

# MUSED



BellaOnline Literary Review

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Plays Poetry Fiction Non-Fiction Art Interviews

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# Your Emails

## MUSED

Publisher: Lisa Shea  
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*Hush Baby Rose* - Beautiful Jeff. Sweet moments of actual poetry while we still can hold them, although I remember at the time wishing they would just go to sleep and let me write a poem. ~Morgan

*Saffron* - What a beautifully written little slice of life. I loved it! ~Susan

*Portrait in Violet* - This is a poem that you can truly feel. Love it! ~Lisa

*Drop Out* - A moving story. A piece of history! ~manijeh

*Haiku* - Those few words awakened the senses. Just a wee respite.  
~Sharon

*Memories I Kept* – Incredibly powerful poem which grows on each new reading. ~Jane

*CAR* - So evocative I enjoyed reading it aloud to my husband who liked it as much as me! Thanks! ~Andrea

*Gathering Pre-Limo* – One pleased mom ~Marilyn

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# Welcome



The English language can be playfully tricky in its interpretation of words. Take the simple four-letter-word FALL. It's the time of year we're entering. Autumn. Harvest season. But the fall is also an important part of a block-and-tackle setup on a ship. The falls are the critical ropes which give power to the unit. They are what cause the heavy item like the sails to lift up.

And that is what fall is to me. Not the tumbling down of a fawn on unsteady legs. Not the changing leaves plummeting groundward, for I think of autumn as when the foliage is still on the trees, glorious in crimson, tangerine, and copper. No, fall is when we lift up our gaze to soak in the beauty of nature. It is when we lift up our hearts in gracious thanks for all we have been blessed with. We lift up our souls to renew our quest for sharing compassion, love, and acceptance throughout the world.

Our images share this adoration of the precious unique Earth we all share. We have sunflowers glowing in green and gold. A misty castle glimpsed in another dimension. An enigmatic doorway into who knows where.

Poetry delves into emotions and twines into our thoughts. Rains shimmy leaves and batter islands. A man amongst millions boldly carves his own path. A woman tussles with her ill body which keeps its secrets well hidden.

Fiction catches at the mind and gives it tugs in new directions. A woman is scattered here and there by the winds of fate. A young child struggles to understand life's new, dark twists. A daughter is brought low by the loss of her mother.

Non-fiction is where we connect with our fellow travelers on this too-short path called life. College friends hold each other through illness and change. A stranger becomes everything to a woman in distress. A girl learns the lesson that first impressions are often wrong.

Through it all, we open our eyes just a little wider. We breathe in the sense that every other person is facing their own dilemmas. They have their own challenges. We each deserve patience and understanding. For none of us chose where we were born. Most of us do not choose when we die. In between, we struggle to make our way through a world stuffed with hurdles and hidden dangers. Sometimes it is that one smile from a stranger which gives us the strength to take that next step.

Be that smile.

**On the Cover: Sachuest Wildlife Refuge  
Photography by Carol Dandrade**



# Poetry

## Trash Talkers

**Michael Mogel**

Trash talkers, street walkers  
standing in the aisle  
sitting on the wall  
loitering outside  
drinking past last call.  
Dreams in black and white  
urban gentry - urban flight.  
Here dogs don't bury bones.  
Root less and ruthless

poets hiding under stones  
expressing fear and doubt,  
blue minds dream hazily  
what it's all about.  
The void again  
and what I see  
trash talkers, street walkers  
and me.

**Reaching Out**

**Digital Photography  
by  
Christine Catalano**



## A Morning Prayer after Machado

**Beth Spencer**

The soft applause of popple  
celebrates the sun's return after  
too many days of rain.  
From my high porch, this quiet day, I see  
a broken birch forking into sky, the wait  
of birdfeeder, and an empty path below.  
Bass leaves shimmy and voices of the squirrels shake  
their castanets above me along the highways of the trees.  
Hickory nuts in bright green jackets fall near Purgatory Creek  
which twists from here through lakes and streams  
to Minneapolis who points her fingers skyward.  
There the Mississippi, sluggish, moves down south  
to spread her dirty toes into the delta, carrying  
our farmland to the sea. I hear one crow calling,  
insistent, beckoning a murder.  
Across the sea is Puerto Rico, stepchild of America.  
What confusion of the hour? What more news to break  
her battered bones? Again. Three hurricanes.  
Is the reina mora singing still  
from those tattered trees? Do the fronds of palms still flutter  
in this more tempered wind? Dear God,  
I don't believe in you, but can you listen  
to the some who do?

## A Thousand Tiny Hearts

**Lee Triplett**

hang from her branches. Red  
jewels blazing in the sun.  
Crescents of crimson wave in the wind  
climbing all around her.

O that I had a heart so  
brilliant, so free on the bough,  
riding gracefully atmospheric  
oscillations. A heart

rejoicing in the passing  
of the day, as imminent  
sunset pulls in the lasting  
vibrancy of everywhere.

## Chattanooga Jubilee

**Nick Bush**

A mid-summer's dream of memories  
that are mine and only mine: some dusty  
field in Northern Georgia flushed with manicured green.  
Diamonds. An hour northwest, Chattanooga asphalt  
buzzes with the scuttle of '80s era automobiles.  
The clanging screen door guarding the porch  
where my mother's namesake stretched her neck  
skyward, describing her great aunt,  
a slave on Atlanta plantations.  
Somewhere in Buckhead, a boy with blonde bangs  
and a life seemingly luckier than mine,  
has thrown away his Fulton-County Stadium tickets,  
and sits alone amidst air conditioning and Nintendo games,  
his crowded closet overflowed  
with new gloves, signed jerseys, and unfurled posters.  
Meanwhile I'm planted, Indian-style,  
in Chattanooga heat, watching with my grandparents  
Tom Glavine's cool delivery on a grainy tv.

## Drought

**Lee Evans**

delightful alone  
undiscontented  
nothing needs doing  
dry autumnal dust hangs  
in the air above vernal ponds  
water trembling with insects' footsteps  
gleaming with passing skies  
dry mud-stained leaves leave  
no trace of slithering salamander  
mosquitos that whisper  
in the ears have disappeared  
bog frogs' throats lie parched  
silent like instruments  
neglected by musicians  
who search the skies in vain for rain  
holding out their hands to feel  
fresh drops fall from clouds  
that only pass away  
woods dried up  
cut off at the root  
dry insight

## A Fatal Romance

Joan Hunt

Hanging on a piece of rope  
Was a bar of scented soap  
Swinging blissfully in space  
In readiness to wash your face  
Her shape was perfect like a flower  
With perfume of erotic power  
One day a rather hunky sponge  
Decided he would take the plunge  
He asked the soap out for a date  
But sadly that just sealed her fate  
Against each other they would rub  
As they canoodled in the tub  
Slowly the soap began fading away  
Thinner and thinner she grew every day  
Till finally she became so small  
There was barely anything left at all  
As a tear squeezed from his eye  
The sponge kissed her a sad goodbye  
For just one day he contemplated  
About the bars of soap he'd dated  
Because he knew that come tomorrow  
He'd recover from his sorrow  
And hanging on a piece of rope  
Would be another bar of soap.

## Windflowers

Bernadine Lortis

They sway on stems so slender—  
touching their sisters, shy as kindergartners  
bending to tie each other's shoes—  
you want to warn the wind  
for which they're named.  
Cherished for their timing, blooming  
not in spring when competition would be fierce  
but when most perennials have gone to sleep  
—autumn anemones—  
Aphrodite's tears in Greek Myth  
float silvery pink, delicate above dying ferns,  
flutter away with the last of Monarchs  
waving farewell to Adonis  
zealous for his promised return  
as dormancy draws its final draft  
and winter waits to take its post.

## Ankylosing Spondylitis and Me

Catherine Coundjeris

*This poem was written back in 1997  
when I was newly diagnosed with this disease  
and struggling with the reality of it.*

I want to leave my footprints in the sand,  
But summer is so far away.  
I want to splash in the surf,  
But my heart is made of stone.

Harden not your heart  
He told me,  
And I listened once  
Upon a time in pink tights and a black leotard,  
Dancing with a spine that was normal.

Now you can see my future  
As you have told others before me.  
It's routine and no need to fear  
Semi amputation.

Deteriorating, fusing, and deforming.  
These are words I read today.  
Be careful I am made of glass.  
You can see right through me.  
X-rays line up to show me my illness.

I am made of glass,  
Fracturing into pieces: Little words of despair,  
Petrified wood scattered on the beaches.  
The terror of an iron mask, and  
A neck frozen, a bamboo spine.

I am supporting a glass psyche  
To pour through and heat  
Me into a molten lump of color.  
Created out of obsidian and silicon

Blue and green and white for shaping  
Into glass cathedrals stain-glass windows  
Into the immovable center of the soul.



## Tree-temple

**Sunil Sharma**

On the gnarled bosom  
of the banyan tree  
a home to birds  
and spirits of the undead

few cotton threads  
crisscross in an irregular pattern

a framed picture  
of a goddess consecrates  
the tree as a vertical temple

few flowers  
and incense sticks  
at its roots,

a saree-encased figure  
eyes closed, hands folded  
mumbles mantras to the tree  
that gives shade to her family  
of the vegetable vendor

after the long prayer, she  
resumes the evening trade  
for the commuters back from Mumbai

haggles with them, cheerfully,  
commerce and faith collapse into each  
other seamlessly---in a daily act,  
along a common street.



**Brazil**

**Watercolor by Jane Warren**  
**“Watercolor painting made in**  
**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.”**

## Authority

**Neil Dana Gluckin**

Crows are the law around here,  
judge and jury  
dressed in judicial black.  
Their alarms move in waves  
through the branches,  
condemning the red fox  
that steals along the edge of the woods.

Today three crows chased a hawk,  
which took refuge near the top of a tall pine,  
keeping its options open.  
Scared?  
Hawks know no fear,  
but when it comes to the constabulary,  
they show some respect.



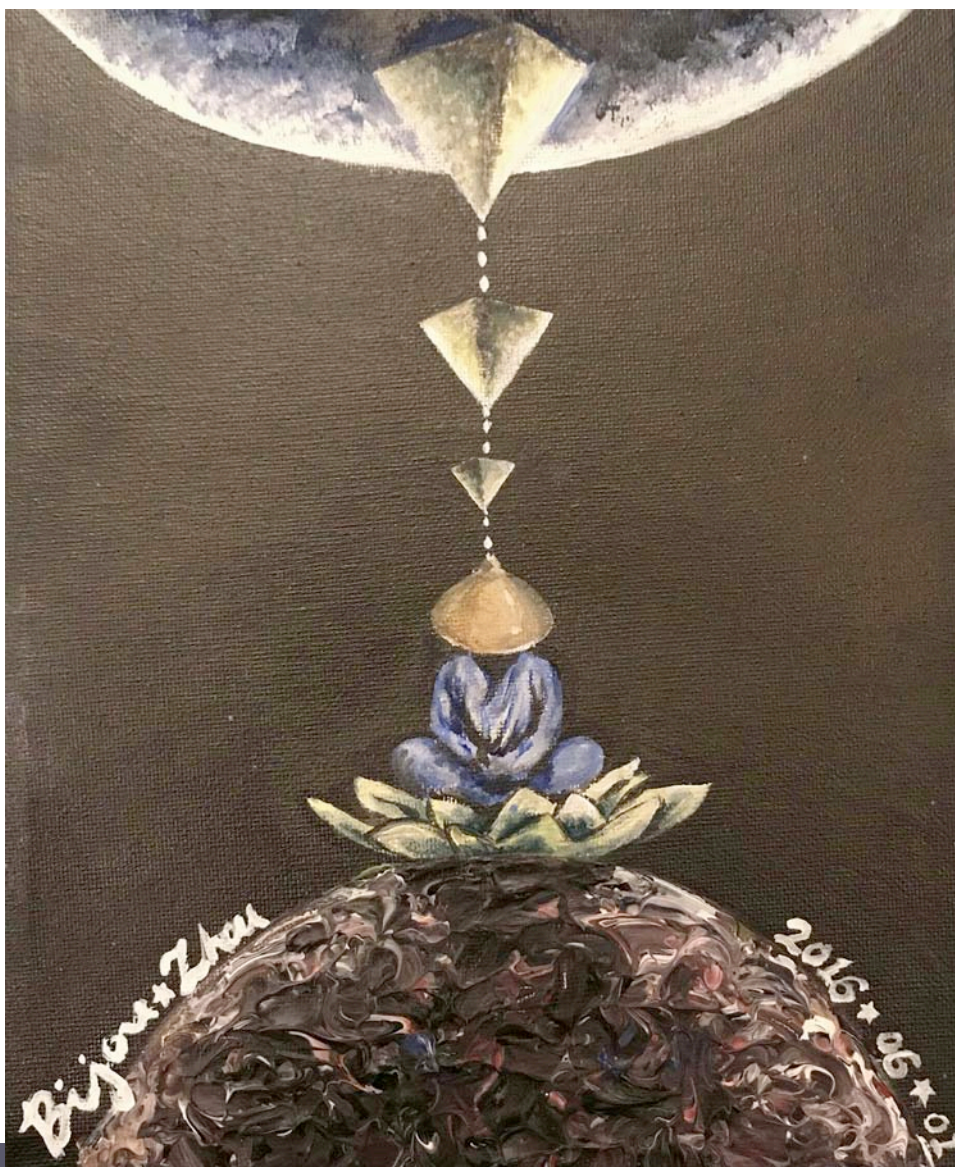
# Heritage Planning

**Dawid Juraszek**

what difference does it make what  
you do or don't do being free should  
not be predicated on anything and  
yet it is scent of wet leaves facial  
expression weather forecast call  
from the office song overheard on  
the way push or pull you this way  
or that and when sometimes you

remember all those words left behind  
by the long gone the moments they  
preserved  
trickle  
down  
to  
you  
and you know it doesn't make any

## Mindfulness Oil on Canvas by Bijou Zhou



## Icy Words

**Victoria Crawford**

Her brush moves across the paper  
icy words frozen in black winter chill  
Outside, tight forsythia buds await  
the spring melt of warm change  
and gentle, liquid flow

## Slivers of Love

**Lindy Kennedy**

it is easy  
to appreciate glass  
before it breaks  
real love cuts deep

## In Arlington

**Craig W. Steele**

In Arlington, beneath sod, green,  
'neath ordered stones of pallid sheen,  
brave soldiers rest from gallant deeds  
like fallen leaves that no one heeds.  
Their sacrifice, what might it mean?

Those left behind marooned between  
abiding pride, grief unforeseen  
for loved ones lost: each mourner bleeds  
in Arlington.

It's time we living intervene:  
embrace what's right, resist routine  
destructive greed, all hate-filled creeds  
till strife recedes and peace succeeds;  
thus grant them ease to sleep serene  
in Arlington.

## Mabon

**Jerrold Narland**

Sparkling frosts  
and chevrons of geese  
arrive in pungent leaf-smoke visions.  
Memories of many past years arise, press.  
Perhaps they never happened  
or have always happened.  
Early chill reluctantly  
succumbs to rising warmth  
from a lowered sun.  
A familiar voice in the morning breeze  
sings around the naked willow,  
chatters with maples  
who respond turning tips  
the red and gold of her hair.  
She murmurs  
of warm hands,  
little clouds of sweet breath,  
and wears a different face  
for each of us.

## Nesting for Grief

**Sally Sandler**

With leaves and moss, and small bits of earth,  
with lichen, feathers, grass and fragile things,  
the bird lines its nest, and then it sings.  
Nesting usually happens before birth.

When loved ones travel death's corridor,  
I, too, am bent on structuring things, like  
the hardware drawer--the screws and nails and strings--  
frantic in my need to create order

before the birth of grieving in my heart.  
While grouping nuts and bolts and bits of twine,  
I try to purge my household (read: my mind)  
of clutter. I need space when grieving starts.

Somewhere in my soul this brings relief--  
staying busy while I nest for grief.

## Dark Sunglasses on Sunless Days

**Terry Dawley**

At a young age, I learned  
the reasons  
Mama wore dark sunglasses on sunless days

when violent storms battered our skies  
and the sun cowered from thunderous slaps  
and the bruised heavens wept

and there were no safe houses to shelter us  
from the fury

that uprooted the fragile normality  
struggling to survive in the volatile climate

and I learned to ignore the sideways glances  
of people passing by  
who offered no umbrella

to take refuge beneath  
whenever  
Mama wore dark sunglasses on sunless days.

## Dancing on a Bayou Breeze

**Stacie Eirich**

Blue waters rippling off the lake,  
clouds hang low,  
stitched across the azure sky,  
the bridge stretching  
across her gentle waves.

In the distance,  
a steady stream of cars  
crossing her depths  
to the city of lights, color, jazz,  
dragonflies flit by, swarming in  
figure eight patterns, quick-winged.  
Leaves rustle in the wind,  
willows sway in hot August air.

Indigo summer dancing on a bayou breeze,  
tiny droplets of cool rain tickling my eyelids,  
inhaling the smell of freshly mown grass,  
listening to tiny chirps of birdsong in the trees,  
the creaking of a swing behind me.  
Voices and laughter, sprinkled on air,  
dappled like the sunlight  
on my skin.

## Begin Again to Rig the Mast

**Sally Sandler**

In my memory it was more  
than mother's ash we delivered  
to the harbor by the bay,  
on a warm August eve.  
It was father who that time  
needed help to be born,

to let go silent cries of grief  
into the forgiving wind,  
to breathe deep the scent of pine  
into his remaining lung,  
and feel the supple summer breeze  
swaddle his arthritic bones.

To be embraced in nature's arms,  
and lullabied by lapping waves,  
rocked by the earth's turn  
toward the ships moored at sea—  
they so many silver stars  
in a dim darkling sky.

And later when her ship set sail  
to a far imagined shore,  
he commenced again to stand,  
squint his eyes against  
the sun,  
and begin again  
to rig the mast.





**Dream Scapes, Mixed Media by Gary Van Haas**

## Autumn Moon-Song

**Stacie Eirich**

Fingers flex, shaping the notes  
on taut strings, curving them nimbly  
across their silken lengths,  
bending into the rounded shape  
of the lute's body.  
Leaning, plucking faster  
in anticipation of celebration,  
sounds vibrating gently  
through the air, floating upwards.

From her ethereal home in the clouds,  
the Moon Goddess listens,  
Sweet, round mooncakes and bejeweled pastries  
lay upon an altar,  
awaiting her to bless the people  
gathered below.

Gracefully, she flies down to earth,  
bestowing eternal beauty  
upon her worshippers,  
as the lute musician's fingers nimbly play  
a skillful tune announcing her,  
like the light of colourful, glowing lanterns  
floating in the sky amongst the clouds,  
under the dazzling light  
of the Autumn Moon.

*\*Note\** This poem was inspired by the  
Moon/Harvest Festival, which is  
celebrated in Mid-Autumn in China,  
and by the ancient stringed instrument  
the Pipa, or Chinese Lute.

## Autoimmune

**E. F. Schraeder**

My body, the snake,  
sleeps coiled in the cool shade,  
a curl of weeds.

The ailments, unknown  
whispers and echos  
of things unseen

the blue-white shimmering  
promise of radiography,  
exposing internal things,

reveals nothing.  
Cavernous questions  
surround the normalcy.

So I decide my body is a wasp,  
buzzing electric  
and easy to piss off—  
so leave it alone.

## Haiku

**Maria DePaul**

Birdsong drowns out rain  
Sunlight bending misty air  
Lyrical rainbow

## Gathering Supper

Elaine Reardon

For tonight kale  
picked at dusk sprinkled  
with pine needles

A little miso and wine  
spill into the roasted squash  
all of us a little tipsy

Outdoors next to the stream  
shiitake laden oak logs pop  
like firecrackers now until frost

From the forest  
to the skillet a sizzle of  
shiitaki, butter, and garlic

Life dances from seed and spore  
from fallen trees at forest edge  
onto our table tonight

## Gravity

Elizabeth Stansberry

She came in,  
tiger's teeth chattered.  
She never asked for  
This Gravity.

Some women were born  
To  
move shadows  
and harness lightening.

Some women were born  
To

Be Alone  
On a pedestal  
In the middle  
Of

The high desert  
Speaking tongues  
And

Taming snakes.

This woman.

She was born

To

Hold magic in her mouth.

Do not conjure

That

Muse.

## Electric

Leslie Dianne

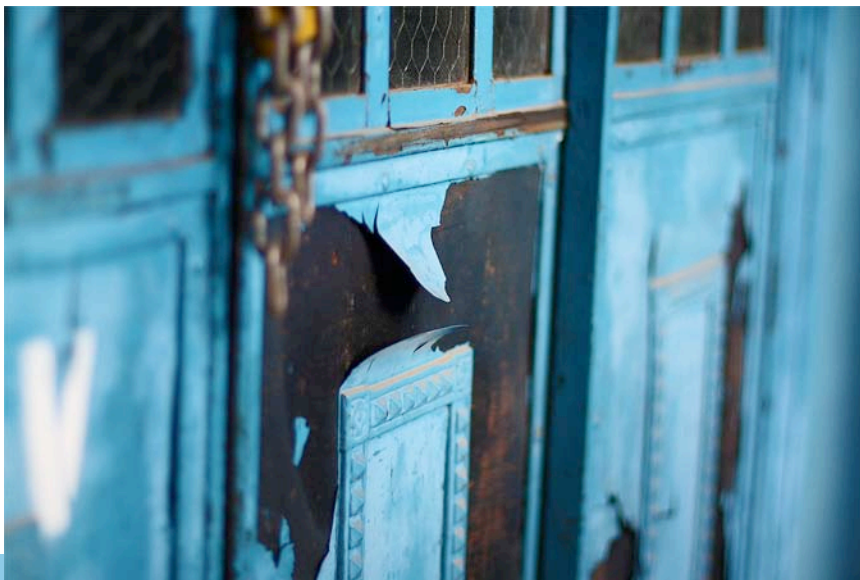
The man froze  
electric  
in the middle  
of forty second street

a taxi jumped around him  
and landed on the  
other side of the  
double yellow line

a bus screamed  
to a stop  
and its echo  
reverberated through the  
hearts of those rushing  
to the rest of their  
lives

they stopped  
to witness  
the vibrating dance of the man  
who took center  
stage in the flaming midday sun  
because he still believed  
he could stop the turning  
of the world  
by shaking  
out his song

### Blue Door, Digital Photography by Meagan Fedigan



# Day of the Dead in Chamula Cemetery

**Beth Spencer**

At morning, mounds rise small above the shroud  
of plastic wrappings, cups, and fallen glass  
deserted by lost celebrants too drunk to mourn  
or say their annual prayers. The unforgotten dead,  
still fed and given drink, lie jacketed in gold  
and orange beneath their smooth mud graves.  
Worn planks or wooden doors laid flat, protect the graves  
from those who would plod clumsily on sacred shrouds  
laid green with pine, and the petals of the marigold.  
Zapatistas offer Coke, or posh, or beer in amber glass  
to me that I might join them, drink to their family's dead.  
Though not my sorrow, in the gully where she crawls I mourn  
with the woman inching in between, who sobbing, mourns  
her children, gone to accident and alcohol, buried in the graves  
on either side. She dribbles Coke across the mound where lie the dead  
and feeds the flames of thin clasped candles that she shrouds  
from sudden wind with her dark and rounded back. An empty glass  
is setting near, waiting for the mums of white and more, more marigolds.  
I meet a man in sheepskin, his teeth outlined in gold  
though he is barely sober even on this special morn.  
In his hard-begotten English, he gestures with a glass  
and offers me a tour of his abuelo's grave:  
a cross of turquoise, the proper dates in black, the shroud  
of shredded marigolds and pine proper for the dead.  
Sombrero-ed mariachis blare notes to rouse the dead.  
Their gala suits emblazoned, not trimmed in gold  
but silver buttoned down their legs. Their music shrouds  
the pain of loss for all of those who mourn.  
Families circled 'round the loved one's grave  
eat favored meals and find comfort in a glass.  
The living taste the candied skulls, sugar like spun-glass.  
The usual bread of orange and anise nourishes the dead.  
Faithful to tradition, each year they replicate grave  
rituals to remember their departed with orange marigolds  
and pine. Prayers chanted in the evening and the morn  
like fog, cover and release them to an alcoholic shroud.  
Glasses ready, October's last sees graves are cleaned, the shroud  
renewed. The dead departed are welcomed back into the morn  
of one more year. Their graves refreshed and roofed in marigolds.

# Des Moines Jones

**Leslie Dianne**

That guy with  
the meth jones  
begging on the  
corner  
his lies  
scrawled on  
cardboard  
he stole from the  
grocery store  
along with  
a snicker's bar  
hitting me up  
for a dollar  
his hunger  
rotting like  
his teeth

I see the  
need in his eyes  
the hold on  
in his fists  
as he tries to steady his  
feet on the concrete

fall down slow  
another mistake  
another miss  
another beautiful  
boy blessing  
and kissing  
the street

# Haiku

**Maria DePaul**

Dandelion seeds  
Gossamer spiral shadows  
Sailing on breezes





**Rainbow**

**Digital Photography  
by  
Linda Nelson**

## **Miles Davis Lays It Down**

**Michael Neal Morris**

...for example when I was layin' down  
Bitches Brew, I was stirring a pot,  
makin' a stew, those good cats  
makin' it organic live and growing.  
Always growing. You don't grow things  
you die. And it was time o' Nam  
too much dying o' brothers  
too much music too flat to blow up.

I was past those days  
when we got paid next to nothing  
to play tired versions of Birth of the Cool  
or Kind of Blue, it was like stealing  
from myself, but more than my pocket.  
My heart was out of it. The coke  
helped. John quit cold, but I had to...

Never mind. Lemme get back  
to Bitches. Those dudes didn't need  
much direction. Sure some were scared  
of me, ha ha, but they weren't women.  
Let's not get into that, you dig.

What I did was expose the hypocrites.  
Jazz is not just about freedom, It is freedom,  
even when you're in chains. Sometimes, a slave  
has to bust out, get away, not just for hisself,  
but to make the world see master's lash.

## **Stories of Fiction**

**Nuno Fatela**

Words in stories too painful to be fiction  
with edges softened by age in subtle traces  
conquered by nightmares of gentle friction  
where each letter hides the truth in lying phrases

Pursuit for better ink becomes an endless run  
countless days meshed into sleepless nights  
the void remains waiting for someone  
in the margins of the noise where hope still fights

Time gathered in layers of accumulated dust  
reassembled to be bigger but not the same  
to kindle the fire which emboldens trust  
to show up to play but not be part of a game

All other tales portrayed share only common actors  
of death provided by unwelcomed benefactors

## October

**Jeff Burt**

October in the oaks,  
long-slanting light,  
cold caravans of rain roaming  
through monuments of marble sky,  
mist lingering in leaves,

all life luminous, filtered,  
like barn-dust swirls in sun-slats,  
moments of forgiving the memory  
of the stinging sentence, the burning phrase,  
the cutting word

and walking the land,  
the sacred land,  
and breathing into,  
and one with,  
the sky.

## People

**Beth O'Brien**

I tell my boyfriend whenever I am on my period,  
or whenever I'm catcalled  
because I want him to know that one is natural,  
the other is not but they both happen  
to women all the time.

I told him when a man shouted at me running  
from across the road; When an Uber driver  
slowed down beside me and took time  
out of his day to wolf-whistle; and how at 7:30am,  
a drunk man called me "Oi", asked me where  
I thought I was going, before telling me where I should.

His most recent reply was:  
'People are so weird!' And by, "people"  
He meant, "men"  
And he didn't even realise.

### Fox River Illinois, Watercolor by George Frederick and Carl Waller



## The Road Ahead is Narrowing

**Bernadine Lortis**

As we make that final turn—  
on the winding road in autumn  
witness fire burning on trees' shoulders  
showing-off their dance of brilliant shawls  
before colder hands of winter winds  
show no mercy and shake them off—  
as eventually we all will  
no matter if we still drive too fast  
or have learned to slow down,  
we have no other choice  
but to remain traveling onward  
for our chance to make that U-turn  
we might have risked has vanished  
like last season's moldered leaves.

### Lost, Digital Photography by Bob Evans



## Mired

**Jean Biegun**

I write "Mired in Blue" and you, my reader,  
see a blue, maybe a vat of mixed blues  
sloppy, blurred and thick. You think

I might be blue, a blue  
poet. You imagine many possibilities  
but then suddenly remember

the dragging, dense midnight shade  
of your marriage's slow dying,  
and that dark sky time your mother

murmured "I feel so blue" while she  
waited in a two-bed hospital room  
to hear a new doctor pronounce

the cancer word.  
"Mired in Blue": the title makes you  
read on for clarification

of what this writer means,  
perhaps a fading pastel still holding  
to walls like those in your almost-gone

daughter's room, or a magical cerulean  
that matches the eyes of a man  
who strode confidently through

your office and your mind  
last Wednesday exactly at 9:15.  
You take so much from my blue mire.

## Tonight

**David Edwards**

cloudless and new moon  
the pregnant ubiquity  
of things possible



## Puttin' on the Glitz

**Deborah Guzzi**

decked out in conifer  
branches and a red bow  
beside the road ruminating-  
the grit of gravel, ice and snow,  
crushed to quartz-like glitter

nature grants its own light décor,  
this peg-legged wayfarer, tries to stop  
the flow with its flag up  
standing in the rush of wind,  
snow, sleet, or hail

upright it waits-

daily-wheels edge the curb-stop  
communicate in colored envelopes from  
points afar, then honk on with Christmas joy

decorated to the nines the mailbox  
in December-boxed-in, its content  
endlessly yammers: to be consumed,  
cradled, kissed, for once-

it has our wayward attention!

## Street Lights

**Janet M. Powers**

Coming out of the concert hall  
I walk into a warm November night  
wet with a gentle misting rain.  
A glowing bouquet of soft lit globes  
reflects another century in sidewalks  
of this uncertain new millennium.  
Strangely elated, remembering  
such nights in another college town  
where I wandered forty years ago,  
young and lonely but surely blessed  
by the gleam of triple spheres  
multiplied in the sheen of wet streets,  
I am struck by a rush of love  
for this earth, this place, this night,  
a brief important bolt of joy,  
infrequent now but so essential.

## Restraints

**Victoria Crawford**

sometimes awake, I watch the clock  
with 13 hours  
counterclockwise,  
wall paper twists horizontally  
waves on beach,  
they roll me on a gurney  
my eyes cross white ceilings  
cracks pursuing,  
needle punctuated arms—  
I pull them out—  
so,  
four point restraints at every corner  
I try to chew them off

a voice I know whispers,  
“the anesthesia will wear off, honey.”

