up. She wouldn't tell me why she thought she deserved more than half. Maureen wouldn't talk to me at all anymore, except through her lawyer.

Heartbroken as I was, half seemed reasonable to me. I would have given it all to her if she just told me why. We didn't have any kids, not much debt. She could have the house; it belonged to her parents anyway. I had already moved into an apartment complex with a pool. I wasn't a swimmer but seeing it every day out my bedroom window made me feel like things weren't all bad.

#

"I remember seeing a lot more bags of dog food in the pantry," I began. "But I didn't see J.K. Growling eating any more than normal. We hadn't talked about getting another dog. And we didn't shop at Costco. Not that I knew of. So why so much--"

"Can you get to the point?" her lawyer interrupted. "It was a simple question. Why don't you agree to the terms?"

I ignored him. "I found a receipt on the table next to her purse--"

Maureen cut me off. "It was in my purse. Not the table. He was going through my purse."

"Before she ripped it out of my hand, I saw Milkbone dog treats on the receipt. Two boxes. But I never saw any boxes and never saw J.K. eating a Milkbone. He's more of a raw antler kind of dog."

“I told you.” Maureen kept her voice low, the one she used with her kindergarten class. “I was going to surprise you with another dog.”

“When?”

I scratched at my thigh again and caught the hem of my uniform shorts with my watch. The seam ripped and some bit of debris--like sand or breadcrumbs--fell to the floor. I smushed them with my shoe and pushed them under the table.

“I was looking for the right kind of dog,” she said. “He was getting bit so much I didn’t want him to hate dogs. I thought having two dogs would help. This is ridiculous. Just agree to the terms.”

“Hold your client,” my lawyer said. He turned to me. “Go on.”

“The way it works is like this.” I stood up and walked over to look out the window. This was the tallest building in town. We were only on the fifth floor but it was enough to see across the small downtown and out past the freeway. I was only up this far about once a year when Maureen and I rode the Ferris Wheel at the county fair.

“At first,” I said, “each bite is judged individually. They look at the cost, the medical bill, what the insurance paid. Then, how much time off did I have to take, how long was I on desk duty. That kind of thing.”

I was surprised to see how much the town had spread out. From the street, I had watched them build every building but now, up high enough to see it all at once, was a bit overwhelming, like I’d been asleep the whole time it was happening.

“The first bite wasn’t much of a surprise,” I continued. I wasn’t sure what I was saying but I couldn’t give Maureen a chance to interrupt. “And it didn’t hurt too much. Stupid little Jack Russell named Sir Yaps-a-Lot. The payout--settlement--was eight thousand dollars. I wanted to put it into savings. We’d need a new car at some point but Maureen wanted to replace all the appliances. It would make the house more valuable, she said, down the road. A few months later, another bite, right on the calf, by a pound mix named Jabba the Mutt. That was fifteen thousand. I was on crutches for about six weeks to get back from that one. She wanted a closed-in back porch so we could drink coffee even in the rain.”

I turned from the window. Maureen’s face was red; her lawyer had a tight grip on her forearm.

“Can we have a break?” her lawyer asked.

“We’re just getting started,” my lawyer said.

I sat back down at the table and sipped from the paper cup. The water was warm. “Anyway, this last one was by a cairn terrier--you know, like Toto. He was named Bilbo Fleabaggins.” I clenched my fist, determined to stop scratching. “That one paid another fifteen thousand. We went to Hawaii for a week. First class flights. New luggage. All-inclusive resort. I kept wanting to put some into savings but it’s hard to argue with Maureen.”

“Yeah, right,” she snorted. “You never saved a penny in your life before you met me.”

It was true, but before we got married, I didn't have anything to save for.

"They told me that was it, though." I cleared my throat. "I got a letter saying that the payout for all future bites was just a thousand bucks each. A few days after that, Maureen said she wanted a divorce. I don't know why, we'd just had a great time together in Hawaii."

"Did she give you a reason?" my lawyer asked.

"She said in California you didn't need a reason."

"That's true," her lawyer said.

"We just weren't right together," Maureen said. "I told you. It had nothing to do with the money."

I continued talking, not hearing her anymore. "Three big payouts was generous, they told me, anything after that was either bad luck or you were gaming the system. But how could you game a system of dog bites? That's ridiculous. But then again, no one else in our county had ever been bitten more than twice. I looked it up."

"Can he just stick to the facts?" her lawyer interrupted.

