

# Red Savina Review *fall, 2017*



# Red Savina Review

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# Wendy Gist

## THE POETRY OF WALKING



from RSR Featured Art © watercolor by Carol McCoy

*“Poetry is a life-cherishing force. For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.”*

— Mary Oliver

Would you like to journey down a path that will help conjure creative insight? A common premise in Taoism is, in the literal sense, that Tao means Path, a road that needs three simultaneous active elements to make it real: the road itself, the person, and the walking the road. I find poetry is like the Tao in that a poem asks one to increase awareness and to be mindful. It’s a process, not a thing, and walking is a way to distill mindfulness into spontaneous creativity.

As an emerging poet, I do the best thinking while walking. If I were deprived of the luxury of daily strolls to find reprieve from the technical age in which I live, I’d run the risk of slipping into a mechanical modality of thought. Walking leads my way into the fertile fields of in-depth creativity. Peripatetic poets are nothing new. Many poets walk. Mary Oliver, for one, who I

admire, has spent a lot of time walking in the woods, which is quite apparent in her poetry. I've sometimes wondered if she walks when faced with the blankness of so-called writer's block, that self-induced hypnosis that paralyzes creative flow. For me, walking in the woods can be a beneficial practice to aid in sidestepping such blockage.

Perhaps that's why there's a poetic form called the Walk Poem. There are different types of Walk Poems, and, of course, they all require walking. It's one of my favorite poems to write. When my mind is as blank as the page in front of me, a vegetative buzzing white, I take to walking to generate "good energy," a common phrase in Taoist scripture that is the very stuff of creation.

Then, when injected with a dose of creative energy, I return to my studio to write. But I don't get too slaphappy. Writing is like swimming under water with your eyes closed: if you're not careful you could break your nose on the side of the pool. So, you must swim slowly. I have to spend ample time to tame a poem or it might turn out mad or incoherent. The more one employs patience while writing, by allowing experience to gestate into language in the womb of the mind, the more one develops a voice of their own, and the more errors (glitches in rhythm or awkward line breaks) glare like a snowman on a Bermuda Island beach. Patience—when in the cacophonous company of the computer screen, cell phones, TV, social media—provides an inoculation against robotic thinking. In the realm of poetry, mechanized metaphor generation can lead to the inauthenticity of imitation.

Authenticity requires the heightened awareness I find by walking. For example, facing the computer screen at my desk, I attempt to write a line to a poem on a brisk wintry day: *the snow is falling like powdered sugar*. The innocuous effort exhibits zapped creative flow. Inauthenticity. Cliché. I'm now inflicted with agitation, which is a common layer of the cycle I experience each time I sit down at the computer screen. There's not much room for imagination when my mind is fried by technology. At this point of creative cessation, I seek adventure, and an enriching walk will serve as firewood to fuel ingenuity.

I pace myself while walking. Not too fast. Not too slow. Finding the right rhythm establishes a sense of tranquility. Oftentimes, when writing creatively, emotion and thought do not come together on the page as swiftly as most writers would like. Nevertheless, a necessary ingredient to a successful poem is time. So, instead of sitting at my computer nibbling munchies and getting fleshy while surfing the Internet, I flee distracting machinery and take to walking. Almost instantly, I loose myself in no-mind, that elusive location where creativity resides, where metaphors appear like snowflakes midair as the inner self and the fresh outdoors unite.

Most often, I walk the woods, but sometimes I pace the high school running track or walk the downtown streets and neighborhoods of the mining-town where I live. This is the manner in which thoughts and observations build gradually into poetic imagery. Walking blends thought with action, stews experience into what will become remembrance. What's more, it's scientific: a new study from Stanford University shows that walking improves creativity. According to the study, researchers observed that creative levels increase as people walk, as opposed to when they sit. The study concluded, "A person's creative output increased by an average of 60 percent when walking." This comes as no surprise: just like the *Parable of the Sower* in the New

Testament, poetic thoughts sprout from seeds sprinkled on the fertile forest floor. These same seeds would strangle in closed rooms of sterile technology.