## Gazing, Digital Photography by Bob Evans





**The Eye, Acrylics by Lisa Shea**  
**“An expression of emotion at the current political chaos”**

## Thoughts on a Subway

**Allison Huang**

When people board the subway  
 they like to sit across from me.  
 Even when the whole car is empty  
 there they shift their brown bags, nestle their denim rumps.  
 Sometimes I fancy it is because I am a woman  
 and I am alone.  
 Once I imagined you  
 were the one who walked on board  
 but then how did you find my car?  
 Or know my train? Or know my stop?  
 I decide this is impossible, and anyway,  
 it was a plump oily lady with a red net  
 of tangerines this time, pretending  
 not to look at me. But were it you  
 I'd look up and I'd blink

my gaze would be a sweater  
 catching on a familiar hook, a crimped thread  
 unspooling all the work it took  
 to fit it in its place. I would fish for your eyes  
 like a dog laps at water  
 though he disturbs a newborn sky.  
 Today a child has dragged a coal  
 across your nose and crystallized  
 the tips of your cheekbones.  
 Were I not a stranger, were I  
 more than just a girl easy  
 to sit across from, I would fold these cinnamon  
 candies in my lips.

*For Kraig*

## The Things You Used To Say

**Amanda Steel**

The things you used to say  
Other people wouldn't understand  
Like when I asked how long until tea  
You asked, how long is a piece of string?  
I'd ask, what's for tea tonight?  
A kick and a run round the table  
Or pig's arse and flannel, whatever that is  
Responding to greetings of good morning  
By saying good afternoon instead  
Because apparently, 8am is closer to afternoon  
Claiming you couldn't remember something  
Because you had slept since then  
As though memories ooze out during sleep  
If they did I would never sleep  
For fear of forgetting you  
I still recall days out  
You liked to walk fast  
While Mum trailed behind  
And every so often, you'd ask  
Where's your bloody mother lass?  
You liked to put lass at the end of each sentence  
To emphasise anger or just impatience  
But it became a running joke  
And still makes me smile  
Whenever I recall the things you used to say

## Two Poems

**Dixon Hearne**

She rises before rays of hope  
quit her kitchen window,  
house yawning to chicory brew.  
She shuffles mechanically  
in her sensible shoes  
misshapen by misshapen feet—  
feet that worked the hard, southern fields,  
tended to five children:  
one taken early by sniper fire,  
another claimed by a reckless car  
on the eve of his deployment  
to the merciless fields of Europe.  
The losses settled in her face and eyes,  
where they remain until the end,  
like so many other faces and eyes that bear  
the outward signs of troubled hearts.  
Who counts the domestic casualties of men's wars?

## The Wrong Man for the Job

**Michael Neal Morris**

so easy to disbelieve  
what god could choose  
so many losers  
so many last kids picked  
a people out of an idolater  
a nation out of a murder  
a kingdom from a scrawny adulterer  
a church from an uneducated fisherman  
a network from a blowhard zealot  
i get it  
but i am less than parts  
what can be built from this  
what can God do  
with this deaf and blind weakling  
too small for anything but sin

brother i could not understand you  
when your voice was clear  
you try through lost lips  
to speak over the dining hall din  
over the television  
over the years of silence  
and i strain perhaps give up  
too easily too easily fall to defaults

i failed you when we were kids  
when you should have been protected  
from a big brother's capricious bad humor  
from the blows of a mother who hit with words  
from the southern comfort river

## Untitled No. 2

**Margarita Serafimova**

The great waves were ramming all before them,  
and the sun appeared, and I spoke to it:  
You! Should come more often.  
The waves had become purely white.



## Sympathy Pains

**Marcie Roman**

When something happened in Doris Dellinger's town, she was always first with the appropriate form of acknowledgement: condolence notes and casseroles, baby booties and blankets. She gave pens to graduates and pies to newcomers, even the ones just passing through; the writers, and painters, and occasional bird-watcher. The accompanying note read: "I am Doris Dellinger and I would like to welcome you to our glorious town." She included her number, but requested no calls after 8 p.m. An early riser, she compensated on the back end, rarely making it past the evening news.

Although she'd never married and had no children, Doris Dellinger did have a companion, a fourteen-year-old terrier named Pogo. She'd adopted him after the previous owner—Annabelle Leech, mother of two rambunctious boys—found Pogo in the oven. "It wasn't on, of course," Annabelle said, "But I was just about to pre-heat it for some rolls." Doris Dellinger saw the rescuing of Pogo as an obligation, one taken without complaint, but she grew to care for the pup, toting him around in a brown vinyl purse anywhere that would allow it, which was just about everywhere. Even though Pogo's bark could lacerate an ear drum, no one ever wanted to say no to Doris Dellinger.

Doris Dellinger was built like a well-insulated house and was almost never ill, so it surprised her one morning to experience a shooting pain in her left arm when she bent to place Pogo in his bag. The pain ebbed and flowed as she went about her day, flaring up through grocery shopping, and as she prepared dinner and watched the news. The next morning it was worse so she made a visit to Dr. Sanchez.

"I just don't get it," she said, her large frame on the table, her sleeve bunched to reveal a veined and flabby upper arm. "I didn't pull it, or lift anything heavier than Pogo. It wasn't there and then it was."

Dr. Sanchez tested her range of motion and took a blood sample. "Don't see anything amiss," he said. "Rest it a bit, use ice if it gets worse." Then he thanked her again for the pecan bars she'd dropped off last week in appreciation of his twenty-five-dollar contribution to the Women's Club raffle.

Pleased that the situation didn't seem serious—she was after all nearing an age where those worries could exist—Doris Dellinger went home and greeted Pogo (the doctor's office was one of the few places he was unwelcome). That was when she

noticed Pogo's limp, just a minor favoring of the paw, as he led her to the drawer where she kept the treats.

"Now Pogo," she said. "What have you done to yourself?"

Reaching down to examine him, her arm burned like she'd stuffed it into a bucket of hot coals. Pogo held up his paw, as though the pressure on it was too much to bear.

"Why Pogo," she gasped. "Could it be you're having sympathy pains?"

The next morning, she brought him to Vet Fletcher, an appointment slot always available for the woman who once took over the reception desk on a busy morning after the receptionist got bit by Dirk Lawson's Chihuahua. As Vet Fletcher prodded a whimpering Pogo, Doris Dellinger's arm flared again—now a bucket of spiked, burning coals—and she plopped into a chair and waved her face with a flyer for heartworm medication.

"So, there does seem to be something going on with Pogo," Vet Fletcher said gently. She ordered blood-work and x-rays and promised to be in touch soon.

The news, arriving the next day, was not good. But it could have been worse.

Pogo had a tumor, just a small one, above his left paw. It was the kind of thing that often went ignored, but thanks to Doris Dellinger's quick response, they could attack it aggressively. Or consider amputation.

Doris Dellinger was practical. "Well," she said. "Seeing as I carry Pogo everywhere, I imagine one less leg won't cause him any trouble. How soon can we schedule?" To Pogo, she said, "Isn't that something. Here I was thinking you were having sympathy pains and it was the other way around."

Sure enough, as soon as the surgery was completed, Doris Dellinger's arm pain went away.

The week following the surgery was a whirlwind. Not only was she catering to Pogo's needs—administering medicine, carrying him to the yard to do his business—but there were two tragedies and one wedding and Doris Dellinger would not let personal matters interfere with her commitment to the town.

"It's nothing," she said, a sedated Pogo asleep in the purse, when she delivered a casserole to the Hernandez's after Mr. Hernandez fell off a ladder and broke his leg.

"Congratulations," she said to the newlyweds as she presented a gift-wrapped binder of recipes she'd typed on her IBM Selectric.

"I'm terribly sorry," she said to Janet Sloane, one of the town's other spinsters, on the loss of Janet's older sister, Penny. Instead of a food offering, Doris Dellinger took out her rubber gloves and Ajax and scrubbed Janet's kitchen to a shine since Janet hated dirt and might not be up to the task during mourning.

That night, Doris Dellinger returned home, held Pogo so he could pee, hand-fed him dinner, took him back outside, then put him to bed. As she went downstairs to double check the lights she experienced a thirst so extreme, it was as if she'd been stuck on a desert for days. She could think of nothing but a cold, clear, glass of water. Gulping one wasn't enough. As she filled a second glass, she noticed the herbs on her kitchen windowsill, limp and brown, the tops hanging as if in defeat.

"Oh dear," she said, trying to recall the last time she'd watered them. She poured her glass into the hardened dirt and filled the pitcher she used for the houseplants, all of which seemed to be suffering. Yes, it was quite possible she'd forgotten to water them what with the pain in her arm, Pogo, and his care. She made several trips to the sink to refill until every plant had been sufficiently watered. The herbs were already perking up and she realized her tremendous thirst was no more.

"Curious," she said to the plants. She could have pondered it further, but it was 8 p.m. and Doris Dellinger was due for bed.

Over the next week, she paid close attention to any tweaks, twinges or hints of trauma. She suggested that Louise Andrejeski have her eyes checked when, stopping at Louise's house with some jam she experienced sudden, blurred vision. At the Post Office, she recommended that Clifford Owen, the

### Context, Digital Photography by Mark Berkery



Postmaster's son, be checked for asthma after feeling short of breath when the boy ran past her to get outside. On the way home, when she stopped to commend Henry Locke, editor of the town paper, on his exposé on second-rate feed salesmen, her stomach seized in cramps.

"You might want to stay close to home," she told him. "Just for the next twenty-four hours or so."

Sure enough: Louise had the early signs of cataracts; Clifford didn't have asthma but rather a mild allergic reaction thought to come from pairing peanut butter, strawberries, and chewing gum; and poor Henry Locke did indeed have to stay close to the bathroom for a solid day and a half, resulting, he assumed, from some leftover fried chicken left too long on the countertop, a mistake many a bachelor has made, even one as experienced as he.

The talk spread, as it does in small towns, like a fire with an endless supply of kindling. By the next day, every dinner conversation was about Doris Dellinger's newfound gift for (depending on the family doing the discussing): healing arts, laying of the hands, ESP, channeling a higher power, prognostication, creative guessing, and, what Doris Dellinger may have used to describe herself, empathy to the extreme. Her phone began to ring.

"Doris Dellinger, can you check on Thomas? He seems run down and they have the big game against Elsburg High on Saturday?"

"Doris Dellinger, my nose gets itchy whenever I'm near Peterman's Hardware. It's been that way for years. Can you tell me why?"

"Doris Dellinger, my Harold has been moaning about his back and won't see Dr. Sanchez, but I'm sure he wouldn't object to a visit, especially if you bring some of those chocolate brownies he loves so."

Doris Dellinger was happy to oblige although she had to use a calendar to keep track of appointments after discovering she'd booked the Steinbergs for a cough at the same time as the Callahans for a lethargic parakeet.

One rare afternoon with nothing scheduled, there was a knock at Doris Dellinger's door. She often received visitors—usually people returning containers from her various offerings—but it was a man she'd never seen before: tall, thin, his beard long, his hands empty. Pogo also identified him as a stranger and sounded the alarm.

The man winced and took a step back.

"Are you Mrs. Dellinger?"

As if she didn't already know he was a stranger, that address would have sealed it. She was Doris Dellinger. Her mother, Mrs. Dellinger, had been dead for years. She answered, "No."

A look of confusion, like a cloud passing over the sun, crossed his face.

"I was told that Doris Dellinger lived here," he said. "My name is Tom Tompkins. I'm a TV producer, in for a week of R&R and to enjoy your beautiful scenery. Thought maybe I could come in for a few minutes. I'd like to pitch you this idea I had." He smiled widely.

Doris Dellinger did not trust anyone with teeth that white and that straight. She wished she could yap a warning like Pogo to tell this man to go away. She did not open her screen door.

He plowed onward. "See I do reality shows. Maybe you've heard of them. Pet Party, about people who throw outrageous parties for pets?" He looked hopefully at Pogo who growled. "Or Extreme Weather Challenge? That's a popular one. Mother Nature's been helpful lately."

Doris Dellinger had no idea what the man was prattling about. She wondered if he'd recently checked out of St. Peter's Home for the Mentally Disadvantaged. A plaque with her name adorned the front hall in appreciation of her donation, each December, of hand knit green wool socks for all the residents. This man wore sandals; his sockless toes poked like worms, ready to be plucked by the next passing bird. She imagined he wanted her to look upon him and use her powers of intuition, although she'd had no telling flash of pain or discomfort, other than that associated with his invasion of her porch.

"What can I help you with, Mr. Tompkins?"

"Call me, Tom, please."

He smiled again, and she looked away. Really, the shine of those things was offensive.

"I heard about you. I mean anyone in town for five minutes hears about Doris Dellinger and her amazing insight into the human condition. That's the kind of thing they love on the coast, you see. I'm thinking we could call you The Senser. How's that? I'm betting we can get a guaranteed six episodes to start then take you on the road."

Something in her face must have hinted he hadn't made his point.

"Talk about tourism. You'd give this town an entire new industry. And of course, you'd be very rich." His eyes flickered



to the right, as if there was something about the slanted porch, the sun faded drapes in the windows, which implied she was living below his standards.

Doris Dellinger counted to ten. Her voice was calm although her heart skipped faster, as if rattling the cage in her chest to demand a greater level of agitation.

"Thank you, but I am not interested in being part of your program."

She shut the door, leaving Tom Tompkins with another look of confusion, like she'd told a joke but stopped before the punchline.

The phone rang. Who knew one small town could have so many problems? And now here was one of her own. A pest. For something told her Tom Tompkins would not give up so easily.

She was right.

The next day at lunchtime, a news van pulled into the town square with two reporters and a cameraman from a nearby affiliate. Tom Tompkins brought them to Petrillo's Diner. "You've got the scoop," he promised (as overheard by Mrs. Petrillo when she went to refill their coffee). But, of course, that wasn't the case and by the time they were paying their bill, two more news vans had pulled in.

Mrs. Petrillo made a phone call from the backroom. "Doris Dellinger don't answer the door; the media circus is on its way."

Doris Dellinger was never one to run from a challenge. She put Pogo in his purse, put on her Sunday coat and went to wait on the sidewalk lest they trample her flowerbeds in an attempt to get a closer shot.

Henry Locke arrived with the last of the news vans. He'd been sitting at his desk when he received a call from Mrs. Petrillo about the brouhaha brewing at Doris Dellinger's. With a sigh, he'd turned off the sports recap, grabbed his hat and headed over. He had no intention of covering her story—he was more of a facts man—but she had helped him with that recent intestinal matter.

Doris Dellinger stood on a square of sidewalk, arms crossed. "Need something Henry?" she asked.

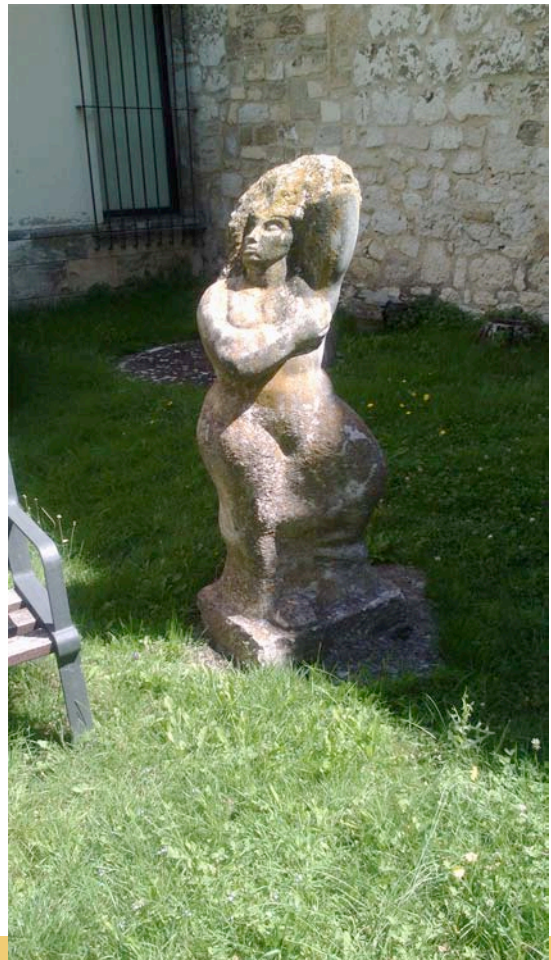
That was a rhetorical question. Henry Locke was the only townsperson—with no family and a healthy constitution, the one incident notwithstanding—who had never been on the receiving end of a Doris Dellinger offering.

They looked out at the small crowd: the cameramen and reporters, drivers smoking through the windows of their vans. Pogo was hoarse from yapping, but his bark was still shrill enough to make any sort of recording impossible. Henry did not need Doris Dellinger's gift to discern that no one was happy, especially the tall fellow with the beard shouting into a phone.

Henry shrugged. "Thought maybe you could use some assistance."

In Doris Dellinger's guttural region, she felt a sudden emptiness. She had eaten a decent lunch, but the emptiness began to grow. She needed to eat and eat so badly that if the only thing left in the world were those pouty faced reporters then so be it. She motioned to the outsiders. "There seems to be an overabundance of nonsense." She said this like it was a function of the weather: reporters and cameramen raining from the sky. As if cued from backstage, another news van and

## Goddess, Digital Photography by Daniel de Culla





two rental cars pulled up, horns blaring in competition for the remaining parking spot. The feeling in her stomach spread. Perhaps, it was not her belly but Henry Locke's. He was already thin as a coat hanger and had likely not been eating right given the matter with his digestive tract. Her mind went to the sugar cookies she'd taken from the oven before she'd answered Mrs. Petrillo's call.

"Henry, would you care to join me for a bite?"

Henry had eaten lunch an hour before; his usual cheese sandwich, bag of chips, but he was on the list of folks who did not say no to Doris Dellinger.

They turned their backs on the reporters and walked up the path.

"Take your coat off, Henry," Doris Dellinger said, inside the foyer, as she leaned over to set Pogo down. She expected him to yap—Pogo yapped at anyone entering the home, known or unknown—but with tail wagging, the dog hobbled into the kitchen.

"I'll just wash up," Henry said.

"You remember where it is?"

The smell of cookies, cooling on the counter, lured. Doris Dellinger wanted to shove them into her mouth, as many as she could fit, to wash them down with a container of thick milk, coating her insides, staunching the emptiness that spread from her stomach to her limbs, as if she were becoming as hollow as those chocolate bunnies at Easter.

Henry nodded. He had played in the Dellinger home as a child, along with their other schoolmates; the house wide and welcoming, like a big bosomed hug. He hadn't been over much in his adult life, other than when he came with the rest of the town to pay respects to the late Mr. Dellinger, followed a few months later by the Mrs.

In the kitchen, Doris Dellinger grabbed two of the cookies, barely chewed, as Pogo sat at her feet in search of falling crumbs. "I don't understand it, Pogo," she said. "Could the man be dying of hunger?" She went to the fridge. Took out a plate of cold cuts, a jar of mayonnaise. She was removing the bread from the breadbox when Henry entered. He'd removed his hat and his hair stood in tufts like cottonwood fluff.

"Well now, you didn't have to go to all this trouble," he said.

"We may be holed up a while." She motioned to the front of the house. "Unless you've got any ideas on making them scat."

Henry peered through the curtains. The news folk stood in two rows as if set up for a line dance, reporters on one side, their backs facing the house, camera folk on the other, the cameras on their shoulders, a third dancing partner. At least they were respecting the flowerbeds. Pogo came over and wagged. Henry scooped the dog up and sat down at the table, scratching Pogo's ears as Pogo licked his chin. Doris Dellinger's hunger pains started to abate.

"Perhaps you should get a dog," she suggested.

"Now, Doris Dellinger, you know Sally Abbott doesn't allow dogs on the property."

Henry had been renting the coach house at the Abbott's for almost thirty-five years.

"I think Sally is being silly, and her cats are quite capable of taking care of themselves."

She chose not to fully reveal what she and Pogo thought of Sally Abbott's cats. She took a slice of turkey. Nibbled it down. Took another. There was an oddness to having Henry Locke in a chair that was usually empty. Since before her mother's time, company was brought to the living or dining room. The kitchen was reserved for a home's permanent inhabitants, but there was something about his coat hanger shape seated in that chair with Pogo on his lap that seemed comfortable, almost familiar. She walked to the counter to get the cookies. From outside came the sound of raised voices, shouting her name. Those beasts were hungry too, it seemed. She wiped her hands on a dishtowel and sighed. While she had not asked for this attention, it was her responsibility to clear them out before her neighbors came home from their workdays.

"Excuse me, Henry," she said. She walked to the front door and swung it open. She would participate in whatever silly interview they wanted just to get them to go away. Henry followed, holding Pogo. "Keep him quiet, Henry, if you could."

But then another idea struck, as sure as one of her intuitions. She marched to the sidewalk. Faces turned her way, cameras at ready. Tom Tompkins motioned to a big-bellied cameraman to spring to action.

Questions flew:

"Doris Dellinger, how do you do it?"

"What does it feel like?"

"Are you a witch or a fortune teller?"

"Do you think you could do it by email?"

Doris Dellinger smiled politely and started to scratch. She scratched her head, and her arms, her belly and her face. She scratched her knees and her elbows, her wrists and her scalp. She scratched with both hands like she was battling the itch of all itches.

"Well folks, first things first. I'm not sure who it is, but it appears at least one of you is about to suffer from a highly contagious rash. I'm never sure of the cause, as you know. I mean it could be ringworm or scabies or pink eye or lice or maybe even that flesh-eating bacteria thing we've been hearing about." She paused to let that sink in. "So, before we do any of this interviewing, if you're feeling the slightest bit of itch, I would recommend an immediate trip to your health care provider."

She waited for them to squirm, and squirm they did. It was clear that there was not a reporter or cameraman or reality TV producer who did not feel the sudden start of an itch on some body part. They tried to hold off but their fingers twitched to rub an eye, or a nose or that one impossible area in the middle of the back. How it called to them to scratch and scratch and scratch. It was useless. A sigh of relief as they gave in. Itching and scratching, and scratching and itching, they packed up their belongings, avoiding each other's eyes. Tires screeched and horns blared once more. Henry relinquished Pogo, relieved he could address his own prickling sensation that called to be quelled from just under his left rib.

As Doris Dellinger started up the path, Tom Tompkins ran over, one hand raking his beard, the other waving a white envelope.

"We are really onto something here. This will be huge. Global even. Here's your contract, just the standard. It's got a stamped envelope all ready to go."

He gave her a thumbs up, and scurried down the path, his other hand moving into the vicinity of his buttocks.

She held the envelope to her temple, closed her eyes and said, "I'm getting the sense that this is going right into the rubbish bin."

When she opened her eyes, Henry wasn't beside her. She looked around and saw him walking down the street, tall and thin, like a lightning rod or a spindly tree. The emptiness from before came back as a gnawing sensation but this time a word flashed in her mind, grey letters with the consistency of crumbly old dough. Loneliness. As soon as she named it, she was sure that this time she'd gotten it right.

After she fed Pogo and took him outside, she picked up the phone. It rang without answer. She waited ten minutes and tried again.

"Hello," Henry Locke said on the other end.

"Hello, Henry. This is Doris Dellinger, and I was wondering if you'd like to come over tomorrow for dinner. I serve at 5:30."

"Why yes," he answered. "Yes, of course."

After she hung up, Doris Dellinger stood by the phone and listened to her body. She was no longer hungry. That was good. She also wasn't thirsty or achy, or sore or itchy, or faint or clammy. She didn't feel queasy or febrile, myopic or infectious. She did, however, feel tired. Tired of the craziness, that was for sure, but also the kind of tired that comes from a good day's work, and maybe, she sensed, an eagerness to see what the next day would bring. So, although it was nowhere near 8 p.m., Doris Dellinger carried Pogo upstairs, and went to bed.

## Ripples, Digital Photography by Bob Evans



# Catalan Gothic

## Eric Michael Bovim

I told him to dry off, sent the girl away, told him to get moving, that we were going to pack up because we were leaving this hotel.

"Where are we going, Daddy?"

"Some place more Spanish."

The woman at reception, same as yesterday, tensed up when I announced my precipitous early check-out. Is something wrong? I assured her the hotel was fine, but that we wanted to be closer to the heart of the city. You have booked for a week, she said. You will lose your deposit. That is fine. She picked up the phone and spoke in French to someone. An older man in a navy suit appeared and introduced himself as the General Manager and said he wanted to be certain my stay had been pleasant. I tried my best to assure him but they seemed unconvinced. They watched us all the way to the elevator, not waving.

"Hotel Lloret," I told the taxi driver.

"What is that?" Colin said.

"We are going to a more special hotel. More atmosphere. Less American things."

"Why?"

"Because we came to be in Spain. This is not being in Spain."

"Oh. Is there a pool?"

"No—and there's no room service. There is the Ramblas," I said, pointing out the window.

The taxi retraced our route from yesterday morning, all the way up to the top of the Ramblas, the Messi ad visible from across the Placa Catalunya. The hotel was still there, just as I recalled it, the neon cursive sign, the rooms with their balconies, the street noise. The driver stayed in the car as I lifted the luggage to the curb. I gave him some coins and he left us. Colin was sullen. For a moment, I thought about summoning another taxi and going right back to the Hotel Arts. No, you won't. You make this work, show this boy that you can make anything work, that there's more to Spain than a corporate hotel.

We took a room on the third floor, two balconies and a cathode-ray television with just one grainy English-language channel, CNN International. There was a bathroom and a king bed, some café chairs you presumably could take out onto the balcony. He was sullen when we entered but perked up a little at the view. I set the chairs outside and sat down to draw him out.

"Isn't this magnificent?" I said.

He read my every micro-expression and gesture before he decided to answer. "I guess. Why did we move again?"

"The other hotel was very beautiful, amazing. But did we fly here to eat chicken fingers and speak English all day? I want you to experience Barcelona. This is a special hotel."

"Why?"

"Because mommy and daddy stayed here once."

He took that in, could not conceal a widening smile, and stared out onto the Ramblas where a man had decorated himself in silver foil and metallic paint and was posing for pictures as the Tin Man.

"Really? In this room? Why were you here?"

"Not this room. One just like it. I had just moved here. Mommy came to visit me. I was poor. This was what we could afford. You know what? Of all the places in the world mommy traveled, she always talked about this hotel, it's little balconies and the view of the street at night. Mommy loved to be outside."

He was smiling: "That's so cool. Alright, fine, I understand, daddy. Now, can we go get the black rice you promised?"

His hair was matted from the chlorine.

"You take a quick shower, get ready, and we'll go for lunch. I know somewhere good where they have it, OK? We have the party tonight too, remember."

He was unusually pliant and went straight to the bathroom and took a long shower, while I sat on the balcony smoking a cigarette I had stashed from Carmen's supply. I checked my phone for the time and saw a text arrive from Arnaud: "Mr. White, such a pleasure, please inform me of your decision, we are most eager to get started with you and no one else."

I took a long drag and noticed a Mexican food chain from America had settled in across the street, scarring the view. There was a breeze and some ashes flew into the room. I thought briefly of Veronica, her long auburn hair bouncing

on the bike trail, the sleeping Danube winding through hills, and I opened the notes function on my phone and typed in some ideas of where that story would go, my mind was alight with ideas, bullets in the sky, and I went dreamy indulging the notion that she would invite me to her performance of Bruckner's symphony and seat me onstage, in the fifth violin chair, so I could experience the music as a virtuoso does, her hair in a bun while she sawed away on her violin, head tilted as if looking into a painting, and I thought of the way Ariadna was examining Monica's art, her solemnity and recognition that each of those paintings had a molten core, even for realism, it's not what you paint but what you omit and can the subject feel the omission, her death was stained on us like indigo, her spirit found its way into the oddest things, the unnamable bug sounds in Christ Church, there was no billboard wisdom that could chase her out of my life, I wanted her there and perhaps Carmen was right that my canvas could expand, her spirit enmeshed into the oddest things, this hotel, the moon, she loved squid ink rice and, of course, this boy.

"Daddy what are you doing?" He had a towel wrapped around his waist.

I had the cigarette hanging from my lip. Quickly I snuffed it out on the balcony and stomped methodically on it as if it would vanish. I closed my eyes and laughed inside. Sooner or later our children must learn that their parents are not perfect.

"Well, daddy was smoking."

His eyes widened.

"I am sorry."

"So, technically, you weren't smoking because it was in your mouth but you weren't breathing in. Right?"

"Uh...right."

"Also, cigarettes can help with stress. Did you know they contain a drug in them that relaxes people? I searched it up. It's true. Nicotine. It comes from plants."

"Why were you looking that up?"

"I saw you smoking in Barbados and I researched it."

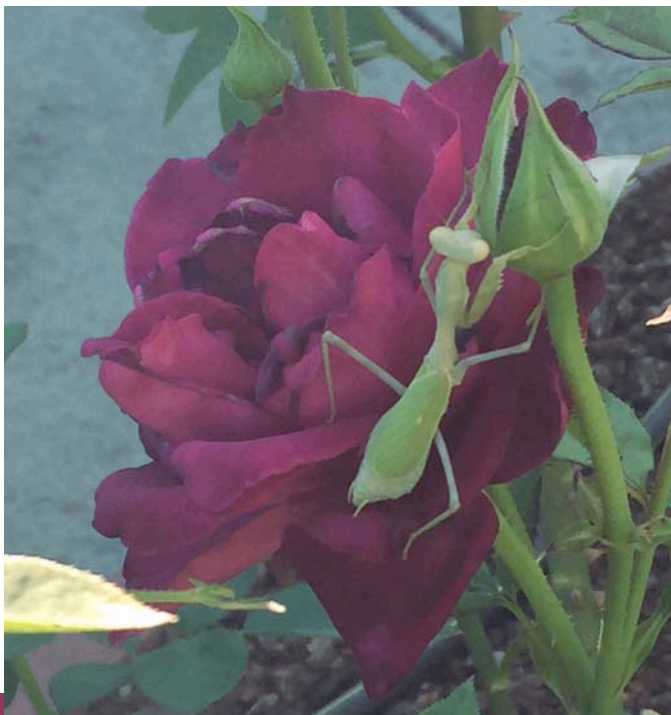
I felt so relieved. I kissed his forehead and tasted soapy water. I wiped him off. I told him to get dressed and ready to go. The day had just started.

"We are going to have an adventure now!"

"We are going to have an adventure. We're going to La Boqueria. Then we are going for a long walk. Then we're going to a party."