I bent down and ripped open the seam of my shorts completely. I let the crumbs fall into my hand. It definitely wasn't sand. I picked out a larger piece, about the size of a pencil eraser, and put it on my tongue. It tasted like what I imagined a dog treat would taste like: dry with a hint of chicken.

Maureen watched me with disgust. "Ok, he's crazy," she said. "I think we can agree on that."

"I can't believe it." I wiped off my hands and sat back in the chair. "I joked once that she washed my uniform in steak sauce to attract the dogs, but she was actually sewing treat crumbs into my shorts."

"That is the biggest bunch of baloney I've ever heard," she said. "Even for you."

"After we moved into the house, she bought a sewing machine. Said she was going to make new curtains. I heard the machine going a few times but never saw anything new."

"Like you would notice new curtains." She had tears in her eyes. Real tears, I could tell.

"But we had fun in Hawaii," I said. "Remember the cocktails served in coconut shells?"

She looked at me straight on. A shadow lifted off her face and for a moment I saw her remembering the hula dancing at the pig roast. Then she stood up. "That's gone," she said. She picked up her purse and walked out of the room.

The lawyers looked at each other, then at me. Maybe it was the heat but I didn't have any fight left. "Give her whatever she wants," I said.

I walked over to the fan and turned it off. From the window, I could see Maureen walking in the parking lot. I watched her car turn onto Route 4 and be swallowed by the

rush. I'd probably never talk to her again. I didn't wish her pain, but I hoped she was just a little heartbroken, too.

I'd been delivering mail in the town for twenty years. I knew more than just who got a medical bill or a Land's End catalog. I knew how the Douglas twins were doing in college and when Mrs. Stone's mother died. And I kept quiet about their secrets, too, like when Marty on Wagner Road fooled the city into planting two trees on his property instead of one.

But there had to be a middle distance. Somewhere between watching life from the distance of a Ferris Wheel and being inside other people's lives. Gun to my head, I couldn't tell you if any of the windows in our house had new curtains or not, or if they ever had.

LESSON

Toti O'Brien

Once, for a change, he is joyful. Almost happy. Standing at the door of his bedroom (the sanctuary where he always retires after lunch) he holds a book—his finger inside, marking the page. Father reads an average of two titles a week. It's a habit that he made in his youth, trying to catch up with ignorance and build his homespun culture. Father is an intellectual at heart, sprung forth from complete illiteracy.

Early afternoon. As usual, he is bound to his siesta with a reading he likes, to ease sleep. But—unheard of—he wants to read a quote. To me? I happen to be the audience he needs. He talks slowly, padding each word with a slight suspension. With a golden halo... maybe because the phrase is in English, a language Dad doesn't speak. Neither do I. Still: "*Everything of beauty is a joy forever,*" he spells. And by miracle, by a sort of transubstanciation, I understand.

My eyes are riveted upon his shy, strange, precious smile—the thing I will remember, the greatest prodigy of all.

EDUCATION

Toti O'Brien

Grandma taught me how to be a proper lady. She tried.

Her instructions came nicely, and I didn't look at them closely. She loved me. I loved her. I couldn't imagine displeasing her. I obeyed her and it wasn't hard.

She taught me how to become a lady (she tried) though I was half of one. Dad's side wasn't genteel. She ignored it. Still, she said I resembled Dad like a drop of water. Strange expression—there aren't two drops of water alike.

Grandma instructed me through examples of her past, in which I saw my future. I grew up with detailed knowledge of the roaring twenties and erroneous expectations. Retro, romantic tastes... wicker furniture, beaded lampshades, silk pillows. Hiding a handkerchief in my sleeve rather than using Kleenex.

When I would grow up I'd folk dance, Grandma said—great fun, appropriate and innocent. I looked forward to it more than I thought of schools or careers. I looked forward to knitting and marmalades. Also poetry, in spare inspired moments. On a balcony, watching the clouds.

I expected a life made of cameos, full of domestic chores plus chaste entertainment. And I'd glide through it unscathed, perhaps with a zest of melancholy, as suited to the early twentieth century... a time squeezed, crushed between two wars.

None of it would happen, of course. My apprenticeship was entirely wasted, but who cared? Grandma loved me. She did.

PRECIOUS

Toti O'Brien

The blue-eyed man returned my ring with a smile. He had found it in the hall where I had left it—I don't know under what kind of spell. When I thought it could be there, I called. Yes, it was in the office, he said. I immediately went to rescue it, though it was worth two dollars, with no feeling attached.