Authentic writing, just like a proper walk, requires enduring awareness. I recently came across some sound advice offered by [Elizabeth Berg](#), author of the novel *Open House* (Ballantine Books, 2001), that emphasizes this point:

*You need to notice all the time, and then tell what you saw in a new way. As for the notion that everything has already been said, maybe it has, but life is like meatloaf: there are so many different ways to present it.*

My preferred place to notice is in the Gila National Forest, which begins just at the edge of town. There, I have dreamed and walked, cracked snow underfoot, and gazed out to the juniper billowed horizon. Swarms of similes have stirred as sunshine echoed through openings of frosty piñon pines. Ravens have croaked from shadows cast by tree trunks messages as the cold awakened my scalp.

And then I head back to the keyboard with notes scribbled in longhand. Many times it takes a series of walks before I get to this point in the game. New ways to express the snow falling flurry about in a brainstorm:

*The snow drops, floating like feathery flowers falling from groves of fringe trees*  
*The snow tumbles like stardust through the still winter night*  
*The pellets of snow whirl in the chill breeze like unhusked grains of wheat*  
*The snow falls like fish food sprinkled from the hands of a god*

In this manner, nature brings out the best writing self I can be. What's more, it's an ongoing process with no end in sight. Who would shun the gift of making oneself anew poem after poem?

This afternoon, I returned to the warm house from a chilly walk under a sky hydrangea blue, sat at my work space, and, what began as falling snow, transformed into a Walk Poem of night love. Who would guess? According to *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*, a Walk Poem can be about what the poet observes while walking, or it can be a poem that reflects the way a poet's mind works during a walk, among other variations. When writing a poem, I always want to hear the words spoken aloud, so I read the poem again and again before it comes to fruition. Without plan, the poem then reintegrates with lived experience becoming a dream awake.

If you're not already an enthusiast of walking for creative stimulation, you may want to give it a try. As the Taoists are fond of saying, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." They're also known to insist, "Not Two." With this in mind, I think of walking and poetry as One.

The walk in winter daylight sparked visions of love in moonlight:

Winter Walk at Nightfall

*(for my husband)*

I want to walk with you  
bundled under snowflakes at nightfall.  
I will cook hot soup—

Lentil, chicken noodle  
any kind.  
I will brew hot tea—

Earl Grey, jasmine  
whatever you desire,  
pour heat into thermos to-go.

Let me walk with you awhile  
out to the winter woods.  
We can break for a meal

and watch the snow  
tumble tumble like stardust  
through the still winter night.

Let me press tender  
my thirsted-for flesh  
to your

moon-lit lips  
as our hearts dissolve in union.  
As for me, let me see

and feel the warm life  
in your lovesick breath  
steaming mysterious across the air.

# Roy Bentley



from [RSR Featured Photography](#) © by Tammy Ruggles

## He Spent a Year Hallucinating Peace

*(Honorable Mention in RSR's William Carlos Williams Summer Poetry Contest, 2017)*

and, according to The National Enquirer, another  
week and a half tossed in like pennies into a fountain.  
The next day the murders began. The first of the waves  
of new-dead and disfigured posed before detectives who  
had lost their hard edge, meaning that they choked up.  
Imagine that year in which no one did anyone harm.  
Imagine the exhalation from the body of the planet.

Which is to ask, what if a quantum hallucination  
had taken hold? Homicide would have left the field  
under skies canopying the relinquishings of anger,  
cloud cover giving way to blue notional brightness.  
Even in Florida, husbands might've refrained from

dismembering wives, though random gunfire might  
have kept up throughout west Texas like foreplay.

I see peace as my best day on the earth continuing.  
I think of the nesting eagles atop a dead-oak flagpole.  
I see flags of wings beating against bodies, featherfalls,  
the comings and goings by first light in March in Ohio.  
I want to believe the hatchlings can survive whatever.  
I will open a door in the hotel of my hallucinations  
if you will open a door in yours and invite me in.

# Woman in the Sun

—a painting by Edward Hopper, 1961

Here is a room and a naked woman standing in it.  
Here is the cigarette smoldering in a hand. An hour  
will do that sometimes: smolder then burn itself out.