I changed my shoes and locked the door behind us. We walked down the flight of stairs to the street and headed in the direction of the sea, walking on the busy promenade under the denuded trees. The sun was hot and I took off my jacket. I had given Colin a few euros that he was tossing into the hats and guitar cases of the various street performers. In ten minutes, we were at the Boqueria. It was cool once inside and smelled like fish and raw meat. Skinned rabbits hung from their skulls. There were bins of exotic mollusks and langostinos squirming in Styrofoam containers. Every thirty feet was a food stand. At three o'clock, the place was packed, locals and very few tourists, men squeezed together at the counters with their cañas and Albariños. I bought Colin a little bag of spiced candied almonds for a euro. We negotiated the crowd and waded to the back, along the way I asked a man selling salted cod to point me towards the paellas and I kept walking towards the back, and we bought some candied apricots for another euro and almost tried the cheeses but the line was too long and Colin was hungry. There was room for us to sit down at the paella stand. They were using butane tanks to fire the burners, and had three massive paella pans going, the final one pure black rice with rings of calamari. He fixed us two plates, topped it with a dollop of aioli. It tasted of the sea. Colin

## **The Rose and Mantis, Digital Photography by Lawrence Pratt**





was eating, not talking. Eating and smiling and not talking. I ordered un Estrella and bought him a diet Coke. I showed him how to mix in the aioli and the garlic intensified the fish flavor.

"Daddy this is my new favorite food!" His lips and teeth and tongue were black from the ink.

"It's incredible. That's true."

"Es lo mejor de Barcelona," said the man cooking.

"Mejor de Barcelona, si," said Colin.

I paid ten euros each and we took a long walk down to the waterfront. We sat down outside at a café at the Maremagnum. Colin said he was willing to try an horchata, and I ordered another Estrella, and I asked the girl to bring an American paper. I had bought some postcards on the Ramblas and gave them to Colin to fill out. She brought an International New York Times. I sat and looked out to the water. The view felt different from the one this morning. It was nice to enjoy some stillness. We watched the boats at sea until it began to darken and get chilly.

I heard my phone vibrate. Another text from Arnaud, petitioning for a call in two days. I didn't reply. Colin seemed tired from being sedentary so we walked back to the hotel.

I told him to get dressed fancy for the party. I put on a nicer shirt, cologne, looked at myself. Then I undressed and hopped

in the shower, changed my razor and shaved, redressed and reapplied the cologne. He had on a white shirt and navy blazer, looked like he was going for First Communion. He asked for some cologne too. I splashed some on his cheeks with the back of my hand. He said he needed to shave. Maybe tomorrow, I said.

I hailed a taxi and asked him to drop us off near the Picasso Museum, so we could walk to the gallery. We were right on time, which meant very early in Spain. I thought we could kill the time by wandering the Gothic streets. I realized we had not done this yet at night. I realized we had only arrived yesterday, although it felt like a week. I realized I had no firm plans yet for Thanksgiving, that my only accomplishment, so far, was changing hotels and hiring a babysitter.

At night, the streets of the Gothic Quarter were enchantingly lit, and we drifted in and out of the side streets off the Carrer Montcada until it seemed like we had seen the same stone building with arches twice before. I assured him we were not lost. I wasn't going to use the map function on my phone, out of respect for Carmen. Somewhere on the Callar Mirallers I stepped into a dark wine bar and asked about the gallery and he pointed me further down the street and said it was on the left. We were now thirty minutes late, so, for Spain, more or less on time.

We walked further for a while until I saw them, a double-take: Monica's paintings shone through the windows in the night because they had hung them all prominently at the entrance of the gallery. Carmen kissed us both as before and Ferran gave a bear hug. There were already forty or so people milling about, a table of tapas and cheese and some flutes of cava.

## Reflections in the Corn Field

### Digital Photography by Meagan Fedigan



"This is so incredible, Carmen. Thank you so much," I said. Colin stuck out his hand to shake hers.

"You are most welcome. We thank you for bringing such special art into our lives. Ferran says there is a dealer here from Madrid who wants to meet you and ask about more pieces. This way, this way! Colin, look there is Jordi, go say hi!"

Carmen escorted me through the crowd, put a cava in my hand, and took me to the dealer, an older Catalan man living in Madrid who, indeed asked about more pieces. After brief discussion, he said he wanted Monica's triptych, at least what I

had described to him, sight unseen. Ariadna materialized. She looked too beautiful. I put the cava in her hand, she nodded and took a sip. The dealer thanked me and handed me a card. When he left, Ariadna and I made small talk together.

"Colin is very sweet. Jordi talked about him all afternoon."

"That's good to hear. He doesn't have many friends."

"Yet."

"You are right, yet."

"You should say something, to everyone, a big toast," she said, her feline composure intact, the flute upright.

"I suppose you are right again. Carmen didn't need to do this for us. By the way, your English is superb."

"I studied in the U.S."

"Where?"

"NYU."

"That's a fine school. You weren't tempted to stay in New York?"

"Honestly, Spanish men are more fun."

"You are right again. Amazing."

"I was kidding."

"I know."

She tried to pass me the flute but I demurred.

"Not to drink, but to clink the glass for your speech."

"Ah, yes," I said. "Would you do it for me?"

When the group heard the crystal ringing, they quieted and turned to us. Colin was towards the back by the Miró with Jordi. I looked out and saw Ferran with his arm around Carmen. Ariadna stepped away and joined the group. I had given talks and speeches to rooms bigger than this before, but I didn't know what to say now. I started by thanking people, Carmen and Ferran, the guests who came to view the art, and I wanted to thank many others too, Sally, Margaret, Hawthorne, even Dr. Weller, but I kept my remarks crisp and tight, only enough to say that tomorrow was Thanksgiving, and that indeed a gathering this grand and wonderful is cause for celebration. And I looked around and held the silence to acknowledge the way Monica was hung all around the room.

Colin was the first to clap. Then the room exploded with applause. Random friends of Carmen's and Ferran's came to embrace me and to tell me what I had done was a beautiful thing. Guests, the men and the women, were cupping my cheek in their hands, touching my shoulders, and I saw her canvasas in the perfect tungsten light and heard her telling me to go, go and live my life again, and I saw our boy and his new friend laughing about something and I turned and looked for Ariadna.

She took my hand and said goodnight and that she would like to see us both tomorrow for lunch.

The walk back to the hotel was chilly, cold enough that I bought Colin an FC Barca windbreaker at a kiosk along the way. He said he was still hungry. We went inside the cafe beside the hotel where all the men were drinking sherry and watching tonight's match. I ordered us bowls of Catalan sausage and white beans. The beans were creamy and oily with the butifarra and Colin ate his entire plate and half of mine. We walked up the stairs to our room and as soon as I unlocked the door, it flew open from the wind; I had inadvertently left the balcony doors open, and now there was street noise and a few leaves blowing around the room. I shut the doors and Colin went into the bathroom to get ready for bed.

I checked my phone one last time. There was another text from Arnaud, the same message as before, sent an hour ago. I watched the car lights circle La Plaza Catalunya and heard Colin singing in the bathroom, factored in the cost of missing out on more of this life, then wrote a very polite email declining the position and hit send.

I sat in the balcony chair for a while, not smoking, watching a man far down the promenade juggle swords, then fire, then both. In my news browser, I spotted a story on the fight for Mosul, and Trump was surging in the head to head polls with Clinton. I clicked through to the New York Times, but their paywall blocked me from the news. I typed the search term into Google and saw fresh stories on all the wires. The brutality of ISIS was unthinkable, medieval but worse because this was 2016. The article said the militant leader had tied eight boys to flagpoles—these were boys under 12, allegedly from the resistance, whatever that could mean in bomb-battered Syria—and killed them with a chainsaw. I scrolled to keep reading but the story was interrupted by a mobile ad about summer barbeque grills, offered at a thirty percent discount. It was horrific. I closed out of the browser.

I thought about a sabbatical from not just the news but also my device. I had read an article recently about a man in London who'd given up his phone altogether, tossed it in the Thames for good. He was doing fine, the piece suggested. I wasn't fine so I certainly couldn't do worse. Maybe the time away from my

digital life would rewire my brain, let the neurons reset, unwind me in the warm bath of life. I took a deep breath and inhaled the night. There was no sensible place to toss a cellphone. Did you burn it to fry the connections? I thought it was exceedingly unnecessary to walk all the way to the Mediterranean to dispense with a phone I could just as easily crush or throw out the window, but then it felt more like a true genuflection to the idea of abandoning the phone to turn its demise into a ritual, to summon Colin for one more round, to lead him out of the hotel late at night, through the Gothic maze of alleys, and back down to the Maremagnum, which is exactly what I did. There was just enough height due to the elevated boardwalk, enough people because of the nightclubs that it didn't look odd to see a man stooped over the rails dropping a hand-sized computer into the sea of antiquity.

It was gone as soon as it hit the water. I felt oddly neutral, disarmed and dismembered, human alas.

"Why did you throw it away, daddy?" Colin said.

"It had nothing left to say."

The moonlight across his face made him look older, hardened features that would likely emerge when he was a teenager. He was a handsome boy, indeed, every part his mother. There lives the dearest freshness deep down inside of things. He was not going to be any trouble for me, this old soul. I sensed that he was trying to decode what I had said. I sensed all his formulated questions, one by one, float out of his head into the over-touristed night, unasked, as we just sauntered from the waterfront past the Cristobal Colon statue, pointing to the New World in the wrong direction, and then we strolled Las Ramblas and watched the street performers, the Moroccan acrobats, the mute wrinkled Catalans who painted silhouettes for twenty euro, and we bought FC Barca hats because we didn't really know any of the player names on the jerseys.

And we waded into the Barrio Gotico for what seemed like eternity, losing ourselves and finding new ways to get to the same place, which, tonight, was the Plaça de Santa Maria del Mar. There was a crowd in the great square as an acoustic guitarist was playing under a palm tree, sending notes up to the balconies and into the sky.

The doors were wide open. He took my hand and we walked inside; the nave was tall and wide, like something hollowed out, Catalan Gothic. Visitors were lighting votives, others kneeling in deep prayer in the back rows, some sat hands folded, gazing up at the crucifix. I could still hear the music; I looked back and the doors were still open wide.

I felt my pockets for coins. I pulled out a handful and there in the pile was something I did not expect, a coin with a perfect circle in the middle, an old 25 cent peseta. How did this get here? They had phased out the peseta in 2002. It fit neatly

between my thumb and forefinger, had a certain ancient heft. There must be currency like this still in circulation, ending up in tourists' pockets, expatriating the country, purchases made partially with non-money. I checked to see if there were more. This was it.

Colin said he wanted to light a candle. I handed him a euro. He looked at it and made a comment, knelt at the flickering altar, and I handed him a stick that he used to steal fire from another candle and he lit his own. There were yellow tulips out of season at the base at the feet of the Virgin Mary, the only icon in her namesake church.

When he finally rose, he had that look you see in people long immersed in prayer. His cheeks were flushed. I fixed his hair and handed him his jacket. We stepped back into the cool night.

There was a little wine bar across the square, a scattering of tables outside and a dark interior, jazz playing, those big champagne bowls they use in France, so many Grand Crus and Reservas on sale by the glass.

We crossed the square and I handed Colin a fist of coins and he sprinkled some in the hat where the man was playing Jeux Interdits. There was a congregation of admirers, mostly locals. I found us a table and sat down and looked up at the moon.

I ordered a glass of Ribera del Duero, a Fanta de naranja for Colin. He poured the soda into his glass. The wine was amazing, smooth and concentrated. They gave us a little dish of chorizo and marcona almonds. We ate them quickly and the waiter brought a second dish. We sat for a while saying nothing, just the arpeggio of the guitar and the crisp night. Every time I sipped the wine it seemed to change. Like people too. We decline in the wrong climate, improve in others. I thought about Monica hanging in the La Ciutat Vella under tungsten light. She would have been proud of me. I thought about Hawthorne in Brioni commanding his new forces, and I wished him well as some stray gauzy clouds drifted across the face of the white full moon. I thought about how capturing these past few weeks on paper might anthologize a defining period of my life. I had time. The cathedral bells rang to mark the new hour from somewhere deep in the maze of Barcelona's lamp-lit magic streets.

And as I drank the last sip I thought about another but knew better. I got the bill and left a good tip of euros along with the peseta coin. Colin wandered over to the guitarist and sat down in the crowd. He turned and looked at me as if to ask if this was okay. I stood up to walk over. It was fine, I nodded. There was nowhere else to go.



# Ernie

## Morgan Currier

It was five o'clock. Time to close up shop. Ernie didn't have a shop; he had a cheap metal desk in a 1970s-era office. But 'close up shop' sounded better. More exciting than what in reality was simply putting his current client folders away, tidying up his notes, and shutting down his out-dated computer. Ernie sighed. Nothing very exciting about that. Nothing exciting about a Tuesday night, either. Home, dinner for himself, feed his rabbit, watch Jeopardy, and then sleep.

Sighing again, he packed up the briefcase he carried in the hope that it lent a bit of mystery to his appearance. Ernie thought that he needed to make a change in his life. He needed to go out and meet people. Meet someone. Meet a girl. As he walked to the train station he pictured himself going into a club after work, dressed in a navy blue suit instead of his daily brown one, nodding casually to acquaintances as he passed on his way to the bar. He would sit at the bar and order...

Ernie's imagination stalled out at this point. He wasn't sure what would be appropriate to order in this situation. Something sophisticated? Something relaxed? He became flustered over not knowing this detail and obsessed about it during the train ride home.

He opened the door to his one bedroom apartment and called out, "I'm home!" There was no answer, which was what he expected. The light on his phone was blinking. He pressed the message button and listened to a voice tell him his rent was due. The next message was from his sister, asking him to call her back.

Ernie pulled a carrot and lettuce from his refrigerator and brought them over to his rabbit's cage. The door to the cage was standing open, and Pumpkin was missing. He spent an hour looking around the tiny apartment and finally found where she had chewed through the beige painted drywall.

He called his sister before bed. "Even my rabbit doesn't want to stay with me."

"I'm sure your bunny will be back. She probably got bored sitting in her cage all day."

He pulled at the black spirally cord of the telephone. "Do you think I'm boring?"

Nancy's sigh came through the line. "Yes."

Ernie's shoulders drooped.

"But I'm boring, too. Mom and dad were boring. We don't exactly come from an exciting line."

"But mom and dad were happy. You're happy. Why can't I be happy?"

Another pause on her end of the line. "I don't know, sweetie. Maybe you're like your bunny and you need a change."

He was still thinking about Nancy's suggestion when his little grey alarm clock went off at six o'clock. Instead of springing out of bed immediately with the first beep, Ernie lay on his bed for an extra minute, counting down the seconds. He swung his legs over the left side instead of the right, ignored his tan slippers and walked barefoot across the cold floor to his closet and removed the striped purple socks his sister had given him

## Museum of Work and Culture 2 Digital Photography by Carol Dandrade





as a joke for his birthday. Today was going to be his day of change.

Ernie arrived late to work. He forced himself to stay in the lobby of the office building pretending to read the paper. At seven minutes past his usual arrival time he couldn't bear it any longer and rushed up the three flights of stairs, almost sprinting to his desk. His boss was just leaving as Ernie arrived, breathing hard.

"I'm sorry...Mr. Stevens..." Ernie said. He slid his chair out from under his desk and sat down. His boss was quiet as Ernie straightened up his already spotless area. When there was only silence, Ernie finally glanced up at the younger man.

His boss was looking down at him, holding his ever-present clipboard and striking a black ink pen against it. Tap. Tap. Tap.

Ernie cringed with each tap. "I'm very sorry, sir. My...uh..." his imagination stalled.

"There's no reason, ever" Mr. Hallen, 'to be late.' Words to live by from Mr. John Lennon."

"Noel Gallagher," Ernie said quietly.

"What?"

"John Lennon didn't say that. Noel Gallagher did. 'There's no reason, ever, to be late. Or Early.' That was Noel Gallagher."

Mr. Stevens was shaking his head. "Are you implying that I'm wrong, Mr. Hallen?"

"No sir. Well, on the quote you are, but—"

"I really did not expect this from you, Mr. Hallen. First you're late. And now you're talking back to me. After all this company has done for you. After all the chances I've given you. I have to say that I am. Greatly. Disappointed." He began scratching notes on the clipboard.

Ernie flushed and cleared his throat. "Excuse me, sir. But what chances are you speaking of? I have been a model employee for the eight years I've worked here."

The pen slapped against the clipboard and Ernie was being glared at through thick, black-rimmed glasses. Like a bug. "That's exactly the kind of attitude that will continue to get you in trouble, Mr. Hallen. And I don't keep troublemakers in my company!"

Mr. Stevens stared at Ernie another moment and then stalked off, the pen and clipboard weathering his wrath.

Ernie's shoulders slumped as he dug out his folders. He had never in his life been reprimanded before, and he wasn't sure how to take it. He stared dully at the file in front of him, thinking over what just happened and what had been said. He'd been labeled as a troublemaker. And then the realization hit him. Today really was different.

The rest of the day flew by for Ernie. He used blue ink instead of black, he removed the "very respectfully" from his signature block, only to reinsert the "respectfully" ten minutes later. He went to a street side vendor for lunch and made the man give him a new hotdog without the onions, and then he left ten minutes past his regular departure time.

On the way home, Ernie got off the train two stops before his usual one. He had no idea where he was or what he was going to do. Instead of walking in the direction that would take him to his apartment he walked the other way. The sidewalks and streets were becoming crowded with people heading home from work, but instead of letting himself get jostled around, Ernie squared his shoulders and bulld his way through.

A few blocks from the train stop Ernie found a small bar. It was the type of charming building he'd always imagined that he'd frequent but was never actually brave enough to do so. Today, Ernie opened the old, heavy wooden door and entered the dimly lit establishment. There were maybe a dozen people inside, spread out among a few small wooden tables and the old scarred up bar. He started to panic a little when he couldn't decide if he should sit at one of the little tables or go to the bar but before he could talk himself out of staying, Ernie

## Millville Lock, Digital Photography by Bob Evans



drew a deep breath, threw back his shoulders and approached the bar.

A big man with a bushy brown beard was drying glasses behind the bar. He glanced at Ernie and then returned his focus to what he was doing. Ernie waited a moment before clearing his throat. When that didn't get a response he drew a breath and in his best imitation of his boss, he asked, "Do you serve drinks at this place, or just do the dishes?"

The bearded man looked up again and studied Ernie for a few seconds. "Sure, we serve drinks. What do you want?"

"A double whiskey. On the rocks."

The bartender pulled a bottle from under the bar, threw some ice in a glass and then filled it from the bottle. He pushed the whiskey towards Ernie. "Fourteen dollars."

Ernie pulled a carefully crumpled twenty-dollar bill from his pocket, tossed it on the bar and said, "Keep it." He took a big gulp of the whiskey and promptly spit it back in the glass, coughing and choking.

The bartender raised his eyebrows, smiled smugly as he pocketed the twenty and went back to drying glasses.

Ernie took his glass and turned his back on the man, surveying the other customers. Almost everyone there was with someone else. Three men sat laughing together at one table. Two young women were sitting at another, one woman looking sad and the other patting her arm. A man and woman sat together at a third table, both looking uncomfortable. Finally Ernie turned his attention to a woman sitting alone. She was looking down at her cell phone, a half-empty glass close at hand. Ernie watched her for a few minutes and when no one sat down with her he picked up his glass of whiskey and walked to her table.

"Do you mind if I sit down?" Ernie asked.

The woman looked up from her phone. "Why?"

Ernie tried to think fast but came up with nothing. He looked at the woman, looked quickly around the bar, and then his gaze fell to the glass in his hand. "Because I brought you a drink." He placed the glass on the table in front of her.

"Thanks," the woman said. She gave Ernie a tight smile and picked up the glass. As she brought it toward her mouth Ernie realized what he had done and in a panic he tried to grab the glass away from her. Instead he knocked it into her face. Amber liquid went everywhere and the glass hit the woman

in the nose. Red blood was soon mixed with the whiskey and the woman cried out.

"Oh my God! I'm so sorry!" Ernie said, reaching to help her. Instead, he was hauled backwards by strong hands.

"What the hell did you do?" The bartender shoved Ernie away from the woman and he fell into the neighboring table where the three men sat. A pitcher and three glasses of beer slid across the surface, and one of the glasses tipped over, pouring beer into the laps of the men. The pitcher slid completely off the table and crashed to the floor. One of the men grabbed Ernie and the last thing he saw was a fist flying toward his face.

A man named Carl drove Ernie home from the bar. During the drive Ernie learned that Carl had been there on a first date, which hadn't gone well so he'd been glad to have an excuse to end the night early. Carl shook Ernie's hand and said, "Keep it," when Ernie tried to give back his bright green handkerchief. As he drove off, he added, "Remember, trivia night on Thursday!" Ernie sighed as he fit his key into the lock of the front door. He smelled horrible, his shirt was blood splattered, his suit was ruined, and he was home much later than he liked to be.

He slowly walked up the five flights of stairs and started down the long hallway to his apartment. He was almost there when he was startled out of his mope by a woman's voice.

"Hey! Watch where you're going!"

Ernie looked up. And up. In front of him was a tall woman with blue spiky hair, a nose ring, and more tattoos than he could count. She was juggling an armful of papers and a roll of tape. Some of the papers slipped from her hold.

## Detail, Digital Photography by Meagan Fedigan





### **Bloom, Digital Photography by Meagan Fedigan**

"Blast! Could you grab those for me please?" she asked.

Ernie set his briefcase down and scooped up the papers, turning them over as he did so. On the front was a large colored picture of Pumpkin with "Is This Your Bunny?" across the top of the paper.

Ernie looked up at the woman. "You found Pumpkin?"

The woman looked at the paper. "Is that her name? I've been calling her Minerva."

Ernie smiled, delighted with the name. "Because she escapes," he said.

The woman grinned back. "Yeah. I can't believe you got it. She's a little devil! I can't keep her in the cage I set up for her." She looked at the paper again. "I've had a good time hanging out with her. She makes my apartment feel," she shrugged, "warmer." She looked back at Ernie, studying him. "You know what I mean?"

Ernie studied her back, looking past the blue hair and colorful pictures that covered her lower arms and saw someone who was maybe a bit lonely. Just like he was. "I think I do." He tucked the papers under one arm with the green handkerchief and then picked up his briefcase. "I need to go get cleaned up. Is it okay to come get my bunny after?"

She nodded. "Yeah, of course. I'm in 506."

"Oh, I thought that was Mrs. Edward's apartment?"

"I just moved in a few weeks ago, but I don't know anything about the person who lived there before me. Honestly, it's been sort of a hellish month so she could still be living there and I may not notice. I'm just trying to get my life back on track..." She shook her head. "Sorry, you don't need to know all of that. Anyway, yes, just come by when you're ready."

"Thank you. And thank you for looking after Minerva," Ernie said.

The woman turned to go to her apartment but came back after a few steps. "Hey, you look like you've had a pretty lousy night. I was just about to make some tea. Would you like to have some with me and tell me about it?"

Ernie smiled, liking how the light above her highlighted the blue in her hair. "Yes. I would like that very much."

# Sylvia's Shoes

Barbara Taylor

My friend Sylvia and I wear the same size shoe. She hates to return merchandise and money is no object to her, so when she ordered a pair of expensive European shoes and UPS delivered two instead, I got the extra pair. These shoes are designed to mold the arches and correct aching backs. They work wonders with spider veins, too. At first, the round soles made me feel as if I was on the deck of a boat in a storm. After adjusting to the sensation, it was more like making my way over cobblestones in spite of the fact I was on a totally flat surface. It was impossible to slump while attempting to walk. If I didn't stand up straight, there was the possibility of falling forward and crashing face down onto the pavement.

The shoes are gray and have wide straps across the top like fabric handles on a cooler. Manmade materials, of course. No animals lose their lives in the manufacturing process. I stopped wearing attractive American shoes and wore these exclusively; without socks in summer and with socks in winter. They project a sporty appearance at dressy occasions, hence the idea of another pair with plain black straps I could glamorize with tights. The investment seemed worth it. A sporty pair for everyday and a nicer pair for evening.

"Surely anyone can find \$250 somewhere if the health of their feet is at stake," Sylvia reasoned, baffled as to why these shoes can't be found in every store in the U.S.

Nevertheless, venues are limited, and this leads me to the problem of getting a proper fitting. This step is crucial. Balance is completely thrown off with dangerous, improperly-sized shoes. It's also a fact our feet get larger and wider with age, as do our noses. One must be constantly vigilant about fluctuations in size.

After some research, I located not one but two purveyors in a city about fifty miles away. This trip wasn't out of the question for such amazing shoes. I tried calling the store to inquire if they had the particular shoe style in stock, but I kept getting the answering machine. Finally, I had to take my chances and go, because there was an important event to attend—a gallery opening for Sylvia, the generous person who had given me the original pair of sporty shoes. It was an exhibition of photographs she had taken of her children during an especially dreadful teenage period. I was counted on to be supportive and bring an appetizer in the "cheese group." Sylvia

was depending on me as a friend to dress appropriately and tastefully. She planned to wear a cut velvet dress that showed off her body to its best advantage. The least I could do was appear in a pair of black shoes instead of my everyday gray sporty ones.

Due to my busy schedule, I was forced to travel for the shoes the day of the opening. I didn't foresee a problem with this plan. It would take around two hours to get there and back. I knew exactly what I wanted. Searching was unnecessary, leaving plenty of time to return home, pick up the cheese ball I'd made, and get myself to the opening.

The ride was uneventful except for cloudy skies. I found the store right away, but there was no predicting the complication of a time-consuming shoe salesman who just couldn't seem to stop talking. He related his entire life history including where he had lived and when, details of his failed marriage, and his ten-year-old daughter's inability to keep quiet. Meanwhile he kept urging me to try on a variety of shoes, including a pair that made a rude sound when I walked in them. He insisted the solution was orthopedic insoles and talcum powder. I wasn't interested in buying these shoes, but he powdered and wrapped my feet anyway to prove he had all the answers.

It seemed my feet had, in fact, expanded somewhat. The size I needed wasn't available in that particular store. I now knew the reason I had been unsuccessful in getting through to the man by phone to check on this very thing. He ignored ringing telephones. Imagine my distress over the thought I'd driven there for nothing. The salesman agreed to check at the second store and, miracle of miracles, they had my size. One of the clerks would run right over and deliver them.

"I'm in a hurry," I said, interrupting some comment the salesman was making that had nothing to do with my shoes. "I have an event to attend this evening."

"Don't worry. Your shoes will be here shortly. Now, where was I?"

I went into a kind of fugue while being bombarded by countless subjects of no interest to me. It crossed my mind the talking might never end; that I'd be trapped forever in this time warp as my sanity unraveled. My final memory would be of the shoe salesman's voice and the smell of garlic. People like him often think odorless garlic capsules are beneficial but, as we all know only too well, they aren't really odorless. I don't understand why stream of consciousness talkers and garlic are connected, but this does appear to be the case. By the time the delivery person arrived in a turquoise Toyota, it was no mystery to me why otherwise non-violent people are driven to murder. The salesman carefully removed the shoes from



the box, chatting on as he smoothed the tissue paper in slow motion.

"We must move along," I said, a bit testily, glancing at the clock on the wall.

"Oh, yes," he said. "My wife—my ex-wife, I should say—had a thing about moving things along. 'Move it along, will you? Move it along.' Ha ha."

The shoes felt fine. But there was a rather large bright red emblem on the sides. This was distracting and unwanted. My other shoes didn't have the emblem.

"It's something new," he said. "But if you can't live with it, there's always a black Sharpie marker. I think I have one around here someplace."

"The red thing can't be cut off?"

"Oh, no. It's sewn on there. It's not going anywhere."

I sighed. Why couldn't things be like I wanted from the beginning? Why was there always some little nagging detail to contend with? Constant, unrelenting compromise was a fixture in my life.

"Never mind, they'll do," I said. "I'll wear them out." I stepped over the shoe boxes stacked around my chair and headed to the counter so there was no doubt he needed to get busy and ring me up without further delay. Instead he strolled leisurely over to the door.

"Wow," he said. "Look at that rain, will you? And the traffic. Maybe you should wait until it lets up. Safety first. I'll get us some coffee."

"No, thank you. I must go." The water was coming down in sheets, all right. At this rate, there would be no time to stop at home before the opening to collect the cheese ball. "Is there a place around here that sells cheese balls?" I asked, digging around in my purse for a credit card.

"Cheese balls?" he repeated. "You mean those crunchy doodle things in a bag?"

"No. Cheese spread in the shape of a ball with nuts stuck all over it," I said in an irritated way. Really. Who doesn't know what a cheese ball is?

"What kind of cheese?" he asked.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," I said. "Cheddar."

"Cheddar," he said, stopping what he was doing to think about it. "Well, let's see. There's a Food Lion down the street here. They have cheddar cheese. I know that for a fact because--"

"There's no gourmet market nearby? A Dean and DeLuca, perhaps?"

"We have the Food Lion. And the Quickie Mart," he said, as if I should be satisfied with these choices.

"All right, then," I said, jingling my keys to remind him once again I was in a rush. Sylvia had given me her extra pair of \$250 shoes and I'd be bringing some commercially prepared cheese ball to her opening. A substandard Food Lion cheese ball. Maybe seeing the new special shoes I'd gone to such trouble to get would make up for this faux pas.

Sure enough, after finally getting out of the shoe store and into the Food Lion, the one cheese ball they had was shocking pink. "Port Wine Cheese Ball," the wrapper said along with a yellow sticker with "1/2 OFF!" I swallowed my pride, paid for it and got on the road.

The drive back turned me into a nervous wreck. Visibility was terrible. There was no way I would make the opening in time to hear Sylvia's speech. I would miss hearing my name called as one of her primary inspirations and the applause for my selfless friendship. What a blow. The rain kept pouring down. When I finally reached the vicinity of the gallery it was dark and there was no parking whatsoever. I hadn't counted on this. After circling the block several times, I was forced to park on the street some distance away. I fluffed my hair in the rearview mirror and applied my lipstick. The cheese ball and my umbrella were enough to keep track of, so I left my purse under the seat.

First, I stepped out of the car into an ankle-deep puddle. Then I leaped a little too fast in my effort to get into shallower waters. The momentum sent me hydroplaning on the new shiny soles and I landed on top of the cheese ball, breaking the wrapper and grinding the cheese into the front of my blouse. I was relieved to hear the sound of running footsteps. Someone was coming to my rescue, I thought. A knight in shining armor.

"Give me all your valuables," a deep voice said above my head.

"What?" I panted. I couldn't believe my ears.

"I said, give me all your valuables, lady," he repeated. I looked up. Here was a man wearing aviator sunglasses at night and

a green army-type jacket. I held out my empty hands to show I didn't have a purse. I didn't even have a cheese ball anymore.