I had bought just before Christmas, spotting it while I wandered in Thrift Stores for last moment gifts. In the fall, home had been burglarized twice—the second time very recently. The cops said the thieves would return. They said staying was too dangerous. Therefore I slept at a friend's house—a bunch of clothes in a suitcase, some more in my car, not sure yet about what to do next.

But I needed to see my folks for the holidays. They were old, weak and they couldn't wait, in spite of my present predicament. So I forced myself to choose presents. I suppose I couldn't admit there was nothing to celebrate.

Jewelry was gone in the first assault by the thieves. I hadn't bought any since, not even fancied I would... until I saw the ring. Large and flat—a disk, a pale moon—lightly, casually embraced by a silver clasp. Turquoise, almost green. Iridescent—its color constantly shifting. I didn't think of it for myself, but I knew it was well worth two bucks! Then it stuck with me. I rarely took it off, besides the afternoon when I lost it.

The man gave it to me with a smile over the office counter. I felt relieved.

Suddenly, another ring came to mind. My husband had bought it when our baby was born— three tiny glass flowers for the three of us. Three different colors, fitting anything I wore. And so delicate. That was also glued to my finger, so to speak, for ten years.

After divorce, one of the buds fell off. But I found it in my bed or my purse, I cannot recall. I put it back. I fixed it. Then I lost another one. For a while, two flowers remained. Then one. Then I knew it was over and I tossed it. Still, I certainly fought for that ring... it embodied my brief family life, my quite brittle happiness—nonetheless intense. I sure fought as much as I could.

Now this flat thing seems prone to remain. There's something solid about it. Strange, that it came around when all the rest disappeared. First I thought it was too handsome for me. But no, it doesn't agree.

When I stare at the ever-changing reflections on its abalone surface, it stares back. It's a mirror. I don't ask if I'm the most beautiful of the kingdom, because I know the answer. I think I can hear it, whispered by the small stony soul—you never were, darling, but I love you anyway.

OLDER SISTER SAYS

Elsa Mattson

Older sister is always talking. And everytime she speaks, I don't listen. For her skin smells of long-aged lemongrass, and her hair is covered with the grease that only time and a few heartbreaks too many can create.

But I do pay attention when she orders some Jollibee's chicken for me, with the Pinoy spaghetti on the side, which I eye with carnal delight. This place is heaven on earth for me, because it is the only place where I can be myself. Here, fried chicken and halo-halo transport me back to an age of innocence, to a time when I did not have to think about children the color of milk and old-lady teachers with drawls, or worry about if my parents have enough money to buy me winter clothes.

Why are we here? I think, it cannot be enough for us to rent an apartment and be promised green grass, but live where the dirt is dull and the has turned brown for loss of hope. I would rather sit inside, listening to the radio, than go outside where the other children are, for they are not like me.

Sometimes, I listen to Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song." But it is not about me, because I come from a land of brown faces and sand and coconuts and volcanoes. I am not familiar with ice or snow. Just with halo-halo and fried chicken.

Food is my only way out.

Older sister says...what does she say? For once, I listen.

She says it is time to go home.

DURIAN FOR SALE

BY MOOSE TYLER

"You healthy," said the squat madam at the four-story brothel in Singapore. She affectionately patted my stomach, and the twinkle in her eyes flared like fireworks discharged at dragon boat races. "You make good money. Hmmm, yes."

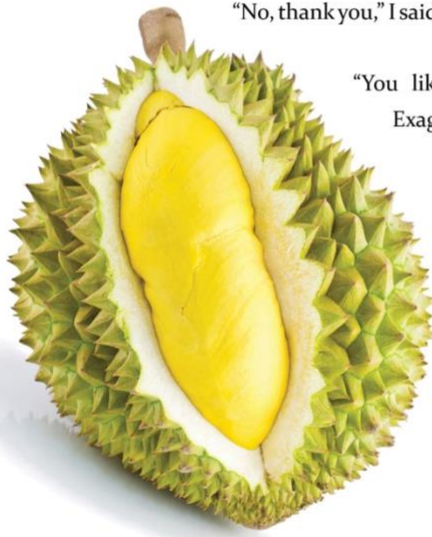
The prostitutes moved around me at a Ferris wheel pace, faces painted, bodies tainted, each one sizing up the new girl as they passed the sink. I stopped my scrub and rapidly rinsed. The madam offered a drying towel that looked 1-ply and, on my semi-sanitized hands, felt like sandpaper.