Here are star thistles of nipple. An unshaven mound.  
Here is a bed with sheets, a bedspread, the scalloped  
bedding attesting to what happens in rooms like this.

If she has been luckless, she is one more Chicagoan  
abandoning beliefs about deliverance and merciful  
gods. It looks as if her lover is far away: reducible

to scuff marks on flooring. Maybe she has freed  
herself by forsaking the one who was falling for  
the beautiful stranger in the high-ceilinged room;

maybe she has gotten up to smoke in pre-dawn  
before the candor of a quadrilateral of window  
where, in first light, night air has the last word.

# Mary Cresswell



*From [RSR Featured Art](#) © by Artist Allen Forrest*

## OBSESSION

How do you like me?  
Just say what you want  
I'll turn into whatever you need:  
connoisseur of your wisdom?  
a worshipful aunt?  
a sex slave who knows how to read?

I'll dye my hair red –  
or do you want blonde?  
Take my soul for afternoon tea –  
I'll walk two paces behind you  
to the back of beyond  
I'll be what you want me to be.

I exist just for you –  
take me now, as a gift –  
And look! I'll only be wearing  
my paradigm shift!

# METAMORPHOSIS

the time of blue butterflies  
was filled with sound:  
hillsides  
lookouts  
underpasses  
overbridges

the call of them filled  
a thousand distances:  
short-tailed  
long-tailed  
iridescent  
papery dull

then worldwide silence  
as they took their new shape:  
turned to  
starfish  
blue and brilliant  
drowning the reef

# Theresa Hamman



## Rebirth

a fracture  
one dead eye  
perched on a high  
cliff watches

the plates shift.

Beyond,  
you hear the way  
the river glops over  
an orange cascade,  
weighty, dense, and

you carry  
skins of rain  
collected long before fires,  
before all that acid,  
and feel

the way your back  
fissures open

blisters—

oiling out  
all black

creating new rivers.

# Gordon Hilgers

## TWO CANDLES AND AN OCEAN BETWEEN

Was it nebulous kid fears as I waited in the powder blue  
of my bedroom, a caught sparrow listening to death  
after I had bottled 26 lighting bugs, B-movie monsters  
lunging drunkenly in darkened, fallow fields of an outside  
that could never belong here in suburbia? This too  
was a glassy contrivance that has escaped television screens  
which fenced-in stormy weather and infantile failure,  
two steps in a crumbling dance where ballerinas bent  
to win precious things. There I am, tonight, any night, me,  
holding a candle simply to see it reflect against a broadcast  
there in the mythos of Saturday. Here is a place  
where only nothingness can hold us, this brief visitation  
a fairground that does not really live. This is how  
a doe contrived her silence, snared in the pick-up bed,  
her freedom not lost because she did not know it. This is  
how I feigned indifference as I rode beside my father,  
a hunter forever. I recall beves of doves without sound  
as they fluttered through underbrush as I searched  
for that thunder-boom of childhood. Then I remember  
you also were there, your unquenchable want, that trust  
we held like fireflies ablaze against the tent of sleep,  
how we untied the bind only two together may unknot.

# Sandra Kolankiewicz



from [RSR Featured Photography](#) © by Tammy Ruggles

## Even the Long List of the Day's Chores

Now that the garden is fading, I turn  
to you, in great need of upkeep, what will  
stay or go, whether the small shirts in your  
closet will be culled, the bald tires on the  
wall in the garage taken down and hauled  
to the recycling center. Even the  
dog can't stop shedding what in the winter  
he needed but what now, a month from fall  
equinox, makes him itch and the fleas fat,  
on my ankles as soon as I'm down the  
stairs at dawn, having woken earlier  
than usual to find the house quiet  
as ever, the darkness feeling sweet and  
safe, even the long list of the day's chores  
on my table kind, for they make sleep possible.

# Stones

I wanted to create so thought of stones,  
curved and fitting in my palm, removed from  
some place long ago I can't remember  
though perhaps I was with you. Or someone  
else, happy enough to have gathered a  
piece of granite to mark what has fallen  
prey to memory, gone as a gesture  
or smile, that lovely energy from that  
wonderful day I cannot recall. We've  
had thousands of them, shards struck from the base  
of a cliff, smoothed by the rushing water.