He sniffed the air and eyed my blouse as if I'd thrown up all over myself. "You must have somethin'," he said, stepping back. "Jewelry, maybe."

I wasn't wearing jewelry. All I had were my shoes. I lifted a foot.

"What are those?" he asked, peering down.

"Very expensive, difficult to find shoes." I sniffed.

"They got round soles," he said. "When I was in 'Nam we used to make sandals like that out of old truck tires."

"These are \$250 shoes! They're brand new!"

The mugger stood there for a minute, deep in thought. "Okay," he said. "I guess I'll take 'em. Whatever. But hurry up, will ya? There's some place I gotta be."

I unfastened the straps and handed him the shoes. He shook his head, muttered something unflattering, and wandered down a side street. There wasn't a soul in sight. Everyone was at the gallery opening, I guessed. I couldn't make an

appearance in such a condition; soaked, with pink cheese all over my clothes and no shoes.

I was a little surprised not to be jolted awake early the next morning by an angry call from Sylvia. Only after a long hot shower, two cups of coffee, and the newspaper did I collect myself for a confrontation. Knowing her, she was bound to have taken it personally that I didn't show up for the reception. Then there was the scathing review of her photography exhibit that appeared in the local section. The article featured a photo of her son wearing green makeup; an unfortunate choice that made me flinch. Poor Sylvia.

Once I explained about the black shoes, the pink cheese ball, and the robbery, we'd probably both have a good cry and move on. I was even prepared to say the reviewer must be childless and therefore didn't understand the first thing about the unconditional love I assume her photos are meant to convey, yet the phone never rang. Wasn't my friend the least bit concerned about what had happened to me? I could have been in intensive care for all she knew.

I've left a number of messages for Sylvia this week, outlining everything. After several days of talking to a machine, I pointed out that it was really her gift of the gray sporty shoes that started the whole chain of events and I would appreciate an apology. I expect to hear back from her any time now.

## Hartford Avenue Stone Bridge, Digital Photography by Dennis Smith



# I Know Days

Sam Muller

I know days. They are easy to know, from one sunrise to the next.

But weeks, months and years are just words.

Sometimes she says, 'I'll be away for a week,' or 'I'll bring you a new dress next month.' Yesterday she said, 'So, you are seventeen. One more year...'

I know there is a world out there, beyond this desert; a world of hamlets and cities, forests and mountains, rivers and seas. I know it is not natural to live in a tower, alone, except when she visits me. I know about lovers and friends, parents and children.

I know these from the books she brings me. The books have pictures. What the words tell, the pictures show. Without them I wouldn't know a tree from a bush, a horse from a donkey, or a prince from a monster.

Sometimes she tells me stories, her voice dripping like warm honey. I listen, as still as the cushioned chairs, the oval table, the two-door wardrobe and the canopied bed. At those times, I'm free of this world of scorching sand. At those times I'm far away, frolicking in a crystal clear river, walking in an evergreen glade or twirling in a glittering ballroom.

When I listen to her stories, I don't feel lonely.

When I listen to her stories, I'm almost happy.

\*\*

The crows keep me company when she is away. I talk to them. They listen, their bright eyes fixed on me. I think they can understand me.

I try to make my conversations interesting. But I know so little to talk about.

The crows caw back. I wish I could understand them. Their conversations must be interesting.

They have seen the world.

\*\*

Sleeping or awake I have just one dream.

One morning the dream comes true.

It begins as a dot and ends as a prince on horseback. He dismounts and looks up at my window. His curls glimmer like a peacock's tail in the morning sunlight.

I smile. I beckon.

He smiles back. My body tingles. I'm filled with longings I can't fathom.

A cloud of gold breaks the sameness of the searing white sky. She is here, gold hair cascading down her back, gold skin glowing in sunlight, gold dress clinging.

I don't watch. I close the window and sit on the bed, my eyes shut, my hands clamped on my ears.

His last cry pierces the wooden shutters and seeps through my trembling fingers.

\*\*

Others come. Sometimes she is here when they arrive. Sometimes she is not. But she always gets here before they can do anything more than dismount and wave.

Soon, when I see a rider I don't smile. I weep.

\*\*

One day she is late.

This prince has a rope. He throws it at me. Words are not necessary. I know what to do. I catch it and tie it to a bedpost.

When he reaches the window I give him my hand to help him in.

Human touch is unfamiliar and exhilarating, light as a feather, tight as a claw. I laugh, whenever my mouth is free.

After a while I stop laughing.

He is too strong for me, but not for her.

He screams, the sound growing distant as he gets closer to the ground.

I busy myself, changing my torn dress, redoing my tumbled hair.



Before she leaves, she pats my cheek with an icy finger. It's the first time she has touched me. Her touch is nothing like his. It can't be. She is not human.

Later, much later, I look down. He is at the bottom, a tiny unmoving heap.

\*\*

The crows are chatty, more than usual. They fly in and out of the room and hop about on the furniture, cawing endlessly. It is as if they are telling me something important.

I listen and listen, trying to make sense of their chatter. But I can't understand them.

\*\*

He comes with the next dawn.

There is no horse. He doesn't need one. His strides are longer than a horse's gallop. He covers the distance between the horizon and the tower far faster than any prince on horseback.

His head almost reaches my window. His red eyes are lidless; his teeth are knife sharp; his tail is a whip; his horns gleam in the morning sun.

He doesn't wave at me or try to come in; just stands with his back to the tower and calls to her.

She arrives, a vision in molten gold.

The whole long day they battle. Lightning is their weapon. I sit at my window watching.

It ends as the sun sets. She vanishes in a bleeding cloud. He remains, a mountain cracked and eroded.

He peeps through the window. I cower. The crows caw and caw but I ignore them.

'The crows begged me to free you.' His voice rattles the furniture. 'I know I am fearsome. But you have no reason to fear me.' I shudder.

He says 'Without her spell of renewal, the tower will collapse. But you will die long before that, from hunger and thirst.'

I gather some of my clothes into a bundle and go to the window. He picks me up with a wounded hand and sets me on a bruised shoulder.

The crows caw a song. They are happy.

I wish I can be.

\*\*

Days drift into weeks, weeks into months. I live in his castle in the midst of a forest. The doors are open. But I have nowhere to go.

He tells me I'm free.

But freedom is just a word, the way weeks, months and years were, once.

He tells me there's a world out there.

But world is just a word, the way weeks, months and years were, once.

He says nothing about her, even though I ask.

One day I recall a story she told me, about a prince who was turned into a monster by an evil magician, and rescued by the love of a beautiful maiden.

Hope lights a fire in my heart. I smile and twirl round the room.

When he arrives, I run to him and ask him whether he is an enchanted prince.

## Passin' Wind! Digital Photography by Linda Nelson



He looks at me with pity in his blood red eyes and says no, this was the way he was born.

Hope dies. My heart is a heap of ashes.

\*\*

One day a prince arrives on a white steed, as easy on the eye as the prettiest picture in the books she gave me.

I leave a letter behind, explaining where I'm going and with whom. Words are hard to find and two sentences are all I can manage.

\*\*

I marry my prince. I have a son.

But there is a hole in my life, a hole made of things I don't know and things I didn't do.

I don't know who my parents are, why she took me away from them, for what purpose she brought me up in that tower.

I never thanked him for freeing me.

The hole began as a pinprick, the day I left with my prince. It grew as I frolicked in a crystal clear river with my prince, walked in an evergreen glade with my prince and danced in a glittering ballroom with my prince. It grew as I watched my son at play, as I tried out a new dress or opened an old book, as I lay by my husband at night and listened to his gentle snores.

I know it will consume me one day.

\*\*

I sit by the window holding my first grandson in my lap.

A man lumbers by, a man on stilts, his feet precariously placed on two poles. Children trail after him, their awed faces staring at the fifteen feet tall figure in red, blue and yellow satin.

He reminds me of me.

I've never stood on my own feet, never had my feet on the ground, never experienced life on earth.

I've been a prisoner and a queen, a wife, a mother and a grandmother. Yet I don't know who I am.

A murder of crows arrives. They perch on the balustrade, cawing.

I think I know what they are trying to tell me.

\*\*

This time I write no letters. I say what I have to say to my husband and my son. The words are hard to find and harder to voice, but I manage.

At first they are horrified and angry. At first they feel bewildered and betrayed. Then they begin to understand. Or perhaps they don't understand. Perhaps they just accept my decision because they love me too much to stand in my way.

As I leave, they wave and they weep.

I weep too, and almost turn back. But I know this is something I have to do. I might not find the answer I seek. But seek I must.

The hole within me stops growing as my feet touch the ground.

\*\*

It's a different road than any I've traveled.

I learn how to care for myself. It is either that, or die.

All my life someone was responsible for me – she who kept me a prisoner in a tower, he who rescued me from it and my husband who gave me all the things I craved. On the road, I am responsible for myself. I have to prepare my own food, find my own shelter and ensure my own protection. There are no maids, no beds, no guards.

I reach his castle after three weeks of riding.

It is empty. It has been empty for a long time.

I walk all over, looking for some sign of what happened to him. Eventually I reach the room which had been mine, once.

As I turn to leave, I catch a reflection in the mirror. I walk up to it and a stranger stares at me.

I touch my face. My skin is no longer soft. It has been toughened by the sun and the rain. My hair looks as if it has been chopped by a butcher.

Long hair and journeys don't go together. That was one of the first discoveries I made. I had to cut it off with the short sword I brought for my protection.

Learning how to handle a sword had been my husband's only condition, when I told him of my decision. My son taught me.

The day I beat him was the day he and his father became resigned to my journey.

\*\*

I reach her tower after three months of riding.

It lies in a heap of ruins.

My past is beyond my reach. It is buried under those stones.

I dismount and start looking through the rubble, for answers. Sand is all I find.

The crows come, a murder of them. They circle my head three times, cawing urgently, before flying away.

I mount my horse around and ride after them.

\*\*

Once it had been an oasis. Now the spring is dry, the grass is dead and the trees are withering.

Between the parched spring and the leafless trees is a stone house, a round house. It's as if someone tried to create a tower and gave up.

The crows perch on the roof, cawing.

I dismount. The stone house has a single door. It opens when I push it.

The house is a single room, dark, and dank. It reeks of dust and disuse.

I call out, but hear only the echo of my own voice.

I turn to leave.

The crows stop me. They fly in and out of the room and hop about on the furniture, cawing endlessly.

I think I know what they are telling me.

I stand still. The crows fall silent.

I don't call out. I listen.

The sound is so tiny, it might have been the wind, or an insect, or my imagination. But I know it is not any of those.

I look under the oval table, behind the cushioned chairs, inside the two-door wardrobe.

There is nothing.

I peep under the canopied bed. And I see the small shape, huddled into a ball.

As my eyes become used to the darkness, the shape turns into a child, then a girl.

I smile at her. 'I am Rampiana.'

The girl stares, eyes saucer-like in her thin face. 'That is my name.'

'I know.' I take a deep breath. 'Where is she?'

The other Rampiana shakes her head. 'She said she'll be back in a week. I don't know if a week has gone. I know only days.'

\*\*

The girl is hungry and thirsty. I give her my water and my food. She eats and drinks in silence until nothing is left.

'Will you come with me,' I ask.

'Where?' she asks.

'Home,' I answer

Her little face crowds with emotions. I know them all.

I wait. My heart is an overworked bellow.

She smiles and gives me her hand.

The hole inside me vanishes.

I have found the answer, though not the one I sought.

I looked for words. I found a life.

\*\*

We leave.

The crows caw a song.

They are happy.

So am I.



# March On, Sisters, March On

Lori Hetherington

Sarah Marie heard her sisters whispering. Whispers always meant something interesting: a boy, a reprimand, an improper deed and, as the youngest among her siblings, a chance to learn about the world.

Mildred and Georgia were sitting on the porch swing, its rhythmic squeaking covering—or at least they thought—the secret words they shared. “women...” “march...” “suffragettes...” Sarah Marie felt her skin tingle.

“Go away,” demanded Georgia. She was the oldest of the Harris girls and so she thought she could be as nasty and bossy as she wanted. “Go play with your dolls or something! Can’t you see we’re talking? Besides, you aren’t invited!” Mildred giggled.

Sometimes, well, actually most of the time, Sarah Marie hated being the youngest. It meant she had to sit at home with Miss Duncan, the cook, when there was a dance and rarely got a new dress, the type that had never been worn. Mother tried to convince her that a dress was “new” because she had never worn it, but that kind of reasoning didn’t make sense to Sarah Marie. However, there was one advantage to being the youngest: Papa let her sit on his lap, and none of the others were so lucky.

It was 1919 and the horror of the Great War was slowly fading. People said the Wilson twins, who lived up the road, had shell shock, but Sarah Marie thought they were just sad and afraid. Peter’s hands shook when he held his hymnal and Eugene’s blue eyes hid behind lids that hung so low he never looked anybody straight on. She couldn’t really remember how they were before, when they had come to help Papa with the horses. “Mighty fine boys,” he had told Mr. Wilson, at the end of the day when the two new foals were born. Good thing her oldest brother Raymond had a short leg, otherwise he might be sad and afraid too.

As after dinner slid into twilight, Sarah Marie sat on the wrought iron bench under the great oak tree, thinking. If she wanted to find out more about her sisters’ secret, she would have to be clever and catch one of them in a moment of distraction. Mildred was nine years older and since Arthur Polk had put a ring on her finger she was sometimes even nice to her little sister. Georgia was getting married at the end of the month and all she talked about was her fiancé Thomas Miller,

her dress, the flowers, the music, and the house where the newlyweds would live in the city.

The moon eventually rose above the eastern horizon, signaling it was time to go to bed. The elder Harris girls giggled as they made their way upstairs while Mother stood in the glow at the screen door, waiting. Sarah Marie took slow, miniscule steps across the lawn, waiting for the usual reprimand and anticipating the tiny thrill: power, albeit short-lived, over a grownup.

Mildred was waiting for her in their shared bedroom. “Here,” she said holding the hairbrush out to her younger sister. “Don’t stop until I count to one hundred.” Mildred’s hair was pretty, but it wasn’t worth any special mention, and besides it only reached her waist. Not like her own: loose and unbraided she could sit on it, and Mother said it was as glossy, and the color as rich as their prize mare Felicity’s coat. At least she was the best in one thing, Sarah Marie reminded herself.

“It’s only two more weeks till the wedding,” she said as she pulled the brush through a tangle in Mildred’s hair.

“Ouch! Fifteen, sixteen...”

“It’s so exciting and Mother says there are so many things still left to do.”

“Uh-huh. Thirty-one, thirty-two...”

Seizing the moment of distraction, but without undue enthusiasm that might attract suspicion, Sarah Marie asked, “Are you going to the march with Arthur?” If there was a social event, Mildred and Arthur were inseparable.

“Don’t be a ninny. Arthur would never march with the Suffragettes, and Papa will be furious when he finds out I’m marching. Don’t you say anything to him! If you do, I won’t let you be the flower girl when Arthur and I get married!”

Sarah Marie kept brushing, long strokes that started when she felt the contact of the bristles with Mildred’s scalp and finished when the brush pulled all the way through and her wrist twisted and lifted. “Cross my heart,” she promised.

“They say that Mrs. Herbert—she’s the Suffragette who’s coming from Washington to lead the march—they say she knows Alice Paul personally! Mother thinks I’m going to spend the morning with Louise, to help her embroider a tablecloth to sell at the Harvest Bazaar... Anyway, they’re saying that the politicians are beginning to capitulate and we can’t give up now. It’s only fair that women have the same right as men, even if Papa says the next thing women will want is to wear

trousers like their husbands," Mildred huffed. "Oh, you made me lose count... I'll start again from fifty, and don't ask any more questions."

The morning air was brisk, although the elms and sycamores in the park behind the courthouse hadn't yet begun to turn yellow and brown. The first women to arrive in the park were the organizers and the ladies from the local chapter of the suffrage association. They unfurled banners and excitedly pinned sashes proclaiming their slogans across their bosoms, and the volume of their voices grew as more and more women appeared.

There were men standing on the steps at the front of the courthouse and they could hear the excited chatter behind the building with white columns. Police Chief Mulligan and twenty of his men—their broad-chests glimmering with rows of brass buttons caught in the early morning sunlight, each of them holding a billy club in one hand—were ready to "keep order." The mayor's instructions had been unequivocal. "Redlands is not Washington or New York and this town shall not appear in the headlines of the state's newspapers over something as ridiculous as women wanting to cast ballots."

As the women's numbers swelled, so did the curious who lined the streets. Men who'd come to jeer or to report back to husbands, fathers, brothers; women who were afraid to show their support by marching. Children skipped and laughed and played their games: a parade was a joyful event, wasn't it?

Finally, the sound of a distant drum announced the beginning of the march and everyone turned to stare up the street. The first figure to round the corner of Main Street and Pine, just past the courthouse, was Liberty. Really it was Mrs. Burnham, the greengrocer's wife, dressed in a gown of carefully draped fabric with a crown on her head and carrying a make-believe torch, and when the crowd recognized her the rumble of voices sounded like thunder, the kind that starts low, building then fading as the seconds pass. Behind her, in neatly organized rows, the Suffragettes moved as a single unit, chanting as one, "VOTES FOR WOMEN!" There were too many of them to count with a glance and they progressed—solemn, determined, orderly—with eyes focused forward, locked on a point in the future that was their destination.

The policemen now stood firm in front of City Hall, the women's goal on that particular day. The order was to keep the Suffragettes from occupying the mayor's office, using whatever means necessary. As the protesters approached, Police Chief Mulligan stepped forward. "Sorry ladies, but we can't allow you to go inside."

Mrs. Burnham, emboldened by her role as Liberty, didn't hesitate. "Oh, for goodness sake, Timothy, step out of my way!" And she swung at him with her papier-mâché torch.

Everyone gasped.

Timothy Mulligan's face flamed red and the other officers stormed forward while the Suffragettes tried to push their way into Town Hall. The skirmish bordered on the humorous for those who were not involved or who did not hold a strong opinion. In other words, only for the children.

Later that afternoon, while Sarah Marie was watching her father repair one of the horse buggies, a Redlands policeman on a bicycle rode through the Harris family gate. When he got closer, she could see it was John Taylor, who went to their church like a normal man, never in his uniform. His face was unsmiling.

"Hello Robert. You'd better come with me into town. Your daughter Mildred's been arrested in the Suffragette march."

Sarah Marie wanted to ask what a suffragette was, but she could tell from her father's expression that it would be better to wait.

Many, many seasons passed—nearly an entire lifetime. It was autumn again. Sarah Marie's hair had long lost its gloss and it had been decades since she'd received compliments on her tresses. On this particular morning, she was scheduled among the first group to take the van from the retirement home to the polling station and she was waiting for the volunteer driver. Her hands trembled more than usual as she checked her purse to be certain her voter registration card was tucked inside with her ID. If only Mildred could be casting her vote in this presidential election... But Mildred had died in a car accident thirty years before and had had few chances to vote for women in political offices, even if she supported every female candidate that came along, not that there were many.

"Good morning, ma'am. You ready?" asked the driver as he gripped the handles on her wheelchair and gently eased it down the ramp.

"Yes, I am, young man. Wild horses couldn't keep me from voting in this election. Never thought I'd see this day!" she chuckled. "And I want to be sure to remember it. It's 2016, isn't it?"

"It surely is, ma'am. What an honor to have the oldest county resident in my vehicle! One hundred and five, isn't that right?"

Sarah Marie didn't respond, but the driver paid little heed, he was used to old folks who didn't always hear so well.

The driver made several trips back and forth between the van and the lobby of the retirement home, loading the other passengers one by one. As soon as everyone's wheelchair was secured, he started the motor, turned up the radio, and pulled out into traffic. Ten minutes later he parked in the disabled spot in front of the polling station and proceeded to unload in reverse order.

"Here we are ma'am," he announced brightly as he ducked inside the van to wheel out the last of the elderly voters. But Sarah Marie didn't respond. He placed his hand gently on her shoulder, feeling the bird-like bones beneath her pink cardigan. "Ma'am...?" he asked, leaning around so she could see him.

Sarah Marie's eyes were closed and her thin lips, etched with deep wrinkles, remained curved in an eternal, but satisfied smile.

### **Alien World of Water, Digital Photography by Mark Berkery**

**"Taking her time to adjust and recover from the recent struggle in an alien world of water, rescued from certain death."**





## A Fresh Perspective

**Matthew Roy Davey**

Part of Liam was glad when they found out the trees were to be cut down. Claire had been bored for a long time and the protest group would give her something to do. It was a small strip of land in front of their house, wasteland really, where buddleia and bushes had been allowed to grow, flourishing until the houses on the other side were obscured by foliage.

Claire was incandescent when she found out houses were going to be built on the plot. She wanted the council to designate it as a nature reserve. She loved to sit and stare out of their bedroom window, watching the birds she said. She even kept some binoculars on her dressing table.

A bloke on the other side of the reserve, Stephen, set up the campaign group and Claire pitched in. They'd meet most evenings to plan their resistance and write letters, but it was all in vain.

Liam left the house one morning in June with trees towering over the road. When he got home that evening they were gone. Their road, he thought, was much airier, the sky bigger.

When he came through the door Claire didn't answer his greeting so he went up to their bedroom. She wasn't there either. The room seemed filled with light. He walked to the window and stared out. Where the trees had been was a barren strip of gouged earth. For the first time in years he could see the houses on the far side. In fact he could see Stephen's house. Peering closer he realised he could even see into Stephen's bedroom. Something was happening. He picked up the binoculars.

Time seemed to stop and Liam had to remember to keep breathing. The binoculars wobbled. No wonder the campaign had failed.

## Petrichor

**Marylou Mansfield**

I found myself,  
my true self,  
standing in the parting clouds,  
pushed aside by an eager sun,  
after long awaited showers.

The pant of green leaves  
cupped with errant water,  
nursed a parched earth  
back to health.  
I drank as well.

Memories sifted in my mind  
as panned gold.  
The nuggets were there,  
rinsed afresh, glimmering,  
awaiting my fingers  
to pluck them to my heart.

I took my time,  
savoring each flit of detail,  
bringing me closer  
to my own cursum perficio.  
I so love these moments,  
floating between filtered mist  
and seeking sun,  
quenching the thirst of my recollections.

## Vignette

**David Edwards**

Hot, humid August. A small garden in full bloom: leafy cabbages, green tomatoes, carrots, two rows of spindly corn, several drooping Giant Sunflowers. At the garden's border a crude cardboard sign. Upon it, even more crudely, in crayon the words "ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING!" Fortunately, for their plumpness and epicurean ambitions, rabbits cannot read... and even if they could, would surely not understand, nor appreciate adverbial admonitions.

# The Unspoken Rule

**Stella James**

My mama lived by three simple rules and merely twelve hours after her death, I had broken them all. But what mama don't know can't hurt her.

1. Don't leave the house without your face and hair done.

I tried in vain to fix my short wavy hair, but it poofed out with the humidity the summer morning brought, and I sighed as I moved on to picking out the dried clumps of mascara clinging to my eyelashes. Cody would probably think nothing of me sneaking out, would probably be grateful if anything. No awkward morning after conversation or forced silent breakfast. I was doing us both a favor.

2. Never have more than two drinks on a date.

Could last night even be considered a date? Me, stumbling into his apartment after a few shots and three martinis at the bar doesn't exactly constitute a date, does it? More like a pity outing. Oh, I'll throw you a bone in this screwed up fling we have going on cause your mom just died, and at least I'll definitely get laid. Yes, that's a much more accurate description of last night's events.

Even if we had been on a date, I probably would have downed three car bombs just to ease my nerves around him. The daunting question of what we are or better yet, so obviously not, hangs over my head like a storm cloud that only copious amounts of alcohol can fix.

3. Never, not ever, turn to a man to solve your problems. Who wants to marry a hot mess?

I stumbled out of my car, trying to lock it in various ways over my head with my clicker. The strap of my dress eased off my shoulder with every step I took, and one of my heels fell halfway off. I landed on the couch ungracefully, half my body flopped over the side and blew a strand of hair out of my face. What is the definition of a hot mess again? Surely it's not the girl who had to throw her underwear away in the girls' bathroom because she was so drunk that she actually peed herself before making it to the toilet.

I flopped over, covering my eyes with my arm to block out the unwanted sunlight, silently lamenting over my lack of curtains. At least Cody thought I was trying to be sexy when I ditched the underwear. He doesn't have to know the truth. If he figured

out a fraction of my truth, he'd be running for the hills. Wouldn't he? He might get off on crazy and if so, I'm the perfect brand.

It doesn't change the fact that when mama died, he was the first one I called. My family was already there and my friends would have asked too many questions. He had all the right answers though. "Meet me for a drink, usual place," he had said. No sympathies, no questions. But I just had to pour my heart out. And cried. Deep wretched ugly crying that stained his crisp white sheets from all the mascara running down my face. So attractive, I know. I was a hot mess. Like look it up and there's my picture.

I glanced at the clock on the cable box and sighed, noting I could still taste the vodka on my breath. Not a good sign to be breathing vodka right now. I can't go to work since they gave me the next two weeks off to grieve. It may be a poorly disguised two-week notice. I can't blame them. I've been a mess ever since they gave mama a month left to live.

I thought I fooled everyone around me, hiding my pain behind different glasses at the bar. I'm beginning to think otherwise. My job doesn't want me there, Cody doesn't want me the way I need him to, and my friends pry too much. I'm an island. A sloppy, drunk, hot mess of an island. And now I'm a motherless island.

I can't believe she's really gone. What the hell do I do now? Should I call dad? Maybe he already knew. Maybe someone more responsible called him, like my younger sister who would be proud to follow mama's rules to the grave. The grave. Her grave. I need some more vodka.

You're using me as a crutch. That's the last thing Cody said to me last night. I took a shot for each word. I wasn't using him as a crutch, he was staying with me out of pity. We were so happy those first few weeks of dating before mama was given her life sentence. When did I let everything slip?

"You've been coming home smelling like vodka for a month now. You need to stop and help me plan the funeral." Sophie moved the bottle of vodka away from me. I should've figured she'd come over, and I regret ever giving her a key. I laid my head on the cool surface of the table and snorted.

"Let Melanie plan it. She's the oldest and will change whatever we do anyways." I reached out for the bottle but the thud to the floor told me I wasn't getting it back anytime soon.

"She is, but we have to agree on certain things. She wants her buried in the cream dress." I stared at the painting on the wall, admiring how the people in it looked beautiful even sideways.

"Mama never left the house without her makeup and hair done. She even left this world looking perfect." I pressed my forehead to the table, nose smushed against the wood.

"We will have a luncheon after to celebrate her life and mourn with loved ones," Sophie continued, ignoring my observation.

"Mama would want Chardonnay available. But only two glasses per guest. Mama never drank more than two glasses." Too bad I did.

"I think mama broke that rule when she conceived you," Sophie huffed, clearly unimpressed with my rambling. "Everything is taking place in Nevada."

My head shot up then, and I glared at my little sister. She obviously saved this for last, knowing it would upset me. She stared back at me, seeming bored. "Mama hated Nevada."

"Daddy is there. They already bought the plots before they divorced. It will be cheaper on us." She didn't even look at me, pinching the bridge of her nose as if willing me away.

"Mama doesn't let some man solve her problems." Her chair clattered against the tile as she shot up, slamming her hands against the table.

"Mama isn't here to solve her own problem, now is she? We're left to solve it, and Daddy isn't just some man." Her hands played out on the table in front of her as if she was prepared to pounce at any moment. I leaned away from her and scratched at an imaginary spot on the table.

"Cody says I use him as a crutch." It came out like word vomit and maybe, just maybe, real vomit would follow.

"Maybe you are." She shrugged, frozen in place as if pouncing on me was still a viable option. I gave up on the nonexistent smudge and hugged myself around my middle.

"I feel so empty. She told me she loved me every day."

"She told me that too, but I didn't make vodka my best friend over it." She crossed her arms, a sign that she may be holding herself back from strangling me. "Daddy loves you too."

"Not like she did." The words come out broken, the syllables choking me. No one can love me like mama did. No one. I suddenly felt something crushing my shoulders and let out a startled yelp. I relaxed as Sophie's tears hit my shoulder.

"You're so damn stupid sometimes. Selfish and stupid," she cried out. And I cried too, wrapping my hands around her arms in a vice like grip. We clung to each other, and when she finally sat down across from me, she finished the vodka with me.

"There was a fourth rule you know. An unspoken one." We were sprawled out on the carpet, holding hands and watching the fan spin overhead.

"Oh?" It's the only syllable I could have managed at that point.

"Love is hard, so when things get tough, love harder." My mind wrapped around the words, having to repeat them to get them straight.

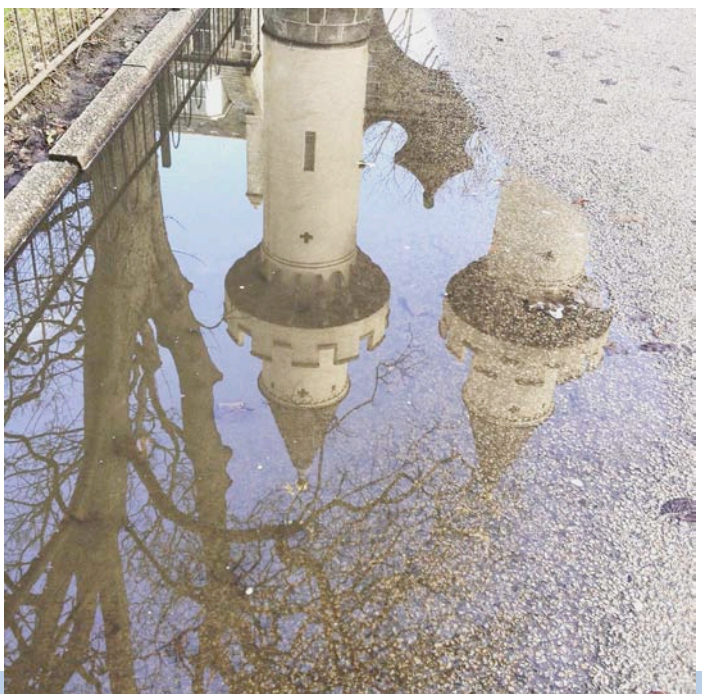
"She loved us hard right up to the end," I declared with a nod, the room moving with me. I felt Sophie turn to me, and I turned to face her as well.

"I love you so hard." She smiled, her eyes bleary and red.

"I do too," I agreed, the tears leaking out of their own volition. Cody doesn't love me so hard. In fact, I've broken all my mama's rules due to him. No more. I'm gonna do mama proud.