"No, thank you," I said, handing back the rag, "I'm just taking in your culture."

"You like it more. Think it over. Come back tomorrow."

Exaggerating the hook of her sales pitch, the madam said,

"I promise you make *good* money."



The other girls at the four-story brothel didn't have the same choice. They were durian in the cart, split-open and rancid, mauled by maggots feasting on the flesh under a scorching Singapore sun.



Durian For Sale
Moose Tyler (digital fiction)

CONTRIBUTERS

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Paul Bluestein is a physician (done practicing), a blues musician (still practicing) and a dedicated Scrabble player (yes, ZAX is a word). He lives in Connecticut with his wife and the two dogs who rescued him. When the Poetry Muse calls, he answers, even if it's during dinner.

Paul Bowers lives on a small farm in northwestern Oklahoma. He teaches writing and literature at Northern Oklahoma College in Enid, and is the author of a short story collection, *Like Men, Made Various* (Lost Horse Press, 2006), and two poetry collections: *The Lone, Cautious, Animal Life* (purple flag press, 2016) and *Occasional Hymns* (Turning Plow Press, 2018). More information about the author is available on his website: paulbowers.org.

Yvonne Carpenter writes from her western Oklahoma wheat farm. She has three books, including *Red Dirt Roads* which won the Oklahoma Book of the Year, 2016. A book with Mongrel Press is planned for fall 2019 Her work has appeared recently in *Concho River Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Dragon Poet*, *Dos Gatos*, and *Red Earth Review*.

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Richard Dixon is a retired high-school Special Education teacher and tennis coach. He has had his poetry and non-fiction published in Dragon Poet Review, Crosstimbers, Westview, Red River Review, Walt's Corner of the Long Islander, HARD CRACKERS, 3 Woody Guthrie anthologies in 2011, 2013 and 2017 as well as Clash By Night, an anthology of poems related to the breakthrough 1979 album by the Clash, London Calling.

He has been a featured reader at Full Circle Bookstore, the Depot in Norman, OK, the Benedict St. Marketplace in Shawnee, OK, Scissortail Creative Writing Festival in Ada, OK and the Chikaskia Literary Festival in Tonkawa, OK.

Brionna Duke is a native Oklahoman and aspiring writer. She received her B.A. in creative writing from the University of Central Oklahoma and studied poetry in the Red Earth MFA program of Oklahoma City University. In addition to poetry, she writes a variety of true crime, horror, fairytales, and short plays, and also has a short memoir published in The Muse. She enjoys traveling, spending time with her family and friends, including her cats, and is a passionate advocate for love and kindness, and the better treatment of humans, animals, and the environment.

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He has a novel at Kindle ebooks. He won the Norman Tree Photo contest twice. His poems have appeared in Dragon Poet Review, abstractmagazinetv.com, Oklahoma Today, Dragon Poet Review, Blood & Thunder, Red River Review, Crosstimbers, Westview, Mid-America Poetry Review, The Exhibitionist and Walt's Corner of the Long Islander. His photographs have appeared in several literary journals, including two covers. In 2007 the Norman Galaxy of Writers nominated him for Poet Laureate of Oklahoma. In 2018 abstractmagazine.tv nominated him for a Pushcart Prize in poetry.

KJ Hannah Greenberg captures the world in words and images. Her latest photography portfolio is 20/20: KJ Hannah Greenberg Eye on Israel. Her most recent poetry collection is Mothers Ought to Utter Only Niceties (Unbound CONTENT, 2017). Her most recent fiction collection is the omnibus, Concatenation (Bards & Sages Publishing, 2018).

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Ken Hada has published seven volumes of poetry, including his latest: Not Quite Pilgrims (VACPoe, 2019). Ken's work has received several accolades, including: Western

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Bel Harbright is an author who lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His focus is on weird genre fiction, though occasionally he dabbles in poetry. On occasion he can be seen staring into the distance on dark nights, curly hair occluding his features and prompting more than one cryptid sighting. He has had work published in *Beyond Imagination*, *SubVerCity Transit*, and has received two honorable mentions from the Writers of the Future contest. His upcoming YA paranormal novel, *Full-tilt Exorcist*, will be out as soon as he can finish rewrites, which means maybe never.