# Grammar as Mindfulness

So when he said I choose what I think about,  
as he proposed I had drawn it all toward me,  
this drowning like no other in the hole in  
the bottom of the creek where the plug's been  
yanked out, his saying I'd set everything in  
motion with my desires, wanting instead of  
having, striving instead of being. I can't  
help that evening at sunset when we sat on  
a rock at the swimming hole I took him to,  
voices of the locals coming our way so it was  
time to leave, for this was not our part of the  
county, and no one likes to see that others  
know a secret place. There we were, here we aren't,  
postponing the subject with an adverb that  
plucks us up, sets us down unchanged. The  
cure is an outdated sentence pattern that  
either alters a thought or creates one. I  
survive by complementing an object, shift  
my thoughts, supplying kind words to describe.

# Evalyn Lee

## NO BACKUP AT THE APPLE STORE

All my thoughts are on that phone.  
My life is on that phone.  
And now it's gone.

I can't get it back, never again, nothing.  
All my thoughts made real.  
The phone never worked or synced up.

I am asking you for help.  
Yes, I know it's too late.  
Everything that was on it is gone.

I was so busy making music  
On my phone,  
I didn't have time...

Now it's gone.  
It wasn't only data.  
It was my life, my song.

# BOAT RACE PRACTICE

O, Mr. Blake,  
As the doves fly,  
At the river's bend,  
The boats race.

Blades lift then  
Stroke the swirl  
Of eddy, all a shimmer  
In the light of rain clouds.

Nothing really moves until  
You are locked in,  
Mr. Blake, to the pressure  
We treasure.

The Southwest train  
Trills over Barnes Bridge,  
The brick slope below  
Is slippery and dank.

What do we do to undo  
All our bad habits, Mr. Blake?  
What theory should we use  
To reset our minds?

A dead daffodil shakes  
Beside the fern  
Shrouded log, everything  
Is wet with green shadows.

Empty chairs  
On empty balconies  
Sit and wait  
For sheets to dry.

New leaves unfurl,  
Mr. Blake, like sudden  
Umbrellas opening  
In the rain.

Why do we ride out  
The accidents of our

Lives too ashamed  
To say I'm sorry

For my greed, my appetite,  
My lack of discipline or faith?  
We are anxious  
But cannot change direction.

Small moments of certainty  
Call out, little motions,  
Stop, then, move,  
*"Let the boat come to you."*

Coaches call on megaphones,  
*"To change the direction  
Of your seat, your blade  
Must be in the water."*

But most of us carry on,  
Being wrong. We find  
It hard to change  
Direction without stopping.

We want to win.  
The race. The boat  
Is away. Wait.  
Ready. Change. Go.

# Thomas Locicero



from [RSR Featured Photography](#) © by Tammy Ruggles

## Unsocial Media

Words and their intent fugitive around  
our heads, verbal sticks and oral stones, and those  
pauses, at once killing and restoring us.  
The death is in the silence, the silence  
is too short. And what is so important?  
The world was friendlier without any friends.  
Now decades-long relationships are thrown  
away like unwanted leftovers into  
a trash heap billions would love to call their own,  
and for what? a political dissent.  
Here we are, on our overpriced, obsolete  
information-overload contraptions,  
the blue light scratching, scorching our retinas.  
We all have the exact same facts and figures,  
yet we cannot agree on anything.  
The best thing about social media  
is that each person has his or her own voice.  
The worst thing about social media  
is that each person has his or her own voice.

# Pete Miller

## BEGINNING WITH FOUND MOTEL REVIEW (AFTER AUDEN)

The blankets  
were crumbled  
like something happened  
in that bed  
just prior  
to us arriving.  
But something  
has always just happened.  
The all-surrounding  
unapparent. The last  
fried potatoes just eaten,  
hepatitis ghosting  
the encampment.  
That skeletal janitor's  
just-finished hour of  
singing Def Leppard.  
The Outreach Team's  
learning what gangstalking means  
in regards to human trafficking.  
Oil painting of a girl crushed by a wagon.  
The sheets, stuck-together cringes.  
Without an observer  
the ice melts weirder.  
Hot liquid floats  
forward its scars,  
a million small suns.  
And the damnable  
went and used up  
all the shade.  
But Luck ran through here  
just a minute ago.  
Everybody swears it.