And even if I do end up breaking a rule or two, there's one rule I will swear to live by. The unspoken rule. I'm gonna love the hell out of my life and if someone can't love hard with me, then sayonara to them. My mama lived by three simple rules and twenty-four hours later, I've realized the unspoken one is the only one that mattered.

## Through the Looking Puddle Digital Photography by Kate Hodges



# The Tea Room

Charlotte Lewis

It's been well over forty-five years since Leota and I went to Neiman-Marcus the first time. As I think back on it, that visit may have been the glue that kept our friendship so strong.

We met in church though neither of us were very religious. She said it was a social outlet; I said I was there for the music. Whatever it was, we met at church. Both of us had just come through an uncomfortable divorce. Not mean or anything, just awkward. It's hard in your mid-thirties to admit you married the wrong man.

About once a month, we met for dinner at the new Black Angus. Well, it was new to our town then but may have been around a few years elsewhere. They didn't take reservations but would put your name on a "list". Leota and I decided to create a "list" name rather than use either of our names. A syllable from her last name, one from mine, a Y for class, and we became Unsley. We used it often through the next several decades.

Back to Neiman-Marcus. One evening my phone rang; it was Leota. "Have you seen the commercials on Channel Two? Neiman-Marcus. I didn't know they advertised."

I changed channels. In a few minutes there was a Neiman-Marcus commercial. Really slick. Of course, with Christmas coming and your store is one of the priciest in town, maybe you should advertise. But what had struck Leota was the tea room they referred to in the commercial. "Visit the tea room and unwind after you've visited the holiday fairyland known as Neiman-Marcus" or something like that. Did I know they had a tea room?

"You must be kidding, Leota. I've never been in a Neiman-Marcus let alone had tea there."

"Why don't we do that Saturday? You're not working and neither am I."

She called for reservations for two, Unsley, Twelve-thirty Saturday afternoon. It was the first Saturday of December so there wasn't the Christmas push yet.

We didn't live that far from Beverly Hills but gave ourselves an hour to get there. I drove; she navigated. "Oh, look, some sign

maker is going to be in trouble. Look how he spelled Ro-Day-O Drive - R-o-d-e-o." She cracked me up. But she did guide me to the dedicated Neiman-Marcus parking lot with no incident.

As neither of us had ever been there, and it had a reputation, we dressed up. What did we know about how rich people dress to go shopping? Nada. Heels, hose, simple dark dresses. No hats and that should have been a dead giveaway to any Neiman-Marcus employee that we were imposters. Every woman over thirty, or looked over thirty, wore a hat. Honest to god. However, we were evidently presentable as the doorman opened the large glass and gold front door for us.

Yes. A doorman. He didn't actually bow but I had the impression he might have. "Good afternoon, Ladies. Welcome to Neiman-Marcus, Beverly Hills."

Leota asked for directions to the tea room and he pointed straight ahead. "The elevator is directly down this aisle. Enjoy lunch."

Leota and I looked around. Neiman Marcus was definitely a fairyland. As we thought back on it later it was decorated for the holidays all right - probably Hanukah more than Christmas as there was so much silver and blue. It was beautiful.

The elevator looked as though it was going to heaven. Gold columns on either side. The doors were so shiny, I could see my reflection. I pushed the call button and a plush car arrived in a matter of seconds. Of course, there was an elevator operator. He smiled broadly and asked, "Floor?"

Neither of us knew. Leota said, "Tea Room."

"Ah, Fifth Floor."

When the elevator car stopped, the operator said, "Enjoy your lunch. Welcome to Neiman-Marcus, Beverly Hills."

The tea room was to our immediate left. It was open to the main floor though there were sheer curtains hanging as a wall. Everything was pink in the tea room. A maitre'd was behind a slim podium. He seemed to accept us as belonging there. "Reservation?"

"Yes, Unsley."

The man was all smiles. I felt he thought he knew us; he was that cordial. His small name tag was gold and black, quite discreet, and said "Henri." Nothing else, just his name. He led us to a table by a large window draped in pink sheers. We could see the street below.



A waitress, in pink, was right behind him with two menus and water on a tray. "Would you like a few minutes to decide?" We nodded.

The menu was simple enough. We had no idea what this lunch was going to cost. Lunch at a local restaurant would cost about six dollars so we figured Neiman-Marcus would be double that. We were pleasantly surprised.

There were not a great many choices. Tea and crumpets. No fooling. The Sandwich Tea which included choice of soup or salad, a sandwich, dessert and tea. The Salad Tea which was three salads (chicken, potato, and garden) with crackers, dessert and tea. High Tea - choice of soup or salad, veal, pork, or lamb chop, potato and vegetable sides, dessert and tea. Or, just Dessert and tea.

The Sandwich Tea sounded best to us both. We were surprised at the seven dollar price. Salad tea was eight and High Tea was nine. Tea and crumpets and tea and dessert were both three fifty. Leota ordered the soup - choice of tomato bisque or lobster bisque - with her Sandwich tea. She'd never had lobster bisque. Perfect opportunity to try it. I ordered the salad - choice of cucumber or tomato - I took tomato.

The sandwiches were surprises. White bread without crusts, cut corner to corner both ways. Each sandwich was four triangles. They came, on a little tray on a pedestal, standing on edge. Surprise? Each triangle was a different filling - chicken salad, egg salad, ham salad, and creamed cheese with pimentos. Dessert was half a dozen petit fours between us. Also on a little pedestal tray. The tea was superb and was Neiman-Marcus' own blend. As we left we saw we could buy it in bulk, as well as purchase their own designer defuser.

Leota observed that perhaps this is what the inside of a harem looks like. Everything was pink. A lot of draped and swagged fabric. Beautifully framed landscapes on the few bare walls. My first thought had been bordello. Guess Leota was classier than I. In the middle of the dining area was a decorated Christmas tree. Six or seven feet tall was our guess. It was done in pink twinkle lights and lots of tinsel. Beautiful and unusual. It did have a fairyland appearance.

The waitress checked our tea pot a couple of times. She was very attentive. Perhaps we were well enough dressed even without hats. Though we didn't see any other bare heads in the tea room. She brought the check after determining we needed nothing more.

As she put the small tray with the check on the table she leaned closer to us. "We closed Mrs. Unsley's account after

we learned of her passing. Henri says that if you had intended to sign for lunch today, he will gladly reopen it for you."

We looked at each other. What? Thankfully she misread our surprise. "Mrs. Unsley used to speak of her daughters-in-law often. When the reservation came in, we were so pleased. She came the first and third Saturday of every month and for you to come on the first Saturday, well, we just thought it was so wonderful of you to remember her this way."

Leota and I were beyond shock at this point. I swallowed and managed to keep my voice even. "Thank you so much for the consideration. No. We didn't intend to sign for lunch today. Please tell Henri his gesture is most appreciated."

She left the check between us. We looked at each other in amazement. What had just happened here? We each put down a ten dollar bill. That might constitute over tipping but we

## Val d'Orcia Italy Digital Photography by Carol Dandrade



felt it best to pay and run. Henri thanked us for coming as we exited into the main store.

A ladies' lounge was next to the restaurant. Once inside we shook our heads. I wanted to laugh as it seemed so outrageous. Our made up name actually belonged to someone. Someone with money; someone who ate at the Tea Room at Neiman-Marcus on a regular basis. Someone who was dead. Well, that was probably a good thing. We had not indicated to anyone we were related to the late Mrs. Unsley so we didn't feel guilty. But we were still shocked.

It took us a few minutes to gain total composure. We walked through Neiman-Marcus. It was decorated like a fairyland - the

entire store. Well, the three floors that we explored were. It also sported fairyland prices on beautiful merchandise.

On the way home, we did laugh. This was just too Twilight Zone to believe.

We decided we would continue to use our made up name. And we did, for the next several years. However, it was well over ten years before we visited Neiman-Marcus, Beverly Hills, again.

### **Resilience, Digital Photography by Mark Berkery**

**"It is always striking there is no sign of personality, no suffering 'me', but a natural character of resilience."**





# Dry

## Fred Cheney

Dry. We'd seen dry before, some of us. Billy Latimer had traveled around, following the crops and the fruit. He said he had been to the southwest, and he told about farmers going to war with their neighbors over damming creeks or putting larger diameter pipes into the irrigation canals. One place where he was picking fruit, the owners suddenly started paying by the weight because the bushel that year weighed 20% less than the year before.

But around here, well, dry like this was something real new to our sleepy town in the woods. Dry, in this town, might mean someone would set up a sprinkler to keep a lawn green throughout August. Dry might mean someone with a dug well might have to drive to town to fill five-gallon buckets with water from the spigot outside the town office for a short time. Dry might mean that some family gardens would be a bit slower and less productive than usual. But there was nothing usual about this dry spell.

All of the things that went with a dry spell arrived two months early, and it kept getting worse. Seemed like everybody had arrived at their own personal rationing plans. First thing to go were green lawns, and then bountiful family gardens. Everybody had their own plan. I know we did in our family; we talked about it lots.

The woods, which came right up to town and our backyard, were always like a lush carpet of green, but they were not lush and they were not rich in color this year. The green was muted like it had been dusted with something gray, something like gunpowder. And gunpowder made a good comparison because you could tell the woods were explosive when you were in them. Walking through, you just felt the dry under your feet and in your nostrils. You could feel the threat of fire on your skin. It made you aware and uncomfortable, sort of like a rough wool shirt.

Warnings of the danger were part of every weather report. But just like the voluntary rationing, people came to their own forest protection strategies; they put off burning brush piles, they no longer flicked their cigarettes out their car windows, they took extra care with the grill.

Early August, a front moved in, and the sky darkened. After so many weeks of dry, the humid air felt almost like rain on your skin. Clouds hung low, they seemed to scrape the treetops, and everyone kept waiting for the sky to open up. The weather

held like that for four days, and while we got reports of rain from places as close as 30 miles, nothing fell here, on us.

The last morning of it dawned as gray as ashes, but by eleven o'clock the sun was back fiercer than ever before. It beat down on the earth as though determined to dry up any moisture that might have stayed behind, and it kept hot right into the night. About midnight, all of us in town heard the sounds of dry lightning. It rumbled along, never giving up a sharp crash, only loud enough to wake the restless, which included all of us. Poppa got out of bed and went outside, walked around the house to see the direction, the closeness, the strength. When he came back in, Momma was up, coffee made, and sitting at the kitchen table ready to make plans. Poppa looked at me leaning on the doorway. At least he couldn't tell me to go back to bed because I had school the next day.

I went outside and headed downtown. People were shuffling along in the streets, talking low to one another under the glow of streetlights that seemed to be sores on the night. Gradually we all made our way to the fire station where the news of any lightning strike would come in first. A few cars came in from outside of town. The fire chief, who had been sleeping in his office for weeks, pushed the window open wide by the short-wave radio, so we would hear any reports that came in.

Talking in low tones, men pushed gravel back and forth with the toes of their boots with a concentration you usually see when they're pushing hash browns to the side of their breakfast plate. Conversations were about what was packed and what wasn't. No matter how impractical, you took what couldn't be replaced. The wedding dress that had served three generations went, the flat-screen TV stayed. And, what to do about the stock? No good answer there, just open the barn doors and the pens, and hope for the best.

About 4:30 the crowd broke up, the way smoke does when given enough space. Nobody was sleepy; they were just giving in to a situation that wouldn't move, wouldn't change. At some deep and hidden level, I think they all would welcome a lightning strike and a fire. I know I felt that way. The wait would be over, and there would be a real enemy to fight.

I walked home, the kitchen light was still on. Through the window, I could see Momma fetching another cup of coffee. She was looking over her shoulder and asking Poppa something as she filled his mug, and he was shaking his head real slow from side to side as he was sitting down at the table.

Poppa sat down real heavy, real tired.

# I Love You, Nikita

A.M. Reitlinger

"I love you, Nikita," Mama says and I nod. She's been saying it to me over the last days so often that I merely nod now. She knows I love her too, I am sure.

The sun is burning down while we are walking through the bushes and, once more, I wonder where the magic land is hidden.

Mama said there would be a magic land with lush fields, houses as high as the sky and nice people who were always friendly. I cannot see any lush fields so far, only dusty dirt tracks, dried out bushes and the bright sun burning down our necks. We've been walking for hours and I am starting to think this trip isn't really fun. I remember the trips we did before and we never walked this far and Mama wasn't so quickly annoyed with me. She's holding my hand, almost yanking me, dragging my tired feet through the sand. Trips used to be to the park or the woods even – or to Nana – but this one is weird. Sometimes we have to crawl through the dust and even though I thought it was fun in the beginning, I don't like the taste of dust anymore. It itches my throat and we are out of water. Sometimes we have to hide behind the bushes – especially when cars come – and Mama said it was like hide-and-seek, but no one ever finds us, so I don't get the point of the game. My feet also hurt and Mama said she would carry me, but I am too big. I disagree, Papa always carried me on his shoulders.

I miss Papa. I asked Mama if he would be in the magic land, but she said even the houses as high as the sky couldn't reach the place Papa had gone.

We're not alone on this trip, which is odd. Other people are walking alongside us and I don't know any of them. Mama doesn't seem to like them either, but we are still always staying together. I don't get it.

I wake from the screaming. Confused, I sit up and feel Mama's arms around me. "I am here, Nikita, I am here", she mumbles and presses me to her chest. I am confused, so I start to cry. There are bright lights blinding me and then a man steps up to us. Mama flinches when he touches her arm. He is clad in green and it is difficult to make out his whole body in the dark, but we follow him into a big building which is brightly lit, so I have to squint my eyes and shield them for a while because I am still a little tired.

Mama still presses me to her chest which is completely wet, I am not sure if it's her or my tears. Mine have dried because nothing really bad can happen when Mama is with me. More men in green await at the centre of the weird house which has dirty walls and very high ceilings. I almost cannot see them, but it is probably better so because ugly pipes run them up and down and I wonder why it cannot be like in our little house. You didn't see pipes there.

Another man approaches us and Mama presses me harder to her. I cannot really breathe anymore, but I don't want to talk in front of the green men, so I rest my head on Mama's shoulder. She smells of dust and sweat but underneath I can smell Mama and I doze off a little.

Mama puts me down on the floor and I take a deep breath. She grabs me by the shoulders and looks into my eyes intensively.

"Listen, Nikita," she says. "Stay here, I will be back, I won't be gone long." Her voice wavers and I cling to her because I don't want her to go.

"It will be alright," she says and kisses me. Mama-kisses. I kiss her back and want to pull myself up when I hug her, but she puts my arms down again.

"I will be back in a minute," she says and then she vanishes into one of the many doors and I am left alone with one of the green men.

The man takes me by the arm and gestures to sit down. I am rather scared now and I don't know when Mama will be back, so I do as I am told. When I look into the green man's face, I see that he is very white actually. His skin is almost translucent and I can see blue veins puckering underneath his throat. With his extremely white teeth, he flashes me a smile and I try to smile too, but my eyes dart around, looking for Mama. I cannot see her in the crowd.

"Mama?" I say to the man and he answers with weird sounds I don't understand. Probably he is sick or something. Mama said some people are "special" or "disabled" and not so good at things other people can easily do. I feel sorry for him, it must be hard not to be understood.

"Mama?" I say again, a bit more clearly now. His smile falters the tiniest bit and he sighs. Once more he makes these sounds and I decide not to speak to him.

Probably he is embarrassed.

He talks to me in his weird sounds but I don't listen. I just want my Mama. I forgot which door she went through, so I keep checking all of them to make sure she doesn't leave without



me. I also need to pee, but Mama has to take me to the toilet. I cannot go on my own yet, which is sometimes embarrassing because Maria already can, but then she is three quarters of a year older than me.

I realise I had fallen asleep when I wake up. Quickly, I look around but Mama is still not there, neither is the green man. I am in a bed now, it smells like the bed I had to sleep in when Mama took me to the hospital when I had my tonsils removed. I don't like it. I want Mama.

I start crying her name and when the door opens, I am so relieved. Only that the woman coming in is not Mama, it is a strange woman. Like the man, she is very white and her blue eyes pierce right through me.

"Everything is OK now," she says and I am happy that she can speak normally, but I still don't believe her.

"Mama," I repeat again and the woman sits down next to me, stroking my hair.

"You are safe now," she whispers with a smile, but I disagree. Mama is not here and so I cry anew.

The white woman comforts me, but I don't like her. Again and again, I scream for Mama, but either she doesn't hear me, or she doesn't care about me anymore. Probably it was because I hadn't told her enough that I loved her, probably I should have crawled better or ducked deeper under the bushes. I don't know what I did wrong for Mama not wanting to see me anymore, but I wish she would take me away from this place. I hate it here. I want to go home and so I wait on my bed, watching the door, waiting for Mama to come back.

### **Sunflower, Digital Photography by Christine Catalano**

**"Mature sunflowers face east, hence this backlit, high-key exposure."**



# Zugunruhe\*

**Kimberly Behre Kenna**

Last time we hiked this late in the season, Charly begged to go home. She said the wind had teeth.

"Mom, why do birds fly south in the winter?" My six-year-old shoved her hands in her pockets and kicked her way through the leaves.

"They sense cold coming on so they travel to their warm winter homes."

"Is Lyla in her winter home?"

My arms goose-bumped. "Lyla's somewhere safe. We can't see her but we will someday." Charly hugged my leg, her cold fingers numbing my thoughts. I rubbed her back. "We should head home."

She took off running. "No! We haven't gotten to the rock yet."

I jogged to catch up, handed her my gloves. "Please, put these on."

"I'm not cold, Mom."

I held up her hand. "Your fingers are blue." She stuck her thumb in her mouth and sucked at it, a habit I thought she'd outgrown. "Look, the big rock is right there." I pointed. "We'll climb it and eat our cookies at the top, then head home before we turn into ice people." I rubbed her hands.

"Stop, you're hurting me, Mommy!" She pulled away and stomped off.

I followed. The smell of decaying leaves spun a dizzy image. The arm of a red corduroy jacket. A leg twisted impossibly at the base of an oak tree. I squeezed my eyes shut, exhaling the memory.

"Look what I found!" I opened my eyes to see Charly teetering at the top of the rock, arms extended toward the sky, shaking something red. "It's Lyla's!" she said.

I clutched my throat and knelt down. The damp earth bled into my knees. The wind shook me senseless.

"What's wrong, Mom?" She leaned toward the edge, peering down at me.

I leapt up and ran to the rock where she stood eight feet above me. "Move back from the ledge!" I cried. Her eyes bantered and she lowered her hands, a curtain containing my horror.

Charly sat down, dangled her legs over the precipice, and dropped the red thing. It floated to my feet. There was a hole in the thumb where Lyla had bitten through. Twin girls, twinned habits. I held the stiff wool to my nose.

Then there she was at my side, a soft surprise. Charly took the mitten from me and held it to her own nose. "Lyla smelled like apples but this just smells like moss."

I sat down at the base of the rock and Charly flopped into my lap. I stuck my index finger through the hole in the mitten, held it up and wiggled it like a puppet. "I may smell like moss but

## Waters Farm Digital Photography by Meagan Fedigan





I'm still me," I said in a pitched voice. "Just because you don't see me doesn't mean I wasn't here."

Charly held up her index finger and addressed mine. "I don't feel good, Lyla. I need you to come home." She frowned and bit her lip.

I let my hand drop to my lap, opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out.

"My head hurts, Mama. Like the time I fell off my bike and got stitches." She touched the scar on her forehead.

I held up my mitten hand. "You're cold like your Mama says," my finger admonished. "You need to listen to her."

"Mama doesn't listen to herself sometimes," her finger retorted.

I pulled off the mitten. "Now what do you mean by that?"

Her finger stood tall and she put it on my nose. "Your nose is red and runny but all you do is tell Charly that she's cold."

"That's what mothers are for. To keep their children warm."

"How you going to keep me warm if you can't keep yourself warm?"

I breathed in the life of her. I breathed out Lyla.

Charly fished around in my pocket for the zip lock bag of oatmeal cookies. She pulled one out, broke off a piece and fed it to me. She nibbled the rest. I chewed and chewed. I'd have to masticate it to nothingness to get it down. Like memories, I finally swallowed.

Charly stuck her chubby fist into the mitten and opened and closed it, addressing me in a squeaky voice. "Mama, I miss you and Charly. I wish you two would visit me at my winter home."

The cookie had left a rank film in my mouth and I held back a gag.

She put her hand back in her lap. "Now you look blue, Mama."

One of the last orange leaves floated into my lap as if it had finally given in to winter. "Sometimes, Charly, sadness holds me so tight it's hard to breathe."

She looked at me for a long time, then she smoothed my hair back from my forehead.

"Something's holding me tight too." She held her index finger to her ear, listened, and nodded. "It's Lyla. And she says she loves us."

Charly looped her arms around my neck, her mittened hand like a bird on my shoulder. I stood and settled her on my hip. Then we took off, wind at our back, down the trail toward our warm winter home.

\*Zugunruhe: The restlessness of birds before migration

## Todi Italy Digital Photography by Carol Dandrade



# A Fair Game

**Beth O'Brien**

The box the game had come in had long since been torn beyond use, so she carried the pieces in a carrier bag. The board was scuffed at the corners from too much travelling without a box, and he carried it tucked under one arm.

Climbing in single file up the three steps to the seating area, both of them gripped tightly onto the handrail with their free hand. They proceeded together into the far corner of the cafe and the man sat down at the end of a long table, nodding good morning to the coffee-sipping, early-starters already seated at the other end.

'Tea?' asked Tabitha, as she handed Albert the carrier bag. He had already unfolded the board and now began setting up the pieces in their proper places.

'Yes please Tabs - two sugars?' The last two words came out as a question because he knew Tabitha was better at following his doctor's instructions than he was, and apparently having diabetes meant you shouldn't have sugar in your tea.

'One,' she compromised with a smile and he chuckled over his minor victory as she went to order their drinks.

By the time Tabitha returned with a huge white teapot, one jug of milk and a pointedly solitary sachet of sugar, Albert had arranged the chess board perfectly, with the white pieces lined up in front of himself, and the black ones facing him across the table.

'You're always white,' she said indignantly.

'And you still always win,' he rejoined, quite truthfully. She tried not to show her smile as she handed him an empty mug.

'Go on then, Bertie,' she said, nodding at the board.

A slow hand, trembling with nothing other than age, reached out, picked up a pawn at random and moved it forwards two spaces.

For several minutes the two played without exchanging a word, until Albert broke the quiet.

'That's probably enough, isn't it Tabs?' To anyone nearby, this might have been taken as a call to end the game, but Tabitha, knowing what he meant, peeked inside the teapot.

'Looks it,' she confirmed.

Albert took a napkin from the stack on the tray and placed his cup on it. Taking up the pot, he splashed about half a mugs full into it. He placed his half full mug back on his clean saucer and used the napkin, which had already caught much of the spillage, to wipe up the rest. He repeated this with Tabitha's cup while she poured a little milk, first into his cup, and then her own. Their attention returned to the game.

'Bertie, because you moved your knight there,' she pointed, 'I can take it, so you might want to redo that last move.'

His eyes scanned for the offending knight and its unnoticed attacker. Spotting them, he hastily moved his knight back to where it had been as if he were worried that if he was too slow, he might lose his knight before he got there.

Having found a less dangerous move, Albert began to fumble with his sugar sachet while Tabitha took her turn.

'Where did you move?' he was forced to ask, having not been watching the board.

'Here,' she said, pointing to her castle.

Laying the sachet down, he pondered the board with the tips of his fingers together in front of him - a mannerism he had unconsciously learned from the woman opposite.

'But Tabs!' he said, 'What about my bishop?' Tabitha's eyes traced the diagonal line between her castle and Albert's bishop.

'Oh! You're right!' she said, taking her turn to move the offending piece and relocating it. 'That's better. Thanks,' she smiled.

The cafe bustled with chat around them. People joined and left their table as the couple continued playing until the tea had been drunk, or spilt and wiped from the table.

'If you go there, you'll have me in checkmate, Bertie!' exclaimed Tabitha.

'Will I?' laughed Bertie, as he followed her pointing finger. He moved his queen two squares to the right and proudly repeated the words, 'Check... Mate...' as if each word was its own sentence.

Knowing the drill, the players shook hands over the board before beginning to pack it away.

'Next time,' smiled Tabs, 'I'm being white.'



As they got up to go, Bertie laughed and tried to explain why this wouldn't be fair. The two departed from the cafe, climbing carefully back down the three steps; one with a carrier bag dangling from her wrist, one with a battered chess board under

his arm, and both leaving the unopened sugar sachet lying forgotten on the table behind them.

**Brazil 2, Watercolor by Jane Warren**  
**"Watercolor painting made in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil."**



# Not The Usual Day

## Marylou Mansfield

Carrie's alarm pounded at five in the morning; three early starts in a row. She was weary and barely managing a miasmic headache which had plagued for weeks.

"I need to do something about this. I will...soon." She promised herself, yet, again.

Carrie threw herself together; put on clean scrubs and snatched her ID badge and keys from the hook by the back door; then headed out, running on autopilot. She stopped at the local D&D drive through to grab a coffee; black, hot, no cream or sugar. Caffeine was good for a headache, right? Someone had told her that.

When Carrie pushed open the double doors to the ICU ward with coffee in hand, her night nurses were overly happy to see her.

"Lots of action last night, Carrie. Big accident on the thruway and we caught four of the bad ones." Head nurse, Linda, informed Carrie with a double eye roll. There would be much to do in the days ahead. At least Carrie knew the paper work would be in order. Linda was meticulous when it came to record keeping. She was, also, a nurse extraordinaire. Carrie needed only step in and pick up the tasks of this day. That would be plenty. Her headache seemed to subside as she concentrated on her work.

The first few hours ticked by quickly. Carrie had time to chat with the security officers assigned to her wing as they changed shifts. She had come to know them well and felt safer seeing them walk the halls every day. Joe, in particular, took time to acquaint himself with nurses and doctors and a patient or two; even gave a hug to a little boy visiting his grandmother. He cut quite a figure; a large man, 6'3" 275 lbs, bullet proof vest, taser, hip mounted revolver and the rest. With all of that, his smile was that of a skinny fifteen year old neighborhood paperboy. It all fit somehow. The puzzle pieces all fit that day.

Around three in the afternoon, Carrie began her regular recording of patient chart info. The four accident patients were holding their own; a few concerns, but nothing unexpected. She waved to Joe as he sauntered by and told him there was fresh coffee and cold pizza in the break room. He could help himself. His eyes lit up. "On my next go round." He responded.

Joe paced around the corner and out of sight. Carrie thought it odd noticing as Joe walked away, he moved his hand to his sidearm.

Carrie rubbed her eyes and yawned. Her hands felt cotton ball dry, in need of some TLC. She reached for the plastic bottle of hospital hand lotion on the shelf behind her. The lotion flipped in her hands and landed on the floor at her feet by the chair. At that instant, as she crouched to retrieve the bottle, Carrie heard POP...POP...POP. Next she heard bells and alarms signaling patients in trouble...flat lining, perhaps, struggling for sure. Again...POP...POP.

Screaming and yelling erupted up and down the hallway. The acrid smell of something burning floated around the corner.

All of this happened in less than twenty seconds. Carrie's breath was sucked out of her body for at least all of those seconds. Then all of her training and practicing kicked in. She and two other nurses gripped the crash cart and headed into the melee, rounding the same corner Joe had just approached a minute before. There was Joe, the big man, clutching his right arm, bleeding profusely. He never flinched.

"Get behind me, Ladies," he said in a steady determined voice. With Joe in the lead, gun at the ready, they ran from bed to bed, hoping for more help. Two patients appeared to be already passed; a third could be revived. They made the choice to begin there.

By then, the full alarm was howling everywhere. The code for "active shooter on site" was set into motion.

Joe closed the curtains and the door where Carrie and the others were working feverishly. He went back into the hallway with weapon drawn.

POP...POP...Carrie heard that horrible sound again. She kept performing CPR and praying.

# Eternal Vista

**John Smistad**

Evan lives a common life. Not exhilarating, nor excruciating. Few ups, few downs. No frills. And Evan is fine with this.

Mostly.

But sometimes Evan gets this feeling. That he can fly. To another world. And leave this one far behind. The feeling comes and goes. Anyway, he tells himself that's crazy.

A flash of white.

Evan works at a restaurant baking pizzas in an oven. Everyone says Evan makes really good pizza. Some of the best they've ever eaten. So Evan reckons he does. If he thinks about it at all.

A flash of blue.

Evan has a girlfriend. Her name is Helen. Nothing to write home about. Not that Evan writes home about anything anyway. Helen works selling children's clothes in a department store. One day Helen hopes to be a manager. Helen loves Evan. She wants to marry him. Evan's not sure if he wants to be married. To anyone.

A flash of green.

Evan likes to drive through the mountains north of town. By himself. He likes to stop at a lookout point and gaze from the cliff. The valley far below is filled with trees. There is a creek that runs through it. It's all so beautiful. Evan loses track of time when he's there. Sometimes he never wants to leave.

A flash of brown.

One day after Evan makes the last pizza of his shift he calls Helen. He leaves a voice mail. He makes it private. He wants only Helen to hear it. Who else will care?

A flash of red.

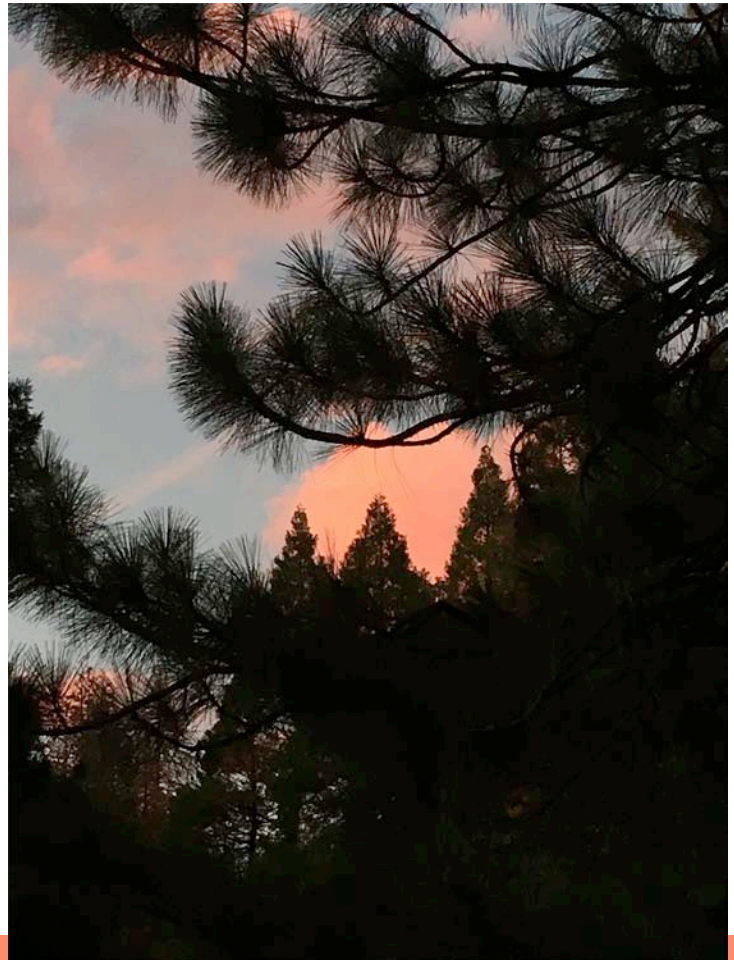
Evan gets in his car. He drives to his favorite spot. He stands looking out over the vast expanse. The view seems to stretch on forever. He wishes he was a tree in the forest.