Paul Juhasz has worked at an Amazon fulfillment center, manned a junk truck, and driven for Uber, all to gather material for his poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. He has read at dozens of conferences and festivals across the country, including *Scissortail* and the *Woody Guthrie Festival*. His work has appeared in *bioStories*, *Red River Review*, *Voices de la Luna*, and *Ain't Gonna Be Treated This Way*. His comic journal, *Fulfillment: Diary of an Amazonian Picker*, chronicling his seven-month sentence at Amazon, has been published in abridged form in *The Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas* and is currently being serialized in *Voices de la Luna*. He lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania, (yes, like the Billy Joel song, although Joel is really singing about Bethlehem—don't get Paul started) just minutes from the Appalachian Trail, and is currently enrolled in the Red Earth MFA program.

Jacqueline Jules is the author of three chapbooks, *Field Trip to the Museum* (Finishing Line Press), *Stronger Than Cleopatra* (ELJ Publications), and *Itzhak Perlman's Broken String*, winner of the 2016 Helen Kay Chapbook Prize from Evening Street Press. Her poetry has appeared in over 100 publications including *Dragon Poet Review*, *The Broome Review*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Hospital Drive*, and *Imitation Fruit*. She is also the author of 40 books for young readers. Visit www.jacquelinejules.com.

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Mario Loprete is an Italian artist. Since earning his degree at the Academy of Fine Arts in Catanzaro, Italy, Loprete's work has become extensive and internationally renowned. His art has been featured in hundreds of galleries, the latest being the Landing Gallery in Los Angeles, California.

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Jen McConnell has had her fiction and poetry published recently in *The Bookends Review*, *Buck Off Magazine*, *Luna Luna*, *Mused*, and *Blue Lotus Review*. Her debut collection of short stories, "Welcome, Anybody," was published by Press 53. Her website is jenmcconnell.com.

Elsa Mattson is an undergraduate student studying in the United States. As a Singaporean-born mixed race American with a strong penchant for all things Southeast Asia, she published her short story "The Soil Has No Sons" in Issue 32 of international literary magazine *Anak Sastra*. She has also written numerous film reviews and creative articles for *Teen Ink*, under the username "ElsyM."

Robert Milby, of Florida, NY, has been reading his poems, in public since March, 1995, and hosts four Hudson Valley poetry readings. He has published several books of poetry, and two cds. Since October, 2003, Milby and Performance Artist, Carl Welden perform as *Theremin Ghosts!* Ghost poems with Theremin accompaniment. He is a listed poet with Poets & Writers, Inc. NYC. Milby is the Poet Laureate of Orange County, NY 2017-2019.

Beth Ann Mock received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Oklahoma State University in 2013 and teaches at Rose State College.

Toti O'Brien is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. She was born in Rome then moved to Los Angeles, where she makes a living as a self-employed artist, performing musician and professional dancer. Her work has most recently appeared in *Lotuseaters*, *Altadena Poetry Review*, *Arkana*, and *Ragazine*.

Sarah Richter is working toward her baccalaureate in English with a minor in history, and she currently works as a publishing strategist.

Her passions beyond writing include reading, hiking, learning languages, music, and painting. Sarah is a 200 hour certified yoga teacher through Aura Wellness Center, and she is a student member of the National Book Critics Circle.

Gerard Sarnat is a physician who's built and staffed homeless and prison clinics as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. He won the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is published in academic-related journals including Stanford, Oberlin, Brown, Harvard and Columbia. Gerry's writing has also appeared widely in such U.S. outlets as San Francisco Magazine, The Los Angeles Review and The New York Times, as well as many international publications including those out of China, Bangladesh, the UK, New Zealand, and Fiji. "Mount Analogue" was selected KADDISH FOR THE COUNTRY for pamphlet distribution nationwide on Inauguration Day 2017. Amber Of Memory was chosen for the 50th Harvard reunion Dylan symposium. He's also authored the collections Homeless Chronicles (2010), Disputes (2012), 17s (2014), and Melting the Ice King (2016). Gerry's been married since 1969 with three kids, five grandsons and looking forward to future granddaughters. gerardsarnat.com.

Fabio Sassi makes photos and acrylics using what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream. He really enjoys taking the everyday and ordinary and framing it in a different way. Fabio lives in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com

D.A. Simants was born and raised in Aurora, Colorado. He is a writer and a poet, and his ultimate goal is to use his writing to help decrease the stigma surrounding psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.