Evan cries.  
Then he smiles.

A flash of white.  
A flash of blue.  
A flash of green.  
A flash of brown.  
A flash of red.

Evan takes his place among the trees.

## Sunset Pines Digital Photography by Judy Salz



# Non-Fiction

## Reunion

Anne Moul

Three of us are relaxing together in the hot tub, college friends reunited for the first time in years, when Cat suddenly pulls her bathing suit top down and says, "Look, I think they turned out pretty well, considering everything, don't you?" Rachel and I, slightly taken aback, nod our heads in earnest agreement. Cat's breasts look almost normal except for that tan smile of a scar under the bottom of each. Her reconstruction involved some new procedure that didn't require gel-filled inserts or tattoo artists painting on areolas. Something about saving the skin and rebuilding the underlying tissue. I didn't catch all the details because I was reeling from the unexpected appearance of breasts we've only heard about in emails and face-book conversations.

Nine of us have come together for a reunion weekend in a little town on Maryland's Eastern Shore, an enclave of upscale homes nestled along the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. We were freshmen in the same hall of the same dorm at a small college in south central Pennsylvania in the fall of 1975. Something about that first year away from home bonded us, despite different majors and the fact that a few of us transferred to other schools. After graduation, we scattered to our respective lives, gathering at Christmas until the babies and the jobs and the buffeting of life made even that too hard to do.

Nina is our cat-herder, the one who fans the flames of friendship, who will not relinquish her hold on this crowd of aging freshmen. Who mows down our excuses of why we can't get together, sending relentless emails until we all just give up and say, "Ok, ok, Neen, we'll come." She prods our slightly resistant and oh-so-busy souls into spending a weekend with people we haven't seen in years. Part of her motivation is "We're all turning 60 and we need to do this for Cat."

I've always been an outlier with this group, so I was a little apprehensive about the trip. I lived at the far end of the hall, and was more closely affiliated with the nerdy music department than the coolest soccer players. But somehow, I got sucked into their realm, partly because my first husband was in the same class with some of the men and over the years, we've managed to sustain a pleasant, grown-up relationship marked by holiday gatherings, annual Christmas letters and the occasional email. The death of Cat's husband, Rob, a strapping athlete felled by a ferociously quick brain cancer at age 40, suddenly thrust our serene little world into a dark shadow of mortality.

We're all a bit shopworn these days. Illness, tragedy, and painful relationships have etched lines on our faces and carved scars on our bodies, both physical and emotional. Only one of us still has living parents. Three of us have a family member struggling with addiction. Warm and kind Rachel has dedicated her life to caring for a special needs child, now a young adult, whose disabilities resulted from the colossal ineptitude of a drunken obstetrician. Elegant and forever single Megan recently shouldered the burden of both her parents' final days and shares sad and beautiful stories of that journey. Megan weeps freely throughout the weekend.

Several of us are childless, not necessarily by choice and in the wee dark hours, worry about who will stand at our own bedsides at the end. Claire, the sweet and motherly social worker, anxiously awaits the birth of her daughter's second child, hoping and praying that her daughter stays sober. Molly is a renowned infectious disease specialist, and behind the fashion model cheekbones, translucently thin body, and dazzling smile, I sense she's what the British refer to as "under a strain."

But perhaps, no one has been hit harder than Cat. We called her chatty Catty when we lived on the hall and that hasn't changed. Huge brown eyes, high energy, smart and resilient and always ready to find the next party, fall in love with the next cute guy. A tornado spinning through life. Unstoppable.

Cat was a surgical nurse until Rob died and then decided she needed to be at the other end of life, so she cares for babies in the intensive care unit. She soldiered on to raise her four children, recover from a leg broken in eight places after a misstep outside the hospital on an icy morning and in a joyful resurgence of love and hope, married again nine years ago. Last May, Cat was diagnosed with a particularly vicious form of breast cancer, probably a version of what killed her mother before she even got to college. I remember reading a face-book post saying she had lost eleven pounds in one week from the chemo.

In the flurry of emails preceding this weekend, there were discussions of sleeping arrangements. Who has back problems, who snores, who doesn't mind having a bedmate. Cat sent a cryptic note saying since she now sleeps alone, she would love to have a roommate. We discover that her second marriage has broken up and during our visit, Cat regales us with horrific tales of why that happened.

After a Friday afternoon arrival filled with awkward hugs and "We can't believe we're finally doing this," and "Look at this incredible house," we discover we cannot stop talking. I didn't realize until after the weekend was over, that no one ever turned on a TV and we barely looked at our phones. Our time is spent fully engaged with each other. Years of bottled up



stories and feelings pour forth and maybe it's easier because we rarely see each other and there is no one to judge. We feel safe with people who shared our first days away from the security of our parents.

Sometimes just a few of us gather with coffee in the morning or a glass of wine by the dock at night. Molly and Nina, the most athletic, take a 30-mile bike ride together. I drove with Claire, who I probably know the least and find myself telling her things I seldom reveal to anyone. It's as though we all went home for a forty-year weekend and can't wait to share the stories of what happened while we were there.

Rather than going out to restaurants, Nina plans lovely candlelit dinners on the screened-in porch. Our faces are bathed in flattering light, crystal tears from both laughter and sadness sparkling on our cheeks. Someone places her phone in a bucket to amplify the music from Pandora's '70s station. We drink wine and eat crab cakes and broiled salmon. The second night one of us suggests we say grace, so we clasp each other's hands and Molly, our beautiful and brilliant physician, thanks God for the food and Cat's renewed health and the opportunity to be together after all these years.

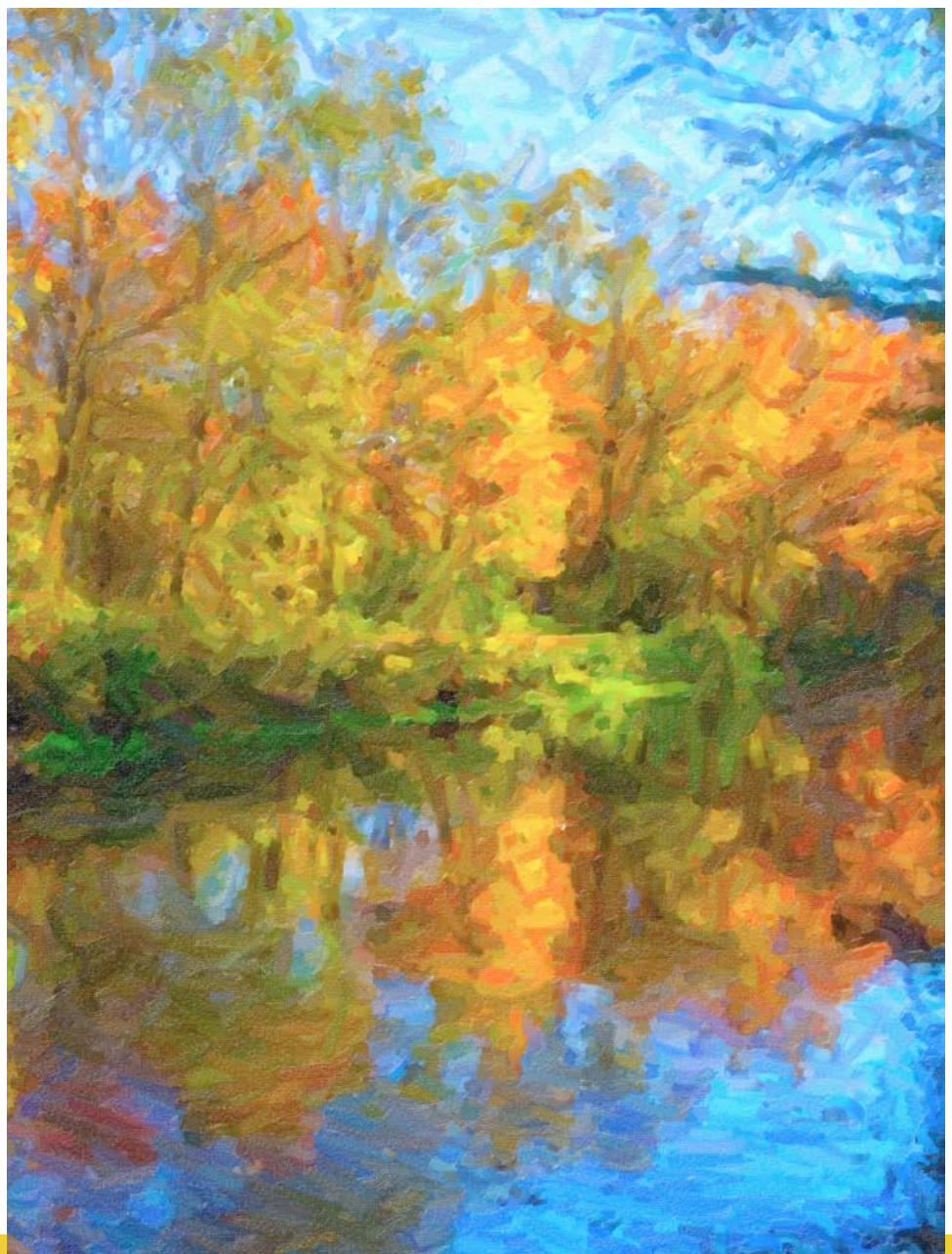
Cat brings stacks of old picture albums with her, the kind with the sticky cellophane magnetic pages. She urges us to take some of them home to keep. "My kids aren't going to want these when I'm gone. I want to make sure they stay with other people who remember." It is the only time she even hints that her life may end sooner than ours.

On the first page of one of the albums is her official write-up for allowing guys in the girls' bathroom the first week we were at school. She is still proud of the typewritten citation informing her she is under probation for the entire semester.

We leaf through the albums, marveling at the faces in the yellowing photos. Our long straight hair with feathered bangs. Boyfriends with styled hair and '70s mustaches sporting pastel tuxedos with giant lapels.

"Remember that guy? Who was dating him? Isn't he the one who dumped buckets of water in our room that night? No, that was someone else. He's the one who threw Nina's stereo

### **Impressionist Fall Impressions Reimagined Digital Photo by Dennis Smith**



out the window when they broke up. I remember when I first brought Jerry home to meet my parents, they thought he was mafia. Rach, why were you always in your underwear? Oh my God, look at those dresses. I wonder whatever happened to that girl who had the sideburns? Was she the one who kept the rat in the cage? It wasn't a rat, it was a hamster. His name was Thurber. Remember he'd go rolling down the hall in his little plastic ball?"

I can still smell the popcorn and hear Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" blasting out of our rooms.

A group of us spends Saturday in the harbor village, picturesque and crowded on a gloriously warm autumn day. We shop and then eat lunch in a crowded bar. The waitress snaps a picture of us huddled together in our corner booth. We take a boat ride on the river, not Cat's idea of a sunset cruise on a catamaran but it will have to do. Cat leads the way for mid-afternoon ice cream cones followed by a wine-tasting. We talk about where we've traveled and where we still hope to go. Cat wants to go to Scotland and so does Megan and maybe they will go together next summer.

Cat tells us about Shawn, her second husband and how they jumped into it too soon, in a desperate attempt to soothe each other's pain. But there is drama, a troubled stepson, Shawn works too hard and drinks too much. It takes a strong person to balance Cat's fierceness and Shawn just didn't have the goods. Claire says to me on the way home, "I know Shawn had his problems, but there were three people in that marriage. I don't think Cat will ever get over Rob."

We admire Cat's post-chemo hair which has come in curlier and more salt and pepper gray instead of the warm chocolate brown of her college days. She shows us pictures of the stylish wig she wore during treatment and says she's considering cutting her real hair that way. We tell her to go for it. When you look at Cat, you see a lined and prematurely aged face although her eyes still reflect joy in life and a spark of mischief. But those eyes have watched a young husband draw his last breath, leaving behind a widow with four children to raise. That face has hovered over a toilet bowl for hours, expelling the toxic residue of medication needed to save the life of the body attached to it.

We whisper to each other in our rooms at night or sitting on the Adirondack chairs outside, "Is she ok? Is she in remission? Does it seem to you like she's almost over the top, trying to pack everything in—still working full time and planning trips and throwing huge weddings for her girls and talking about meeting someone again?" Yes, to all and can you blame her? None of us has teetered that close to the edge of the precipice yet, so Cat is blazing a trail for us. She's showing us how it's done.

The second evening we play a convoluted game of Apples to Apples where you use only the cards with the adjectives. Each person takes a turn being "it" and players choose a card from their hand that they think describes that person best. The person being described then chooses the one they think is most accurate. We are a thick-skinned group comfortable enough with each other to laugh and not be offended by some of the adjectives. Cards picked for Cat always ring strong—"boisterous," "intense," "courageous."

Cat and I share what I assume is normally the kids' room in this mansion. She's on the bottom bunk and I'm on a twin bed in the same small room. Neither one of us can sleep. The beds are miserable, the room is hot and stuffy so we talk late into the night. Not about cancer or life or anything deep, but about our animals. I am a pet parent and currently have two dogs with major medical issues. Cat tells me about what she's been through with her Golden Retrievers and assorted cats and the best options for pet insurance and places for specialized veterinary treatment. We fall asleep to the sound of each other's snores. I am happy to be her roommate so that for at least two nights, she is not alone. I suspect I will remember this night forever.

We all hug each other for real when we leave on Sunday, the awkwardness gone. We've dived beneath the surface of brief emails and chirpy Christmas letters. We've been at the bedsides. Watched the children stagger home after a night of drinking. Sat across from the accountant while he tells us the only option for the business is to file for bankruptcy. Noticed the missing spoons from the drawers, an indication that someone in the family needs them for drug use. Seen the sinister shadows on the x-rays, sat in the reclining chair while the life-saving drugs drip into our veins. Listened to beloved parents ramble on, lost in a haze of dementia.

We are powerful sisters. We are women who listen patiently to each other's stories. Who laugh and cry together about the past and following Cat's example, stride bravely into the future, ready to take on whatever it brings. Who, despite the years and miles of distance that separate us, still know when to place a gentle hand on an elbow when one of us is groping blindly in the darkness, like a college freshman in her first weeks away from home. The women who we know will nod in enthusiastic agreement when our turn comes around to raise our shirt and say, "I think they turned out pretty well, don't you?"



# Experience At The Zoo

## Manijeh Badiozamani

We are vacationing in Arizona and decide to take our grandchildren to visit the Phoenix Zoo. As we approach the gate to buy our admission tickets, my daughter-in-law informs us that she has a membership pass to the Seattle Zoo. She is wondering if her pass would be honored at the Phoenix Zoo, or at least good for some discount.

While we are walking and discussing the fee situation, a gentleman and his young daughter approach us. He offers us four free guest passes. He says he has a membership pass to the Phoenix Zoo and also guest passes that are about to expire. He is happy for us to use them.

An incredible act of kindness from a gentleman to total strangers. Whether he heard our conversation or saw our out-of-state license plate, his generosity touches my heart. We accept his gracious offer. He introduces us as his guests and hands the extra passes to the attendant at the gate. We thank him and then head for a different part of the zoo and don't see him again. He has saved us over fifty dollars in admission fees. I think about this experience for several days – doing something nice for total strangers when they least expect it.

The incident takes me back to my childhood and a phrase I used to hear from my parents often. Roughly translated from Farsi to English it is something like this: "Perform a good deed and throw it in the Euphrates River; God will give it back to you in the desert." As a child, I thought it was funny and absurd. How could a good deed "thrown" in a river be returned in the desert! A child's mind can't understand metaphors, or grasp the deep meaning of folk wisdom. What they were trying to teach me was that an act of kindness never gets lost in this world. It only spreads and it comes back to us at the time and place where we least expect it.

Remembering the old proverb, I try to think and figure out what act of kindness have I performed in the

past toward a stranger that is now coming back to me in the Phoenix Zoo. Voila, I remember it.

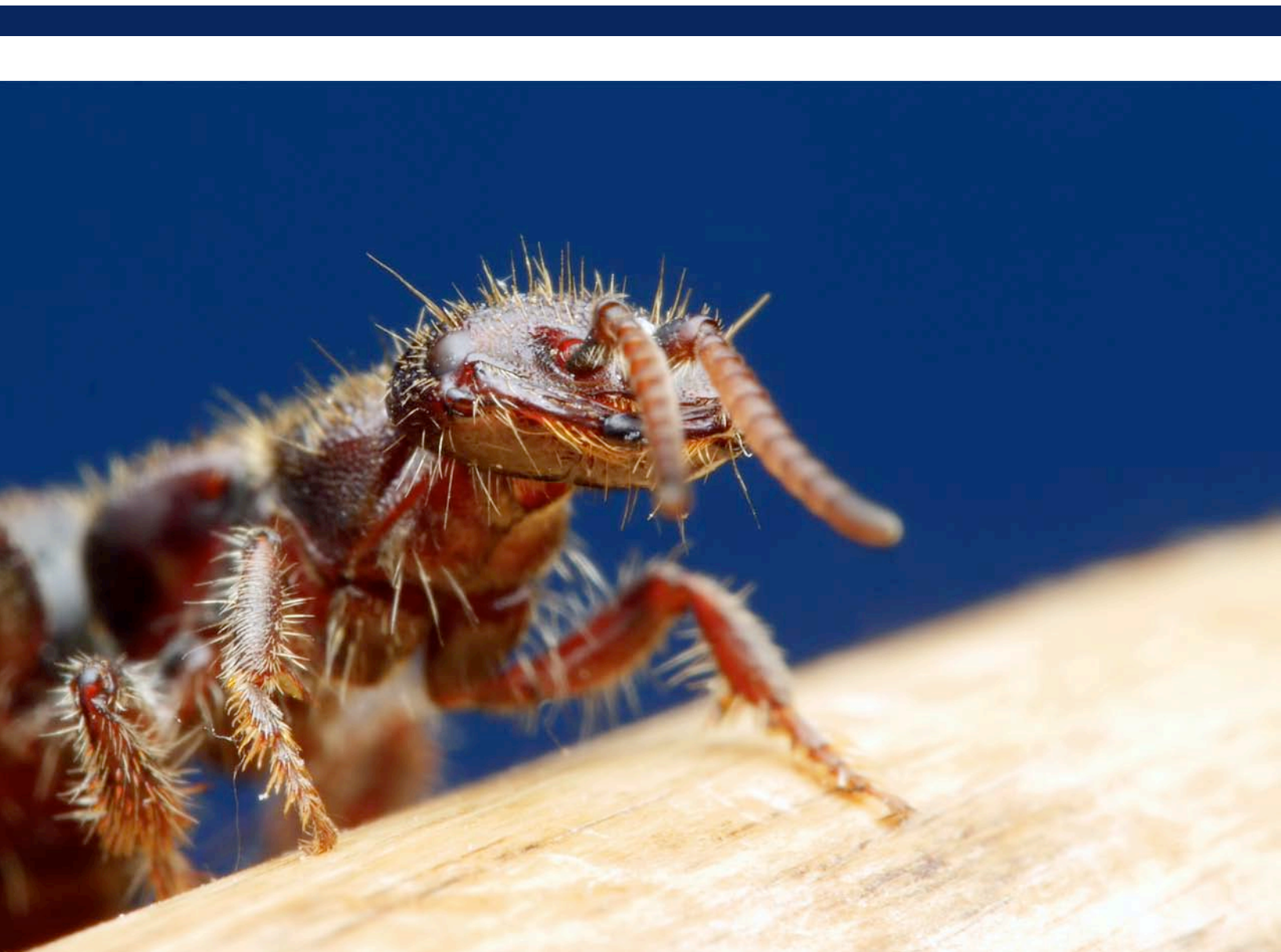
Several years ago, my husband and I were going to a movie. I had bought four pre-paid tickets. Before entering the theater, I saw a young couple, probably on a date, getting ready to buy their tickets. I offered them my two extra tickets. The surprised look on their faces mingled with gratitude and plenty of smiles gave me a sense of incredible joy.

I have also witnessed a random act of kindness at Denver international airport right after September eleven. We were flying to New York, and many people were nervous about flying at that time. We were having lunch at a small café. A young man got up, paid for his bill and also paid for the lunch of an elderly couple who were sitting a few tables away. It still warms up my heart to remember the look on the older couple's faces and their reaction. When they thanked the young man, he cheerfully said, "Please pass it on, do something nice for someone else."

Whether it is in Euphrates of Asia, or at the Phoenix Zoo, or in the mountains of Colorado, no act of random kindness ever gets lost.

## Reflections, Digital Photography by Bob Evans





## **Invigoration**

**Digital Photography by Mark Berkery**

**“Into her preening with a gusto, clear off the water,  
and anything else may have attached. Invigoration.”**



# Dimensionless, and Something like Prayer, Something like Flight

**Stephen Mead**

"Energy, rise! Walls, fall away!" The preceding command/mantra, or some variation, is one I have found myself silently speaking for more than two decades. The words are incantatory, summoning a space to open up within my mind and spirit where I can breathe more deeply, latch onto celestial coat-tail images, and take flight. For the most part the circumstances which have brought me to the usage of such phrases, I can trace back to an ennui bordering beyond dread to the dramatic turf of stark-raving mad. That zone is desperate, a soldering up of claustrophobic depression after panic has hunted down the hounds where my very soundness, a centered safety within, has become its own quarry.

In later, therapeutically pursued and better diagnosed years, Prozac, Clonazepam and mood elevators have proven to be a boon too.

Imagine these words being written now taking on a Dickensian quality, the narrator a wise old spinsterish grand dowager keeping secret passionate intriguing twists under her corset and bustle. "He was always a dreamy child," this woman would say. "I remember him sitting for hours in a corner with his teddy and the cat, quietly watching the play of dust motes in cones of sun. Occasionally he would make marks with a crayon which all the experts we brought in agreed were probably ingenious but, sadly, too vague. This gave his Mother the vapors, it did. A course of calisthenics with a mint poultice in fresh air was recommended to remove the glistening dewy cobweb strands which held him spellbound, and return him to a state of socially appropriate mediocrity."

Yes, as a child I was often away in some game-of-pretend but I don't think it was because I found the world boring. To a child's mind isn't playing dress up and imagining worlds, missions, perils and rescues, fairly innate? Certain aspects of school regimentation and then employment, gainful or not, must have thrown the wrench into that fun. It's amazing more people don't turn to Fuzzy Navels and Magic Mushrooms to compensate.

Before I got into utilizing the energy rise, walls fall away concussed Swami exercise, I have a few distinct recollections of where I flew beyond the commonplace or was able to find it

as naturally magical as opposed to menial. One of these times was hanging out with a high school friend and entering the realm of Séances, Ouija boards and even hypnotism. (What can I say? many a post-adolescent horror flick still capitalizes on these sort of plot devices. We want to believe in something other, beyond the ordinary, a deeper story, a key to meaning.) In any case, after a bout of feigned mesmerism brought on by an antique gold pocket watch and chain, I tried to get my friend to do something else.

No, not heavy petting, keep it clean.

We were in a room of her house that had some nice blank unoccupied space. "Let's stare at the wall for a while," I said. "Let's try to empty our minds, pay attention to our breathing, the steady rhythm of our heartbeats. Next let's try to see ourselves sitting just where we are, sitting just how we are: our socks, our knees, our arms slightly curving at our sides, and then our heads. Let's try to picture our faces just as they are now. Imagine that wall becoming a mirror, and we are passing beyond it like it's a veil, a portal. We are in that other dimension now, sitting, looking back at ourselves, but I don't know what we should do from here, do you?"

And that was the problem. Alice gets through the looking glass and finds that right is left and left is right but other than that there's little difference. At first the experience is a little uncanny, has a thrill of wondrous frisson, but then it kind of peters into a hmmpf, do you want to make some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?

Another instance I recall of interior space opening up for me occurred at one of my first jobs. I had gone from the frenzy of the fast food counter with its beeping machines and buzzers, a panic attack made manifest, a video game where the fries, burgers, co-workers, and customers were all cannibalistic, and getting closer and closer...to the relative solitary pace of a maintenance job. This was actually a promotion and I did enjoy the fact that it was less nerve wracking. Naturally, however, there were times when it fell short of the artistic aspirations of self-reliance (and scarcely having to leave the house) I had for myself while growing up. Though a co-worker might point out how I was doing an honest day's work, thus take pride, the disillusioned, grandeur-lacking part of myself felt the L for L-O-S-E-R stitching itself on my uniform of burnt sienna overalls. (These overalls were made of some odor-catching fabric that took on all the sour milk shakes and tossed out animal fats of the establishment.)

Good God, it was during one of these desultory intervals where I found myself being worn into the dust of the parking space I was told daily to sweep, that the early prototype for the walls-fall-away voice entered my being. After doing the sweeping I was supposed to scrub the oil stains with this hose-connected contraption whose base became a kind of rake

or water broom. As water shot from the brass prongs sunny rainbows often formed against the asphalt, and then the oil stains too, mixed with the reflective bubbly foam, spectrum-shimmered and ran like shiny acrylic liquefied mercury. At home I'd been experimenting with my mom's 110 camera with shadows and light and so brought it to work, instinctively obsessed with realizing small bits of bliss from an overlooked boundary. It's interesting and fortunate that no one called those widely-notorious people with the strait jackets and white suits on me.

I tried being a bit under cover with my work photography but standing on a ladder to shoot the multi-colored swirls of different shakes thickly oozing toward the perfect metallic circle of the drain, was not exactly inconspicuous. Luckily my sister worked at the same place, was well-respected and well-liked for her conscientious work ethic, so more of the derisory talk of me being gay was turned into the indulgent small town rhetoric of eccentric and arty. Somewhere along the lines a survival method I picked up was that if you can seem very sweet, listen to the opinions and gripes of others, whether interested or even agreeing or not, and get them to chuckle, there was less chance of being bashed and dumped in a ditch for the rats frantic play.

Over the years and through a score of other jobs, sometimes actually within the workplace but mainly not, surreptitiously doing some form of art either from the material at hand or to counteract its toxicity, became my best defense for a tenuous grasp on sanity. The taking a moment to let the walls-fall-away conjuring has become second nature, a quiet chameleon skin to slip in and through. There are times too, however, when I imagine the walls as energy shields in their own right. This alternate escape hatch began when I worked as a Patient Care Aide. In between helping with the needs of the often elderly, there might be quite a bit of downtime as they napped. These were occasions when I would look up from my reading, sneaking in a poem or sketch, counting the minutes on the clock until quitting time, and the surrounding walls did not hem me in maze-like so much as hum.

I supposed that was a sign I liked the job better than others, that though neurotically shy, I enjoyed helping people, being of use, that it gave a sense of validation for taking up breathing room in the world with my so-called-life. From the stillness of the quietude came a welling, both an aural and glass-stained reflected aura of calm, of peace, of grace. I might find for a while that I was OK in my skin and in the world, that there was something serene but uplifting in just walking among the halls, touching the walls of rooms, feeling their textures, a soft pastel felt here, a rugged bark-rough brick there or, further, the cool stone puzzle surface which became a sheltering sphere. There are very few people I feel safe around and not in large numbers. The boundary lines of being a solitary during

those occasions somehow opened beyond the need for self-protection, letting in a lightness beyond chatter and noise.

Currently, and in the past, there are stairways in the office buildings I have found myself working in, wondering how did I get there/here, my life coming to that/this, which provide brief respites, catalysts for momentary catharsis amid the nine-to-five routine. Finding the experience of driving, sometimes even being a passenger, extremely unpleasantly akin to what I imagine being hung drawn and quartered must have been like in the cheery simpler good old days, I love to walk. I walk out of necessity as I imagine people all over the planet with baskets on their heads do. I also walk more so, because it can expel the dust and snarling rats nest of Wrong-think that can reside in my soul. Taking stairs has the same function. (Elevators and escalators are fine but don't provide the same Zen function and others move away nervously if you try walking-in-place or doing jumping jacks while utilizing them.)

Stairs remind me of the wiccan/pagan function of drawing up Earth energy. At the base focus on what is under the floor, way down to febrile roots and trickling streams feeding nutrients of richness. Feel that sustenance greet soles of feet, climb like phloem through calves on up. The guiding hand rails can become like rope-tows or more organically electric. Whether ascending or descending, floor by floor, passing doors, making the turns, something like unseen wings may unfold from shoulders, appear on ankles and wrists. The walls whoosh with them too and something else, some larger force that is a benevolent silence. The walls are becoming transparent. Systems of neurons appear, turn intergalactic. Stars appear like sparklers which invite goose bumps, little thrills. Drink the bliss of this with something solar there too, a warming energy with intimations of bird rustling, that happy busy soundtrack of intricate things being built, holding, lasting, simply complex.

This is the music of the spheres. Our hands, legs are like needles in compasses but function as prayers, carrying messages, a kaleidoscopic slideshow of faces, voices of loved ones, each pictured, heard for a moment, water color from water color memory-placed as a photograph, and us, still and again, back on the stairs, enjoying a search, a very large search, for answers out of our very small mortal flesh and blood lives. Please let us be somehow a whole organism all over the planet doing this, yes, yes, astounded to become one past ourselves and in synchronicity with the universe.



## **The Door**

**Digital Photography by Kieron Circuit**

**“Black and White photography of a door to old church grounds in Funchal, Madeira.”**



# Bulldog Day Afternoon

Linda Spear

Friday, August 15; another hot, steamy late summer day in Manhattan, complete with a light but steady drizzle that only added to everyone's stickiness and discomfort. As I charged out of work as a graphic designer after meeting another incredible deadline and getting through a particularly harrowing week, I looked longingly at Grace Church, a block from my office at the corner of East 10th Street and Broadway. It's the place where I've often sought quietude. In fact, it is often the best place to gain resurgent energy before I head up town to catch my train home at Grand Central Station. But on that Friday, I wanted to get home faster than usual. Both of my children were arriving home from sleep away camp, my husband was fixing dinner and central air conditioning plus my Jacuzzi bath awaited my overtired body and mind.

I watched people pass me going the opposite way. Some looked reasonably starched and less wilted by the weather, while others looked like they were pushing too hard on overused legs. Still, I felt I could just about make it to the subway stop, knowing I'd have to stand in the crowded subway car until I got to Grand Central.

With a raincoat over my arm, umbrella in hand and my purse and briefcase in the other, I gradually got into a comfortable stride as my body stretched with every step. A young woman with an English bulldog in tow walked toward me and I inadvertently smiled at them as I love the breed like no other. My own bulldog, Leicester, pronounced Lester, was waiting for me at home with the rest of my family. There is nothing more comforting than kissing his flat face and getting a kiss in return that extended from my chin to my forehead.

But at the very same moment that I felt his sweet kiss, her bulldog fell flat in front of me; arms and legs akimbo. The thumping noise he made as the dog hit the concrete was a terrifying sound. The owner stood facing me, looking up then down, then side to side, not knowing what to do. The shocked woman immediately dropped to the pavement, pulled the face of her bully close and looked into its eyes. At that very same moment, she knew her darling dog was dead. Just seconds before, we both were owners of these lovely dogs. Now her baby was gone. There was no doubt about it. The dog's eyes were stationary in their orbits. Its limbs were limp and motionless as the woman called her name.

"Dilly, Dilly, get up, Dilly!"

I've heard that familiar wail of grief before; in fact my family and I had been the people who have cried in the agony of pet loss, but I had never been so close to another dog owner in this kind of anguish.

Without thought, I opened my umbrella and poised it over the dog, to give it the dignity of privacy. I then rolled my raincoat off my arm and wrapped it around the dog's little body and her owner molded the coat to its sides and drew the dog up to her chest, keening for its loss.

I reached for my smart phone and asked her if she wanted me to call anyone. She looked me in the eye for the second time in minutes and I inadvertently seized her sorrow as if it was mine. There was pain in my heart too. She didn't plant it there; it was the natural reaction to a panic stricken person who has just experienced a loss—not even her own.

The young woman's head shook back and forth, as she clearly could not fathom her next step. So I asked her if I should call her vet. Her eyes truly met mine for the first time and as she focused on me, she nodded—crying out the phone number of the vet by rote. Anyone who has a bulldog knows the phone number of their veterinary clinic by heart. Bulldogs are known to have many physical anomalies and our family has made planned and unplanned stops at our veterinary clinic with Leicester for routine, as well as emergency visits.

I punched in the numbers and handed the phone to her. Instantly, she started babbling that Dilly was dead on the street, repeating the horror of her reality, over and over, to whomever was at the other end of the line. Apparently the vet tech who answered the phone knew them well, because the woman never once uttered her own name; only the name of her dog.

"Yes, yes, I'll be there as soon as I can," she said and dropped the phone to the ground, as she drew the dog closer to her. I picked up my phone and instantly realized that the next step was to hail a cab so she could get to her vet. Getting a cab to stop was hardly easy on any day in Manhattan. In the rain, the heat and the steam of a late summer Friday afternoon, it became a colossal feat of will. For some reason, the first cab I hailed stopped and I yelled to the woman to pick up her dog and the umbrella and join me. She managed to do all of this as she stumbled on the curb to reach the cab.

Until then, I didn't know how much she was trembling. But nonetheless, she held the dead dog tightly against her as she

buried her head in her baby's neck. My coat had become a sling and my umbrella was bent out of shape.

"Where to, Ladies," yelled the cabbie without turning his head. She mumbled the address and he yelled it back to her to be sure he heard her correctly. I didn't think she was listening to him so I interjected: "Yes, yes, that's right."

Although the address was just blocks away, the cab driver had more to contend with than red lights. Cars swerved as the rain picked up and the incessant honking became even more pronounced and urgent. It felt as though the other drivers knew about the insanity of our situation. How else can you feel but insane, when a loved one dies? And I had been unintentionally drawn into her pain.

When we reached the vet's office, she opened the cab door, bolted from the vehicle and ran to the building where the vet tech held the door of the office open and she disappeared from sight as the clinic door closed.

The cabbie actually turned around this time to look at me and he arched his eyebrows. "Lady? Where are we going now and are you going to pay the full fare?" I nodded yes and sat back to relax for a moment. The woman and her dead dog were gone with my raincoat and her cab fare.

Without another thought, I realized that I would need to stay in the cab to get to Grand Central. There was no reason to get out now and board the subway. I didn't think my shaking legs were strong enough to make it to the platform and stand firm to wait for a train.

Once at Grand Central, I felt more in control of my body and paid the cabbie, awarding him a big tip for non-interference.

The sequence of events didn't exactly meet with my plan. I didn't intend to give my raincoat away, but it disappeared with the woman and her dog. At least, I told them, it wasn't a new coat or an expensive one anyway. I also knew that I could call the vet clinic, as I remembered the address and ask for the coat that Dilly came wrapped in late Friday afternoon.

But I couldn't do it. That coat had been on a specific mission and had served a purpose more important than protecting me from the rain. The coat left me to care for a dead dog and a grieving woman; a remembrance that I'd never shake. Chalk it up to yet another unusual life experience, I told myself.

I also thought about the fact that I didn't stop at Grace Church before going home. Had I done that, Dilly would have died in

front of other strangers. Would they have helped the woman to deal with her loss as I had? I convinced myself that other people would have done the very same thing. Cooperation among New Yorkers, done without fanfare, is fairly common in the city.

Less than one week later, a UPS package was left at my front door. I knew I hadn't ordered anything online or from a department store in ages and didn't have a clue as to what the package contained. The sender's name in the return box was unknown to me.

I had a brief moment of paranoia. If I didn't know the sender, should I open the package? Would someone other than a person who experienced 9/11 up close as our family had, ever not consider the possibilities?

## Museum of Work and Culture Digital Photography by Carol Dandrade





## Flightless Wasp

Digital Photography by Mark Berkery

**“Saved, a flightless wasp. Out of the water and on to a stick, a lifeline for a small but not insignificant thing.”**

I felt the package and it was soft and giving. No harsh edges inside. So I opened the wrapping and I found my raincoat—dry cleaned and folded in the small bubbles of plastic wrap.

I looked at the name on the outside wrapper again that read, “Wendy Shelton.” She lived just two blocks from where we met on that hot, horrible steamy sad day. Inside the folds of the raincoat was an envelope. Without concern, I opened it to find a crisp \$20 bill and the following message on a simple note card:

*Just My Way of Thanking You:*

*After I left Dilly—her full name was Piccadilly— at the vet’s for cremation-- I realized I had taken your coat without knowing it. It really upset me that I did not get your name to send it back to you along with the cab fare.*

*But luckily, some of your business cards and other papers (also in this envelope) were in your coat pocket with your name and address and I was so glad that I could return it all to you with my gratitude.*



*I can only say that when I think about my beloved baby dog, who happened to die on her third birthday, I can attach my feelings to a native New Yorker who helped me without even giving it a second thought.*

I smiled and thought about her assumption.

*I'm from Lincoln, Nebraska and have only been in New York for four years. When people talk to me about the insensitivity, ruthlessness and calculated behavior of New Yorkers, I will be able to tell them about you. Please accept my most sincere thank you for being...well just being there when I needed you the most.*

*All best,  
Wendy Shelton*

Wendy included her e-mail so I could contact her. I ran to my computer to thank her and let her know that I received the

coat, the money and her note and I attached a few pictures of Leicester to the mail. My bulldog also had a brindle coat and he looked a lot like Dilly.

Since that time, some months ago, Wendy has adopted another bully whom she loves beyond distraction. I have pictures that Wendy regularly sends me now housed in my computer's picture file. Sometimes her baby bully graces my computer desktop.

I don't know if I will ever make plans to see Wendy again, even though she lives so close to my office and has invited me to meet her for lunch at a nearby bistro. I think it may be too tough for me to let the heart wrenching moments I spent with her and Dilly reemerge.

I think people do what comes naturally to them, no matter where they grew up, settled down or just live.

Actually, I'm not a New Yorker. I'm from rural Pennsylvania.

## Orange Marigold

### Digital Photography by Elizabeth Daigle

**“Up close macro shot of an orange marigold.”**



## Just a Painting

**Susan Bloch**

The painting is me.

In the main hall of the Museum of Modern Art in Mumbai, I stand in front of a yellow-and-black oil painting, in the presence of two women seated facing, but not looking at, one another. Their subdued eyes gaze into the distance at some faraway spot.

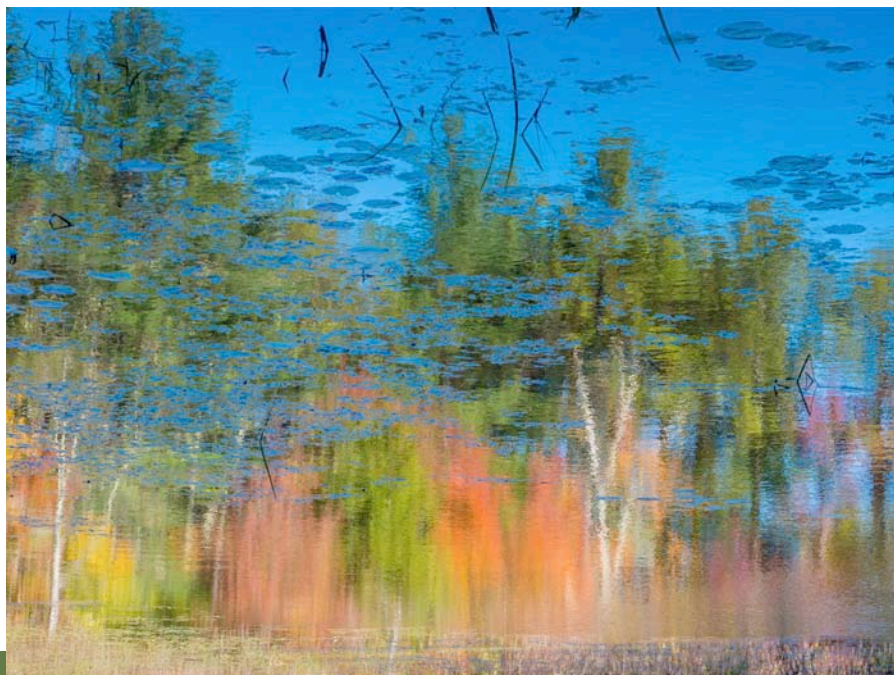
Lost in their intimacy, I step in closer, studying the perfectly blended brazen brushstrokes, waiting for a signal. One of the women seems to be watching me. I stare back without blinking, meeting her gaze, feeling the emptiness of her glance, noting the shadow across her eyes. Those eyes hold me transfixed as if they are focusing not on the outside world but on the thoughts inside her head. Undiscovered and lost dreams float across her dark pupils. I imagine myself sitting there with them, squatting on the prickly, tiger-striped straw mat, flecked with shades of bright yellow, burnt orange, and black, sharing my recurring nightmares. Extraordinary how that painting captures my melancholy. I twist my wedding ring around and around, chafing my finger, and my eyes fill with tears.

Overhead ceiling fans struggle to shift the heavy, humid summer air. The breeze ripples my floral kurta against my back reminding me that Mumbai is now my new home. My hope, after my beloved husband John's death, was that starting a new job in India, working with new people, and living a new life would help me, as my friends suggested, "move on." But I was wrong. Running away from places and people—friends, family, favorite coffee shops and restaurants, our London home, and my office was not the solution. My grief stalked me.

On that Sunday morning, I set out to explore Mumbai's cultural center. Heat radiated off the sidewalk and the sun bristled on my back. Buses belched black fumes as they butted their way through pedestrians, bikes, and rickshaws. Bodies bumped into me in the overcrowded streets. This chaotic infringement, the constant noise and movement was, contrary to expectations, exactly what I needed. Intense contrasting smells of sugary bananas, sweating bodies, rose petal perfume, and public toilets reeking of ammonia reminded me that I was alive.

A hawker badgered me to buy a fresh coconut. He chopped off the top of its rounded head with a machete and stuck a straw into the water. The pure refreshing liquid moistened my parched throat. While I slurped the last drop, I noticed a banner on the side of a large domed building: Special Exhibition for Local Artists—Today Only.

## Reflections on the Canal, Digital Photography by Dennis Smith



Leaving the steamy sidewalk and the cacophony of honking, yelling, and bellowing car exhausts, I walked up the stairs, paid the entrance fee, and wandered into the Museum of Modern Art's large atrium. It was quiet except for intermittent chatter, the hum of whirling fans, and shoes echoing on the marble floor. Shafts of light slanted through the windows. In the strong sunlight, dust particles danced on the whitewashed walls.

I strolled from painting to painting until I stopped, riveted, in front of the one that was before me. Stepping even closer I could almost feel the women's arms embracing me, pulling me into their world. The artist captures the essence of the two women, gilded and streaked with a theatrical manipulation of light and shadow, and a unique understanding of the emotional impact of the fusion of two hues. Hues of light and dark layered with new textures. Hues of shimmering yellow—ghee, saffron, pineapple, turmeric, honey, mango—reaching out to remind me that I, too, had once been all those delicious shades. Hues that would always remind me of John. Before the diagnosis of terminal cancer. Before asbestos fibers sucked the life out of his lungs. Before he took his last breath. When his body stiffened, I turned sage gray. Like the herb's leaves—slightly sour, bitter, and rough to touch. My unique warm flavor smothered. All the color in my life lost.

An aroma of vegetable samosas fills the air. Visitors shuffle past me, people murmur, and two young girls run around in circles giggling, but all I see are the confused expressions

## Lighthouse Digital Photography by Linda Nelson



## Morning Fog Digital Photography by Linda Nelson

on the two women's faces in the painting. Those two women, like me, are searching for a way out of that dark background, through the gloomy undercurrent that smothers the juxtaposed yellows—our shimmer. No longer two-dimensional and flat, these women are now my friends. I take a step forward and just in time I stop myself from reaching out to take their hands. No wonder this painting speaks to me. Without John, I've no idea who I am.

Never before has one work of art affected me in this way. Someone whom I'd never met had captured my hidden feelings with the sweep of a brush and a few tubes of paint. To the outside world I appear vibrant, even courageous, but deep inside me, like the black shading in the painting, my mood is heavy. This fusion of light and dark speaks to me and coaxes me closer. I long for the light hues: laughter and embraces that would push the darkness into the background, forcing my grief to lighten. Hues of John, of us, of our life, before his death the previous year. The dark shades, domineering and deathly, remind me of my sorrow.

The hubbub fades. My eyes close and I feel myself swaying. I try to steady myself by shifting my feet and focusing on the wall. I run my finger through my graying hair to see if I too, like the women in the painting, could twist my curls into a knot at the back of my neck. But mine is too short. Prickly strands poke into the palm of my hand, while their curls are lightly oiled and firmly held by a gleaming barrette at the back of their necks. My baggy, rough, dull brown cotton kurta hangs limply down below my knees. Theirs, lemon-yellow,



sumptuous, soft, and silky, drape over their breasts revealing slender midriffs.

In the museum's bright hall, I cover my mouth with the palm of my left hand and gaze at the women's gold thong sandals, dazzling anklets, and glinting toe rings. Bangles the tint of a harvest moon adorn their arms from their wrists to their elbows. Long drop earrings glitter against their dark outline. From their lips and eyebrows, glowing brassy tones shine out from the shadows urging me to laugh again. But thick eyeliner shrouds their maudlin eyes, as if revealing signs of lethargy. My inside light, like theirs, has run out of power. Now I'm groping to find the switch.

The sun's rays turn pale and fade while I continue to stare mesmerized at the painting's hushed yet incandescent moodiness. The contrast of the walnut wooden frame on the white museum wall sharpens.

Someone near me whispers, "Do you like it?"

I jerk and step back.

A petite woman, wearing a jade-colored sari, looks at me and raises her eyebrows. The soft fabric lies across her forearm. Silver looped earrings frame her broad cheeks.

"It seems to speak to me," I reply, looking down at the stone floor, unsure what to say to the stranger.

"My name is Patti Fortis. I'm the artist," she says, stroking her shoulder-length braid. Her palm stretches out and she clasps my right hand with both of hers. For a moment I'm not sure whose hand I'm holding—hers or one of the women's in the painting. Her sandalwood perfume wafts over me, a magic potion.

"Would you like to buy it?" she asks, bowing her head slightly. "I see you've been looking at it for a long time."

That is the last thing on my mind. I have no clue where to hang it in my tiny Mumbai apartment and I'm not sure I can afford it. But I do know that John would love it. I know I have to buy it. For him. For us. I smile and nod.

"Pleased to meet you Patti. My name is Susan, and I'm not intending to buy anything. But this particular painting of yours... it's wonderful. There is such a strong connection between me and these two women."

My hand lies comfortably between her soft palms, and she shakes my arm up and down.

"Then it shall be yours."

I don't remember walking to the cash machine a few blocks away to draw rupees for my purchase, nor pressing a pile of notes into Patti's hand. She hugs me like a sister, lifts the painting off the wall, and wraps her work of art in newspaper tied with string. The precious purchase guarded by my elbow and forearm is tucked into my armpit. I hold it high off the floor, avoiding the crowds, calling out, "Saavadhaa!" (Careful!) when a kid nearly runs into me. My flip-flops barely touch the marble floor even though I'm holding a heavy package. When I leave the museum entrance and walk down the stairs back onto the bustling sidewalk, the sun is a red ball slipping toward the horizon. The light dazes me and the muggy evening air wafts up my trouser leg. People smoking and chewing betel leaf mill around hawkers selling chutney sandwiches, a man selling slices of papaya, and another, watermelon juice from a metal cart.

A few minutes later I find myself in a tuk-tuk's backseat, clinging onto a pole and bouncing to my new Mumbai apartment. I don't feel the need to wave away the clouds of exhaust fumes or wipe my watery eyes. All that matters is that the painting survives the potholes and the sharp twists and turns.

There is no wall space in the apartment so the painting stands propped against my closet door. It's the first thing I see when I wake up in the morning. Yet as I marvel at their alluring outfits, I recognize that I'm beginning to change. Changes that for now seem cosmetic. I'm hopeful that if I start with my appearance, my spirit will wiggle its way back into my crumpled soul.

A stranger in the mirror stares back at me—dark eyeliner, thick mascara, long drop earrings, and a little too much blush. Curls and waves replace the flat-ironed, layered business bob. My orange kurta embroidered with jade roses defines my waist and emphasizes my breasts.

Today, the painting hangs on a soft purple wall next to the front door of my Seattle home. Every time I unlock and lock my front door these women, my friends, remind me that I'm still not sure who I am or who I want to be. But the gold and yellow hues are brighter as if trapped in the light from the window.

That painting is still me.

# World's Best Key Lime Pie

**Manijeh Badiozamani**

We are new to the area, but have managed to find a short cut that takes us to a big shopping center. It appears everyone else knows about this shortcut as well. Going through the residential areas while following this shortcut, once in a while, I notice signs posted along the side of the road which announces: world's best key lime pie, sold on Friday, at 11 a.m. I've seen such signs four times only since we moved to the area a year ago. I am curious about the pie, but never manage to be on that road on a Friday at 11 a.m.

Today, I am on that road! And here is the story of the world's best key lime pie.

It is 10:15 and I'm driving home from my exercise class – I'm determined to lose two more pounds! It dawns on me that it is Friday, and that I had seen the pie sign yesterday. Voila! I head for the shortcut. It is 10:25 by now.

As I reach the vast empty field, I see four cars already lined up on one side. I roll the window down and ask an older gentleman: "Is this the line for the Key Lime Pie?"

He looks at me with no expression on his face.

"Yes, it is," he says nonchalantly.

"Is the pie really good?" I ask with a smile.

"Yes it is," he replies calmly.

"Then I must get to the back of the line?" I question, feeling rather stupid.

"If you want to buy the pie," he says looking at me as if I'm a moron. I drive to the back of the line – now there are six cars ahead of me.

I call my husband. "Can you guess where I am?" I ask jubilantly.

"I don't have the foggiest notion," he says, with a tinge of curiosity in his voice.

"I'm in line to buy that famous key lime pie."

"Wow, I thought we were trying to lose weight," he protests

"Yes, but we have to taste this pie at least once, and it is close to 11 a.m." I look at my watch, it is 10:43. We hang up. Next I call my sister: "Can you guess where I am right now?"

She smiles at the other end and says she doesn't have a clue.

"I'm in line to buy a key lime pie. Would you like me to buy you one?"

## Fox River Illinois Watercolor by George Frederick and Carl Waller



"Good heavens no!" she says laughing out loud. "We don't eat dessert. Besides, you are buying one and we will come over to taste it."

The cars are arriving one after another, lining up on the grass-covered empty field, or parking on the side of the road. It is getting close to 11:00 and I notice folks are getting out of their cars and lining up somewhere in the middle of the field. I do the same, and walk fast to get in line. There are twenty people standing in line ahead of me waiting for the truck to arrive! By now I am counting about sixty-five cars.

Then, a short, slender, middle-aged man walks into the field, directing traffic and telling those folks who have parked in the path of the truck to move their cars. This is done in an orderly manner. Then a young man shows up. They both put on a white apron, and a chef's hat. The names on the apron read Rob and Tim, the older and the younger one respectively.

It is beastly hot, probably close to 90 degrees with high humidity. But everyone is patiently waiting. People are holding their money – a twenty-dollar bill – that is how much each pie costs. It better be good for that price, I tell myself!

The line curves and now there are roughly seventy folks behind me. Necks are all stretched to see if the truck is arriving. I walk over to Rob and start asking questions about this whole operation.

"Anthony is the baker," Rob says. "He has been making these key lime pies for the past 25 years – and selling them here in this field for the past seven years." Rob tells me all about these wonderful pies. "Anthony uses only four ingredients: eggs, milk, sugar, key lime juice in a special graham cracker crust." Rob appears to be the marketing man for Anthony's business. I also learn that Anthony delivers pies to customers' homes, at no additional delivery charge.

It is sweltering hot, and I'm perspiring profusely. The white truck arrives. Big sign in front says "Family Owned and God Blessed." The truck parks where it is supposed to, and I get to see Anthony, who broadly smiles as he gets out of the truck, opens the back of the truck and pulls down a ramp. I see four chest freezers in there. The pies are all frozen. Anthony brings out a cooler and tells folks to help themselves with cold bottled-water. Then a radio is put on a small folding table and music floats in the air.

Anthony greets the customers, assures everyone that his kitchen is certified and that he is licensed to do business. Tim and Rob, take trays of samples around. I get my first little taste of the world's best key lime pie. Delicious!

The line is moving, and I find myself in front of Anthony to be handed a pie. When he puts a frozen pie in a bag for me, I coyly say, "Two please!"

Anthony assures me it keeps in the freezer for a month, but deep in my heart I know it will be consumed way before the month ends.

**Buzz Bomb, Digital Photography by Christine Catalano**  
**"'I've been waiting for you,' the flower seems to say, as the tiny visitor makes a beeline to it."**





## Familiar Strangers

**Miriam Thor**

Floor lights. I lost half a day with my parents and inconvenienced a friend because of one panel of floor lights. It was the Thursday before Easter during my sophomore year of college, and my friend Hannah was driving me to the airport in Charlotte. On our way there, I received a text letting me know that my flight had been delayed by an hour. That wouldn't have mattered, except that it would cause me to miss my connecting flight in Houston. Unsure what to do, Hannah parked in the short-term lot and went with me to talk to the airline.

After I explained my situation, the woman behind the counter told me she could get me on a straight flight to New Orleans at ten o'clock that night. It seemed like a good deal to me. Yes, I would get home a few hours later, but I would get to fly straight there. Not a bad trade off at all.

I offered to wait at the airport, but Hannah convinced me that she didn't mind making another trip that night. We went to her house and killed time until it was time for her to bring me to the airport once again. After she dropped me off, I made it to my gate with no issues. Then, I sat down and observed

my fellow passengers. Several of them were wearing LSU attire, and I knew that they too were headed home. I didn't say anything though. It takes more than supporting the same football team to make an introvert talk to a stranger.

There were also several cute guys in the crowd.

Maybe one of them will have the seat next to me, I thought, trying not to get my hopes up. When I flew, I always hoped a cute guy would end up sitting next to me, and although it hadn't happened yet, I figured statistically it was bound to eventually.

We started boarding the plane on time. When they called for my zone, I located my seat and was only faintly disappointed when a middle-aged woman was in the one next to mine. I sat down, stowed my carry-on bag, and waited.

And waited and waited. The flight attendants walked up and down the aisle, whispering among themselves. Just when I was getting really concerned, one of them picked up the microphone.

"We're having a problem with a panel of floor lights," she said. "We need all of you to exit the plane while they fix it." Suppressing a sigh, I grabbed my carry-on and followed the other passengers off the aircraft. Silently, I sat down in a chair just outside the gate.

## Face First, Digital Photography by Christine Catalano "A standout sunflower braves the wind."





## Extemporaneous Autumn in the Woods Oil Painting by Dennis Smith

Glancing around at the frustrated faces around me, I couldn't help but feel a sense of camaraderie. With one announcement, we had gone from travelers with nothing in common but a destination to a group united by a common enemy: a panel of floor lights. Feeling comforted that I wasn't alone, I settled in to wait.

At eleven thirty, one of the employees announced that we would be unable to fly out that night. Instead, we would all receive tickets for a flight the next morning at seven. As the crowd looked even more disgruntled than before, she added that the airline would be paying for everyone to stay in a hotel near the airport. Looking slightly mollified, everyone headed toward the service desk to get tickets and vouchers.

Since I had no desire to stay in a hotel by myself, I called Hannah, and half an hour later, I was in the car with her and her mom. I slept on an air mattress in Hannah's room that night, and before sunrise the next morning, she'd dropped me off at the airport yet again. To her credit, she never complained once.

Since it was so early, I made it through security with no issues and quickly made my way toward my gate.

"Good morning," a dark-haired woman said as I walked up. She too had been on the plane last night. "I hope they checked the floor lights this time."

"Me too," I said with a smile.

"Yeah," a short-haired woman chimed in. "You know those floor lights are vital to the plane."

That drew chuckles from several of us. I looked around at the familiar faces, much less lonely than I'd been the previous night. It was nice "knowing" people at the airport.

The good-natured banter continued even as we boarded. I found my seat and looked out the window, thinking this might turn out to be the most enjoyable flight I'd ever experienced. I turned when someone sat next to me. It was one of the cute guys from the previous night.

Yes, I decided, definitely the most enjoyable.

We took off with no complications, from floor lights or otherwise. The guy and I talked for most of the flight, and I was almost sorry when we taxied to the terminal in New Orleans a couple hours later.

"Nice meeting you," I told the guy as I gathered my stuff.

"You too," he said, heading down the aisle. I stood up, careful not to hit my head on the overhead bin, and followed suit.

"We made it," the short-haired woman said, walking away from the gate.

"Best of luck to you," the dark-haired woman told me as she moved toward baggage claim.

"Thanks," I said. "Bye."

As I watched them go their separate ways, I felt a twinge of sadness, knowing I would never see these people again. Even if I did, I knew I wouldn't recognize them. Our camaraderie had vanished as quickly as it had appeared. And yet, I felt grateful for that temporary bond. It had made the delay worth the inconvenience it caused. As my fellow passengers disappeared, I said a brief prayer of thanks before going to meet my parents.



# The Yellow Shoes

A.M. Reitlinger

It all didn't start really promising. It wasn't one of these life-changing moments where, upon beholding a man or woman, you instantaneously think 'this is the person I am going to marry.'

What I initially beheld upon meeting my future fiancé was a pathetic, hunched down heap of misery perching on a chair, obviously wasted beyond any remedy. The guy who had invited me introduced everybody who was still conscious and lastly said 'and this pile of drunken sadness is Jake.' Little did I know that this was the first description ever given to me about my future fiancé, and, in retrospect, it is rather a miracle how it all fell into place eventually.

As the evening proceeded, Jake remained oblivious for the most part of it, however, one of the other guys desperately wanted to fix me up with a different man, who, ironically, was one of Jake's best friends at that time. Thankfully, and oh how thankful I am, he didn't seem particularly interested and so I was still painfully eligible when the wee hours took over and Jake slowly resurfaced – only to immediately insult me in our first conversation ever.

'What do you think of the events tonight?' he asked with a mischievous grin, a lopsided football helmet on his head. He poked an old microphone into my face – hell knew where he had got that from...

'Er', I stuttered. 'I guess it's a good party, right?'

He rolled his eyes at me, his gaze blurry, and shook his head vigorously. 'No, I mean the sports event, dimwit.'

Only now I realised the microphone was of some sports channel and he was apparently having an imaginative event planned out in his head and was pestering people with his broadcast. I decided to flee the scene, but he kept following me like a loyal puppy, his glance of displayed annoyance changing to one of curiosity. As I sat down on the carpet, he settled opposite me, looking at me as if he had never seen a woman before.

I cannot recall anymore what exactly we talked about, but I remember him starting to rub my calves at some point, which, knowing him now as one of the shyest people of all time, strikes me as rather daring and odd, but hey, he was

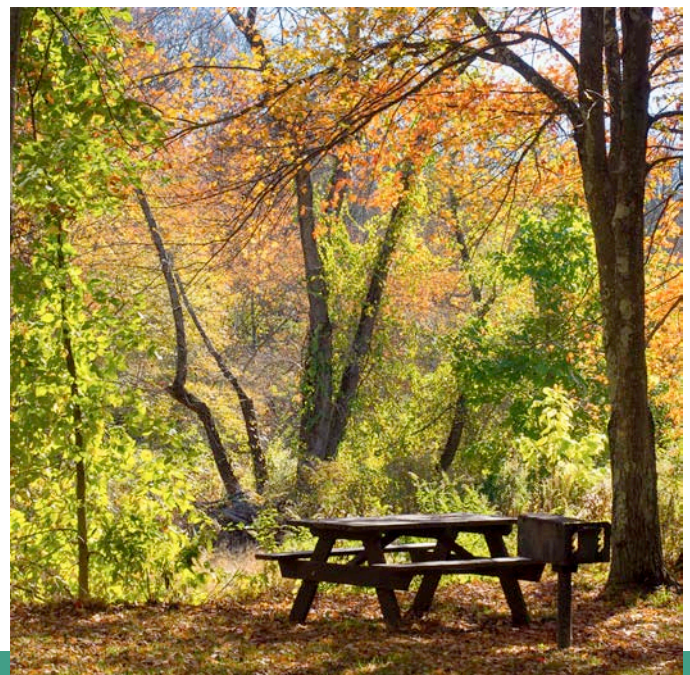
pretty wasted and alcohol is supposed to lower inhibitions, right?