Moose Tyler is a poet, a fiction and script writer, and the current Mayor of Mooseville. She penned her first series of short stories, "Ketchup Korner", in Mrs. Braly's 5th grade English class. Her others short stories, "Lock Your Shit Up When Papa Comes to Town" and "Woody Shackles and the Broken Jacaranda Tree" garnered attention around a water cooler. After a stint as an award-winning copywriter, Moose returned to creative writing and finished her first novel, *The Monarch's Story: Becoming a Warrior*. She holds a Master of Science in Public Relations and Corporate Communication from New York University and is currently pursuing a degree in Creative Writing in the Red Earth MFA program at Oklahoma City University.

Anca Vlasopolos just published her fourth collection of poetry, *Often Fanged Light* (2019); also published the award-winning novel *The New Bedford Samurai*; the award-winning memoir *No Return Address: A Memoir of Displacement*; three collections of poems, *Cartographies of Scale (and Wing)* (2015); *Walking Toward Solstice* (2012); and *Penguins in a Warming World* (2007); three poetry chapbooks, a detective novel, *Missing Members*, and nearly three hundred poems and short stories in literary journals.

Cullen Whisenhunt is a graduate student with Oklahoma City University's Red Earth Creative Writing MFA program and an instructor of Developmental English at Murray State College in Tishomingo, OK. His poetry has appeared in a variety of journals, including *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Red Earth Review*, and *Dragon Poet Review*, and he has upcoming publications in *Ninth Letter* and *Frogpond*. He has also presented his work at the Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium at Seminole State College (Seminole, OK) and the Scissortail Creative Writing Festival at East Central University (Ada, OK).

Sarah Yun was born in January of 2003. She is currently attending an international high school in South Korea. Her hobbies are sewing, collecting small glass sculptures, and studying design. Her future aspiration is to become an industrial or product designer.

Jianqing Zheng's photographs have recently been published in *Arkansas Review*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *Volney Road Review*, and *NHK Haiku Masters* (Japan). He is author of *Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Texas Review Press, 2019) and editor of *Valley Voices: A Literary Review*.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Rayshell E. Clapper is a prose writer and Assistant Professor of English at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California, where she teaches Creative Writing, Literature, and Composition classes. She serves as the chair of Creative Writing Committee and coordinator of the biannual DVC Literature Week. She has presented her original fiction and nonfiction at several conferences and events and published her works in several journals and magazines. The written word is her passion, and all she experiences inspires that passion. *Dragon Poet Review* continues to be a way to promote creativity and inspire all writers. She lives her life through three passions: family (including her beloved pets), writing, and teaching. As a Metal Monkey and Virgo, she balances her worlds of creativity and independence with organization and humanity. She lives in California with her passions and words but ever does the world call to her for travel and experience and life.

Jessica B. Isaacs received the 2015 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry for her first full-length book of poems, *Deep August* (Village Books Press, 2014). She has presented her writing at several regional and national conferences, and her poems may be found in journals and anthologies including *Oklahoma Today*, *Poetry Bay*, *One-Sentence Poems*, *My Life with a Funeral Director*, *Short Order Poems* (September 2014 Issue), *Cybersoleil Literary Journal*, *All Roads Lead Home Poetry Blog*, *Sugar Mule's Women Writing Nature*, *The Muse*, and *Elegant Rage*. She is a member of the coordinating committee for the Woody Guthrie Poets and is an English Professor at Seminole State College in Oklahoma where she serves as the director of their annual Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium. According to her zodiac signs, she is both a Taurus and a Fire Dragon, which makes for interesting dinner conversations. She feathers her nest and keeps her home fires burning in Oklahoma with her husband, kids, dogs, and cats.

Jayne Shimko started her journey as a college reporter during one of the most significant moments in U.S. history, September 11, 2001 which launched her initial career in politics and government, including a brief stint working in one of the offices in the Department of Homeland Security in Washington, D.C. Since then, she has escaped the clutches of bureaucracy and paved a new life as a multimedia maven producing podcasts, creating websites, and managing digital media for a variety of organizations across the country. When she is not busy with her day job, she works on her own publishing and printing business as well as create new fiction and journalistic essays. She is a resident of Chicago, devoted to her wife, loyal to the Chicago Cubs, and passionate about photography, especially landscapes and cityscapes.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:

Dragon Poet Review

is currently accepting submissions until December 31, 2019, for our 2020 Issue, deadline June 1, 2020.

Please submit on our Submittable site:

<https://dragonpoetreview.submittable.com/submit>.

Complete Submission Guidelines are posted on our website at www.dragonpoetreview.com.