Considering our poor start, we soon found ourselves ensconced on the sofa, tongue-tangoing as if there was no tomorrow, and we didn't even stop when the police stopped by because someone had stepped on the roof and neighbours had called them in with the suspicion of a thief seizing an opportunity. I still blush when I think what the officers must have thought upon stepping into the room: a bunch of drunkards, two of them really hitting it off on the sofa behind, oblivious to law enforcement.

When the morning was dawning on all of us and we deemed it time to go home, Jake asked for my number and I almost declined, for which there were various reasons. First of all, I had just graduated from school and was looking forward to a lavish time of sleeping around and having a long line of admirers (Jake was the second man I kissed after I graduated, so my plans weren't really all that successful, were they?). And secondly, there were the yellow shoes.

Who would have thought that the success or failure of a fantastic relationship could be tied to the banalities of yellow footwear? Jake was sporting yellow sneakers, which I considered to be simply horrible. Obviously, I shouldn't have been superficial, but a little mean voice kept creeping up, saying 'are you seriously going to date a man with yellow

## Fall Picnic Digital Photography by Dennis Smith





shoes? What will people say?' In retrospect I blush upon having had such ridiculous thoughts, but it is the miracle of peer-pressure which, at the age of nineteen, sadly still had its firm grip on me. Due to his inebriated state, however, Jake was rather insistent and so I caved and issued my number eventually, expecting to never hear from him again anyway, and that would be it.

A few days later, I was standing in the grocery store with my mother, piling up food into our cart, when my phone pinged.

*Hi, this is Jake. Remember me? Was just thinking of you and thought we could meet in town sometime?*

Completely awestruck, I looked at the message for a minute or two, pondering if I should really take it to the next level (I couldn't forget about the yellow shoes). He seemed so young and I wanted to date older guys and the yellow shoes...

*Hi, sure I remember...What do you have in mind?*

Minutes passed by while I was putting eggs, milk and cheese into the cart, my mother scuttling around me, when, finally, my phone vibrated once more.

*Can I take you out to the movies?*

I caught myself smiling. Sure, he was my age and not a mature man with a car, but he had texted, which was a quality hard to get in a man it seemed, and so I decided to give it a shot because, who knew, probably there was a wonderful man behind these yellow shoes. A man who would cook for me, make me laugh, rock me when I wept, listen to my insane short stories as well as read my lengthy novels, or buy me a beautiful ring. Maybe – maybe – he would turn out to be a man who would go on road trips with me, watch movies, endure my Christmas mania and not only understand but cherish my quirks and craziness which sometimes kicked in when life got rather overwhelming – maybe. Who knew, maybe he would become the man I would marry one day. You could never know, and a pair of yellow shoes shouldn't keep you from finding out, so I wrote

*Sure. Looking forward to it!*

And the rest, as they say, is history.



## **Fading Glory**

**Digital Photography  
by  
Christine Catalano**

**“Gerbera daisy with spent seeds”**

# Contributors



## Manijeh Badiozamani

Manijeh Badiozamani is a literary non-fiction writer. She writes mostly about her experiences growing up in Tehran, Iran, where she was born. Her short stories and articles have been published in magazines, anthologies and on the Web. She is a retired professor of English, and is currently working on a collection of short stories: "Family Tales from Tehran", and a non-fiction, "A Year in Middle America, Letters to My Parents." She lives in Florida.



## Mark Berkery

Mark was born to itinerant Irish parents which set the scene for a restless life. Like the Gypsy, he couldn't accept the moribund values of a soulless society, what passed for important or posed as spiritual. The resulting roller-coaster of experience and inner conflict eventually gave way to a love of the simple sense of nature that he now lives - the best he can - as a form of meditation. He expresses his ongoing exploration of nature's spiritual value through his writing and pictures at [www.beingmark.com](http://www.beingmark.com)



## Jean Biegun

Jean Biegun's poems have appeared in MOBIUS: THE POETRY MAGAZINE, AFTER HOURS: A JOURNAL OF CHICAGO WRITING AND ART, FOX CRY REVIEW, PRESENCE: THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION, WISCONSIN POETS CALENDAR, GOOSE RIVER ANTHOLOGY and other places. In 2004, she left Chicago for a small Wisconsin town to escape the 5 Big City C's: cars, concrete, crowds, consumerism, and crime. So far, pretty good.



## Susan Bloch

Susan Bloch is a freelance writer living in Seattle. Her essay "The Mumbai Massacre" (Blue Lyra Review) received notable mention in Best American Essays 2017. Her writing has also appeared in Tikkun, The Huffington Post, Quail Bell Magazine, Entropy Magazine, The Citron Review, Pif Magazine, and Secret Histories, among others. You can find more of her work at [susanblochwriter.com](http://susanblochwriter.com).



## Jeff Burt

Jeff Burt has work in Atticus Review, The Nervous Breakdown, Amarillo Bay, and Across the Margins. He enjoys the delicious imbecility of conscious life.



### **Nick Bush**

Nick Bush is an associate professor of English at Motlow State Community College and an English PhD student at Middle Tennessee State University as well as a standup comic in Nashville who writes fiction and poetry when he's not watching the Titans or cooking low carb meals. He co-hosts the "Nick & Garrett Get Serious about Jokes" podcast and co-edits the Mosaic literary magazine.



### **Christine Catalano**

Christine likes to take photographs and play with them on the computer. She dedicates her work to her muse and longtime friend.



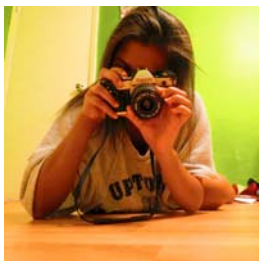
### **Kieron Circuit**

Kieron is a Northern Ireland based street photographer and creative writer with a penchant for travel. The majority of Kieron's images are in black and white to capture emotion and most his writing is influenced by real life experiences. With an interest in helping individuals showcase talents, Kieron is trying to work with community organisations to help provide the platform people need to share their creative side. Some of his work can be found at [callowexplorer.com](http://callowexplorer.com)



### **Morgan Currier**

Francis Currier lives near the White Mountains of New Hampshire with her husband and three of their five sons. She poorly balances her time between family, farming, Halloween plans, and writing. Visit Francis at [www.franciscurrier.com](http://www.franciscurrier.com).



### **Elizabeth Daigle**

Elizabeth is just starting out on her photographic journey. With hopes of finishing up her certification in photography by the end of the year, she is currently going to school for business and hopes to start her own studio.





### **Carol Dandrade**

Viewing life through a lens has allowed Carol to see light, people, places and things with fresh eyes. She is the Coordinator of the Blackstone Heritage Corridor Photographers who volunteer to photograph historic sites throughout the area. Carol's images have been juried, displayed and awarded in area art exhibits. Her work has been shown in New England Wildflower Magazine, Yankee Magazine online, five Blackstone River Corridor calendars, and 9 Mused issues. CarolDandradePhoto.smugmug.com



### **Terry Dawley**

Terry Dawley resides in the snowbelt of Erie, Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in Pithead Chapel, The Cleveland Review, Soft Cartel and Law Enforcement Today. He is an award winner of the Writer's Digest 80th Annual Writing Competition and a five-time award winner of the Pennwriters Annual Writing Contest.



### **Leslie Dianne**

Leslie Dianne is a poet, novelist, screenwriter, playwright & performer whose work has been acclaimed internationally in places such as The Harrogate Fringe Festival in the UK, The International Arts Festival in Tuscany, Italy & at La Mama, ETC in NYC. Her stage plays have been produced in numerous NYC theaters & her poems have appeared in The Pangolin Review, The Esthetic Apostle, Pop Shot & Ink and Voices & are forthcoming in S/tick, Rue Scribe, Raw Journal of Arts & Furtive Dalliance.



### **Stacie Eirich**

Stacie is a writer, mother and unabashed dreamer who reads poetry by moonlight and dreams of traveling beyond the stars. Fueled by hazelnut coffee, dark chocolate and red wine, she's currently writing her next children's fantasy in The Dream Chronicles series. She lives north of New Orleans with her family and two adorable cats, Ollie & Oreo - writing, mothering, and dreaming. Visit Stacie's Blog: [www.writerstacieeirich.blogspot.com](http://www.writerstacieeirich.blogspot.com)



### **Bob Evans**

A late-comer to art photography, Bob spent his early career working in engineering. He finds that creating something from nothing gives a tremendous rush. Bob strongly believes in taking the subject 'as-is' - no posing, no moving of the subject matter. It is capturing the essential essence of the subject matter that is vital to him. As well as photography, Bob is also a keen sculptor and abstract painter. Visit [ArckArts.com](http://ArckArts.com) or follow on FaceBook.



### **Nuno Fatela**

Nuno was born and grew up in sunny Lisbon being inspired by the ocean. He left Lisbon for Amsterdam where he settled by the canals. He is a book lover dabbling in the world of poetry. When not writing, he likes to bike from museum to bookstore and back, looking for inspiration.



### **Meagan Fedigan**

Meagan is a Massachusetts based self-taught photographer who enjoys finding beauty in the everyday. Photography has really opened her eyes to the world around her, and she loves to focus on the details that often go unnoticed. When she's not behind the lens or at her day job, she enjoys spending time with her husband and 3 children. For more of Meagan's work, visit her on Instagram! <https://www.instagram.com/meaganfediganphotography/>



### **Deborah Guzzi**

Deborah Guzzi is a healing facilitator, through touch & the written word. Her third book *The Hurricane* is available through Prolific Press. Her poetry appears in *Journals & Literary Reviews* in the UK, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, Greece, France, India & dozens in the USA



### **Dixon Hearne**

Dixon Hearne is the author of several books, including: *Delta Flats: Stories in the Key of Blues and Hope*; *Plainspeak* (poetry); *Native Voices, Native Lands*; and *Plantatia: High-toned and Lowdown Stories of the South*. His work has been twice nominated for the Pushcart, as well as the Hemingway/PEN award, and won the Creative Spirit Award-Platinum for fiction. Other work appears in *Louisiana Literature*, *Tulane Review*, *Cream City Review*, *New Plains Review* and elsewhere. Visit [www.dixonhearne.com](http://www.dixonhearne.com)



### **Lori Hetherington**

Lori Hetherington grew up in California and has spent nearly her entire adult life in Florence Italy where she works as an Italian to English translator, writing other people's words. She works on a wide variety of texts, from scientific articles to historical and literary fiction, 19th century Tuscan tales, and an occasional contemporary romance. However, she also enjoys writing her own words when she gets the chance. For more information about her work visit [www.lhetheringtontranslation.com](http://www.lhetheringtontranslation.com).



### **Stella James**

Stella B. James runs on coffee, chaos, and Southern sass.



### **Dawid Juraszek**

Dawid Juraszek is a lecturer in literature and culture of English-speaking countries at a university in Guangzhou, China. His academic background is in English, translation studies, educational leadership, international relations, and environmental management. A published novelist, his fiction, non-fiction, and poetry have appeared in a variety of outlets in his native Poland, Japan, the US, the UK, and Australia.



### **Bernadine Lortis**

Now retired, Bernadine gardens, dabbles in watercolor, and concentrates on writing but lately feels emotionally drawn to politics. Her degrees in Art and Education led to careers in Interior Design; elementary, special and adult education; and licensure in Real Estate. Since submitting in June, 2016, creative nonfiction, fiction, flash fiction and poetry have been published in an assortment of journals both on-line and in print. She lives in St. Paul, MN, with her husband near their daughter.



### **Marylou Mansfield**

Marylou Mansfield is a full time resident of Cape Cod. She currently shares in two writing groups located in Orleans, Ma, Dune Hollow Writers, and COA Writers. Marylou contributed to the e-book anthology, SHADOW & LIGHT, published by Provincetown Public Press in 2013, compiled by the Women of Dune Hollow Writers. She has read pieces from the anthology in Provincetown and Chatham. Marylou has enjoyed reading her poetry on Senior View, a program highlighted on HCAM-TV in Hopkinton Ma.



### **Anne Moul**

Anne Moul is a retired music educator, happily enjoying her second act as a writer. Her essays have been published in Episcopal Café, Hippocampus, the Pennsylvania Music Educators News and she recently won first place for non-fiction in the 2018 Pennwriters writing contest. She lives in south-central Pennsylvania with her husband and several high-maintenance pets. Her blog may be found at [www.seconductstories.com](http://www.seconductstories.com).





### **Jerrold Narland**

Writing poetry and short fiction for over fifty years, Jerry hopes to eventually get skilled at it. He currently works at devoting his time to writing, painting, and travel. Previous careers include a Lockheed-Martin Space Launch Systems engineer and twenty years in the United States Navy Submarine Service. He regrets that he has not yet visited the last continent, Antarctica, nor had an opportunity to spend time on the International Space Station.



### **Linda Nelson**

Linda was former graphic designer who worked in Boston and freelanced in the Worcester area. She was fortunate to be one of ten photographers from Arts Worcester to show their work for a year at the Fitchburg Art Museum. She now works outdoors and continues to photograph the wonders around us.



### **Beth O'Brien**

Beth O'Brien is a third year English Literature student at the University of Birmingham. She has published poems with Foxglove Journal and Nine Muses Poetry, and is a reviewer for Mad Hatter Reviews and Riggwelter Press. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, travelling, and snacks.



### **Janet M Powers**

Janet M. Powers, Professor Emerita at Gettysburg College, taught South Asian literature and civilization, women's studies and peace studies for 49 years. She has published poetry in many small journals, including Earth's Daughters, The Poeming Pigeon and The Little Red Tree Anthology. Her chapbook, *Difficult to Subdue as the Wind*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009. This old lady still writes poetry and stands on street corners with signs -- trying to change our sorry world.



### **Lawrence Pratt**

Lawrence is a retired Silicon Valley tech writer who has been pursuing both freelance photography and creative writing as artistic outlets for over 20 years. More free time has allowed him to refine his avocational efforts and develop a website ([www.miroerarts.com](http://www.miroerarts.com)) dedicated to his efforts. Please visit and enjoy. Questions or comments can be posted to his miroerarts gmail account.



### **A.M. Reitlinger**

Angie Reitlinger is an Austrian-American blogger and freelance writer, editor and translator who currently resides in the lovely city of Vienna. She has written ever since she was able to do so and her work covers non-fiction, novels, short stories and songwriting. When she is not writing, you can find her nestled up somewhere with a book or baking high-calorie cakes in her kitchen. Her blog is available on <https://floatingtheboat.weebly.com/> where she shares thoughts, recipes and reviews.



### **Marcie Roman**

Marcie Roman lives in the Chicago area where she works in theater and film production. Her stories have appeared in Black Fox Literary Magazine, The Gravity of the Thing, and Blotterature. She has an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts.



### **Judy Salz**

Judy Salz contributed the work entitled Sunset Pines.



### **Sally Sandler**

Sally Sandler's transcendent poetry brings fresh insight into the passage of time and its effects on fellow Baby Boomers—their shared experiences of aging, losing their parents, gaining grandchildren, paying more attention, recollecting and reminiscing. Sandler is a graduate of the University of Michigan and has lived in San Diego for over forty years. She is a docent and historian at the San Diego Botanic Garden, as well as a wife, a mother, and a grandmother of four. [www.sallysandler.com](http://www.sallysandler.com)



### **Lisa Shea**

Born in Maryland, Lisa Shea has been contentedly nestled in the rolling hills and mossy forests of Massachusetts since 1995. She is drawn to the ocean and cherishes quiet evenings as the orange glow of sunset glistens across wooden docks. Lisa relishes the challenge of conveying meaning and memorable characters in a measured bounding of time and space. Her stories, poems, and images celebrate natural beauty and serenity. Enjoy thousands of her photos at <http://www.lisashea.com>



### **John Smistad**

John Smistad contributed the work *Eternal Vista*.



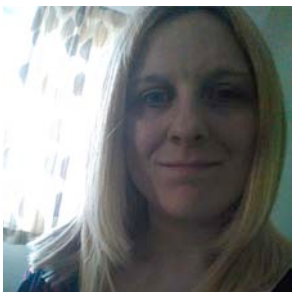
### **Dennis Smith**

Dennis creates images of life and nature to fulfill his need to experience, share, and preserve what he finds beautiful. He travels throughout the Eastern US and Europe creating photos and paintings of his travels. He learned the basics of photography, composition, technique, and darkroom from his Dad. He favors Pictorialism over Modernism and reflects that in both his photography and painting. Dennis lives in Uxbridge Massachusetts and his works can be seen at [www.densmith.com](http://www.densmith.com)



### **Linda Spear**

Linda Spear contributed the work *Bulldog Day Afternoon*.



### **Amanda Steel**

Amanda Steel is a multi-genre author, sometimes writing under the pen name, Aleesha Black. She is also the co-host of the monthly book review podcast "Reading in Bed!". Her website is [www.amandasteelwriter.com](http://www.amandasteelwriter.com)



### **Craig W. Steele**

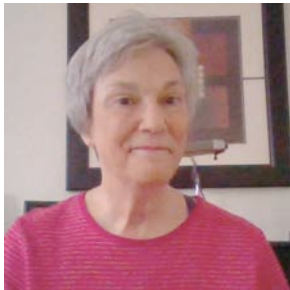
Craig W. Steele is a professor of biology and health sciences at Edinboro University in northwestern Pennsylvania. In his continuing quest to become a widely-read unknown poet, his poems most recently appear or are forthcoming in *The Lyric*, *Oracle Fine Arts Review*, *Mused: the BellaOnline Literary Review*, *The Literary Nest*, *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*, *The Fib Review* and *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*. He continues to write poetry as "The Writer's Poet" for *Extra Innings* online.





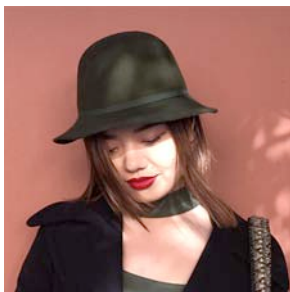
### **Miriam Thor**

Miriam Thor graduated from Gardner-Webb University in 2012 with a degree in American Sign Language and elementary education. She currently resides in North Carolina with her husband and cats. Her previous publications include a young adult fantasy novella entitled *Wish Granted* and short stories in *Edify Fiction*, *Youth Imagination*, and *TWJ Magazine*. You can learn more about her at <https://miriamthor17.wixsite.com/author>.



### **Lee Triplett**

Lee Triplett is a poet, voracious reader, seeker, bipolar depressive, pianist, queer, and South Carolinian. A student of poetry, piano performance, and computer science in college, she immerses herself in poets to whom she is drawn. Her poetry has been published in *Amethyst Review* and she currently lives in Tega Cay, South Carolina.



### **Bijou Zhou**

Bijou Zhou grew up in China's Hunan province. Having first learned painting from a local artist, she went on to receive a degree in Fine Arts from Hunan University of Science and Technology, before moving to the USA to study English at Kennesaw State University. She now lives in Changsha, China.

### **Eric Michael Bovim**

Eric Michael Bovim submitted the work *Catalan Gothic*.

### **Fred Cheney**

Fred Cheney submitted the work *Dry*.

### **Catherine Coundjeris**

Catherine has been battling Ankylosing Spondylitis since she was in high school. A former elementary school teacher, Catherine has also taught writing at Emerson College and ESL writing at Urban College in Boston. Currently she is living with her family in Frederick and she is working on a YA novel. Catherine volunteers as an ESL Coordinator with the Literacy Council of Frederick County and she is very passionate about adult literacy.

### **Matthew Roy Davey**

Matthew Roy Davey lives in Bristol, England. He has won the Dark Tales and The Observer short story competitions and been long-listed for the Bath Flash Fiction award and the Reflex Flash Fiction competition. He has recently been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His short story 'Waving at Trains' has been translated into Mandarin and Slovenian. Matthew is also an occasional lyricist for prog-rock weirdos Schnauser. He has no hobbies. <https://matthewroydavey.wordpress.com/>

### **Daniel de Culla**

Daniel de Culla submitted the work *Goddess*.

## **Maria DePaul**

Maria DePaul is a Washington, DC-based writer who draws inspiration from the beauty -- and sometimes horror -- of the world around us. Her work has been featured in: Akashic's Terrible Twosdays; Aphelion; The Future Fire; Dual Coast Magazine; Haiku Journal; Haikuniverse; The Horror Zine; Illumen; Inwood Indiana; Luna Station Quarterly; Nature Writing; Violet Windows; Plum Tree Tavern; Poetry Quarterly; Scifaiquest; Speculative 66; Three Line Poetry; The Review Review; and Wax Poetry and Art.

## **Leslie Dianne**

Leslie Dianne submitted the work Des Moines Jones.

## **David Edwards**

David Edwards was born, and continues to live, in Muncie, Indiana.

## **Lee Evans**

Lee Evans was born in Maryland, spent most of his life in that state, and is currently living in Bath, Maine. His poems have appeared in such journals as Contemporary Rhyme, The Golden Lantern, The Road Not Taken and The Deronda Review. He has produced two poetry collections, Maryland Weather and Nor'easter, which are available on Lulu.com.

## **Neil Dana Gluckin**

Neil Dana Gluckin submitted the work Authority.

## **Kate Hodges**

Kate Hodges submitted the work Through the Looking Puddle.

## **Allison Huang**

Allison Huang submitted the work Thoughts on a Subway.

## **Joan Hunt**

Joan Hunt contributed the work A Fatal Romance.

## **Kimberly Behre Kenna**

After many years of teaching children, Kimberly now writes for children full time. Genres include poetry, flash fiction, plays, and most recently, middle grade novels. Her work has appeared or is upcoming in American Writers Review, Rubbertop Review, GFT Press, and Plum Tree Tavern. She lives with her husband in Branford, CT, where every day Long Island Sound reminds her of the vast, diverse beauty of all living things.

## **Lindy Kennedy**

Lindy Kennedy submitted the work Slivers of Love.

## **Charlotte Lewis**

Charlotte Lewis lives in Washington State. She has written all her life - once she learned to write. Charlotte was once a third grade teacher but found numbers to be more ruly than 8-year olds, went back to school to learn something new and ended her professional career as a forensic legal accountant. Hobbies include knitting and photography. Charlotte has children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She has self-published and some of her works can be found at charlottelewisonline.com.

## **Stephen Mead**

A resident of NY, Stephen Mead is an Outsider multi-media artist and writer. Since the 1990s he's been grateful to many editors for publishing his work in print zines and eventually online. He is also grateful to have managed to keep various day jobs for the Health Insurance.

### **Michael Mogel**

Michael Mogel submitted the work Trash Talkers.

### **Michael Neal Morris**

Michael Neal Morris submitted the works Miles Davis Lays It Down and .

### **Sam Muller**

Sam Muller is a newish writer working on a book. Her stories have appeared in Deep Magic, Cosmic Roots and Eldritch Shores, The Pedestal Magazine and a Third Flatiron anthology.

### **Linda Nelson**

Linda Nelson submitted the works Lighthouse, Morning Fog, Passin' Wind! and Rainbow.

### **Elaine Reardon**

Elaine is a poet, herbalist, educator, and member of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators. Her chapbook, The Heart is a Nursery For Hope, published September 2016, recently won first honors from Flutter Press as the top seller of 2016. Most recently Elaine's poetry has been published by Three Drops from a Cauldron Journal, MA Poet of the Moment, <http://www.naturewriting.com> and [poetrysuperhighway.com](http://poetrysuperhighway.com). Elaine maintains a blog at [elainereardon.wordpress.com](http://elainereardon.wordpress.com)

### **E. F. Schraeder**

E. F. Schraeder submitted the work Autoimmune.

### **Margarita Serafimova**

Margarita Serafimova submitted the work Untitled No. 2.

### **Beth Spencer**

Beth Spencer is a recent émigré to Minnesota stalking grandchildren in the Minneapolis area. Beth has published a chapbook, "Mill Door" and her first poetry book, "C- in Conduct." Her essay on teaching appeared in the Geraldine R Dodge project, A Passion for Teaching. She won first prize in the Dorothy Dalton poetry contest and a recent honorable mention in a contest at The Mill, Appleton, WI as well as placing in two categories of the League of Minnesota Poets 2017 contest.

### **Elizabeth Stansberry**

Elizabeth Stansberry is passionate about poetry, dog videos and nature. She has been writing poetry since she was 9 years old. Miss Stansberry has several jobs including secretary at Prosper Portland, Ataxia Warrior, and security at Portland Art Museum. In her spare time, Miss Stansberry loves to share her poetry with other poets with rare disabilities. Miss Stansberry currently lives in Portland, Oregon.

### **Barbara Taylor**

Barbara Taylor submitted the work Sylvia's Shoes.

### **Gary Van Haas**

Gary Van Haas submitted the work Dream Scapes.

### **George Frederick and Carl Waller**

George Frederick Carl Waller submitted the works Fox River Illinois and Fox River Illinois.

### **Jane Warren**

Jane Warren contributed the artwork entitled Brazil and Brazil 2.



# Masthead



## **Lisa Shea, Publisher**

Lisa Shea feels that beauty can be discovered in any corner of nature - from the glistening autumn leaf on a mossy rock to the spiral swirls of a shell nestled into a sandy beach. She is drawn to serene organic images, enjoying both photography and haiku as her primary means of discovery. Her short stories examine the hopes, dreams, and growth that we each go through in life. In addition to owning BellaOnline Lisa writes for the Low Carb and Video Gaming topic areas here. Lisa has published 67 non-fiction books on a variety of topics. On the fiction side, she has published twelve medieval romance novels, two modern murder mysteries, and six novellas--all benefit battered women's shelters. Lisa is thrilled that over the years the BellaOnline Mused Literary Magazine has helped nearly one thousand artists reach a world-wide audience and find recognition for their talents.



## **Diane Cipollo, Art Director**

Diane Cipollo started as a traditional ink and watercolor artist. She has always been fascinated by animated movies such as Disney's Fantasia and turned in her traditional ink and watercolors for digital pixels several years ago when digital art and animation software arrived on the scene. She has been with BellaOnline since 2003 as editor for the HTML, PHP, Animation and Digital Art and Design sections. She was an animator for an eCard website and specializes in animated social media.



## **Kim Kenney**

Kim Kenney is the author of four books with Arcadia Publishing, Canton: A Journey Through Time, Canton's West Lawn Cemetery, Canton's Pioneers in Flight, and a brand new release Canton Entertainment. She has also published an exhibition review in The Public Historian, the journal of the National Council for Public History. Her work has appeared in Mused, The Boston Globe, The Repository, and the Amazon Shorts program. She serves as editor of the Museums website at BellaOnline.com, where she has authored several ebooks. Her hobbies include cooking, travel, reading, counted cross stitch, and photography.



## **Tina Sansone**

Tina Sansone has been with BellaOnline since December 2005 as the Genealogy Editor, and more recently the eBook Manager. She was so impressed with the Mused editions that she wanted to be a small part of it and decided to volunteer in the judging process. The awesome submissions are great and an inspiration as she does her own writing. Tina is a wife, mother, and grandma. She is also the Coordinator of the ISFHWE "Excellence in Writing" competition, and the President of the Second Life Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogist. Her website is <http://genealogy.bellaonline.com>.



## **Leif Sutter**

Leif is the role-playing games editor for BellaOnline. He's also a husband, student and aspiring entrepreneur--in that order. The Sutter family includes a two-year-old Bichon Frisé. Leif is presently learning the finer points of animal separation anxiety every time his wife Julie leaves the house without their (her!) pup. Currently he is working on a two-year business management degree, after which his sights are set on a four-year accounting degree. Due to transferring schools with incompatible credits, Leif has completed four English composition courses and feels it would be a shame to let such experience waste away. Therefore, Leif is on the non-fiction team for Mused and has enjoyed every work therein. He fancies himself a harsh critic where writing is concerned but he takes care to read any given work through at least once, without minding errors, in order to experience it on its own merit. While far from a perfect writer himself, he's set on helping others achieve that title.

# Publish Your Work in Mused

Our mission is to showcase original work of talented women and men in traditional and experimental modes. Submissions are sought to support BellaOnline's missions of women, empowerment, charity, the environment and of course artistic/literary merit. We publish quarterly - on the equinoxes and the solstices.

## Subject Matter

We are open to pretty much any topic you wish to write about! Stories about trips you have taken, poetry about your last relationship, photos from your back yard - they are all fair game. That being said, we strongly believe in the reputation and friendly atmosphere that BellaOnline has created. For that reason, we need to avoid certain topics - erotica, rape, nudity and profanity. For legal reasons we need to avoid fan fiction and article reprints. Whatever you submit, please make sure it is your own creation!

## Submission Details

All BellaOnline review submissions are done online, using our online form. No other submissions shall be accepted. For legal reasons, all authors/artists must be 18 years of age or older.

## Response Time

We auto-reply for receipt of all submissions. If you do not immediately get an auto-reply, check your anti-spam filters and contact us to let us know. It might be that your entered email address has a typo in it, which would mean we couldn't contact you using it. We send a follow-up email on acceptance or rejection of a submission. We will reply to all submissions within 3 months. We typically respond during the 2 weeks after the submission deadline for that issue. That is our voting period, where we make final decisions on all entries for a given issue. All decisions of our editorial board are final.

## Editorial Calendar

We publish on each solstice and equinox. Our submission deadline is 45 days before each solstice and equinox. This gives us time to vote on all submissions, proofread the final copy of accepted works, get the bios and photos of the authors, and do the layout for the issue. Because of this lead time, if you submit content to us within 45 days of a release that content is being submitted for the subsequent issue. That is, if we are going to release a Spring Equinox issue on March 21st, and you submit content on March 20th, your content is not being considered for that Spring Equinox issue. It will be considered for the Summer Solstice issue. The issue we are drawing in submissions for will always be indicated on the submission form.

## Rights

Submissions should be unpublished elsewhere on the web, as we will acquire first, worldwide electronic rights. Artists/writers understand they are submitting their work at will and thus the submissions are always their property. Rights revert to the author immediately after publication.

## Editing

All accepted works are subject to minor editing for length and appropriateness.

## Payment

Mused is a charity project, to support our charity efforts, so we do not offer payment for submissions. However, each person featured can submit several sentences promoting their background, and link to their personal website. BellaOnline is the 2nd largest women's website in the world, so that link can result in thousands of visitors for you!

## We look forward to hearing from you!



# MUSED

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