# Sergio A. Ortiz



*from RSR Featured Photography © by Tammy Ruggles*

## Daybreak

celebrates with hats  
and open windows.

Terror flies off the cycle.

Mountaintops throw birds  
in each other's faces.  
Hope dawns in airports,

under the vault,  
shedding light of so  
many centuries.

Love and patience,  
central columns.  
We rub our hands

and laugh. We wash  
our eyes and play.

# Cassandra Rockwood-Rice

*RSR'S William Carlos Williams Summer Poetry Prize Winner, 2017*



## THE SUN GASHES

our nostalgia, ugly joy  
Sunday crisp-cotton  
pressed, ready for  
gospel in a temple  
missing gods

our children ache like tomatoes  
soft, unacquainted with their  
messiness. Here, in a village  
overrun with paradise  
our bare children run  
rocky paths, in shining eyes  
a specific hunger

only here it is not so much a  
shortage of food as it is a  
shortage of fathers.

# Stan Sanvel Rubin



*from RSR Featured Photography © by Tammy Ruggles*

## Lesson

Another bitter lesson  
among the ones I learned

is that the inhabitants of Earth  
cannot be trusted

to find their way  
without hurting themselves

or doing harm to others.  
When they think they're free,

they are loose as hailstones  
bouncing off whatever

gets in the way.  
When they feel trapped,

they're dangerous.  
This isn't just some of the time.

They are reckless as cows  
behind barbed wire

who want out and will follow  
any leader who leads them.

They are desperate as a calf  
taken from its mother

fed nettles and water instead of milk  
and led to slaughter

still trying to kiss the fingers  
of the hand that puts it on the truck.

Possibly you think  
this is not a lesson.

# Notes On Apocalypse

The final struggle with the deceivers  
takes place every minute of every day  
inside your own four-sided heart.  
This is not as easy as it sounds.  
Dark winds echo loud as bells  
in the tower you're trapped in  
with no ladder. If you try  
to go down sheer rock, you can't  
find a finger hold. You're dizzy.  
If you try to go up, you will fall.  
The only choice is persistence.  
Your fingers break, your eyes bleed  
as if they see something invisible.  
It's actually even harder than that.  
Nietzsche knew the force of desire is autonomous  
like top dogs in Greek myths  
who pretty much do what they want to  
and do it without remorse.  
The 24/7 network of evil  
is mapped by the veins in your body.  
Your blood drowns cities.  
You are happier when you're not thinking of this.  
Salvation comes only after cataclysmic invasions,  
struggles, every nightmare insanely true.  
You can't stop it.  
You just have to muddle through  
until you drop, exhausted,  
finally past temptation, at last resting  
in a burnt-out landscape you secretly dreamed of  
—or ride the dizzying cloverleaf highway  
to Hell on a soul bright as a Porsche.

# What's Next

After the end, we will be nude as a universe  
without planets, without stars, without light or dark,  
which is what ours will be, the despair drained from it.  
They won't be playing baseball then, or love. There will be  
nothingness instead of us, no fingers to touch skin, no memory  
of the left-behind-everything that dies each time we fight.  
What is apocalypse if not a promise kept?  
Heat death, a hellish end devoid of pain or fire,  
where zombies or androids remarkably like us  
couldn't save themselves and didn't care,  
the way we seemed once to care for everything,  
balancing our pain against our words or letting both  
flame headlong like comets with world-consuming tails.  
We saw it coming. We are doing it now.

# Howard Winn



## TOO MANY MEMORIAL SERVICES

appear on my calendar  
popping up sometimes  
unexpectedly when a  
reasonably healthy friend  
suddenly snaps off  
while participating in  
ordinary life and then  
there are the sad ones  
gradually wasting away  
in the midst of those  
still enjoying the usual  
life who try to accommodate  
the one making the slow  
exit but whatever the  
speed of the journey out  
there is always the

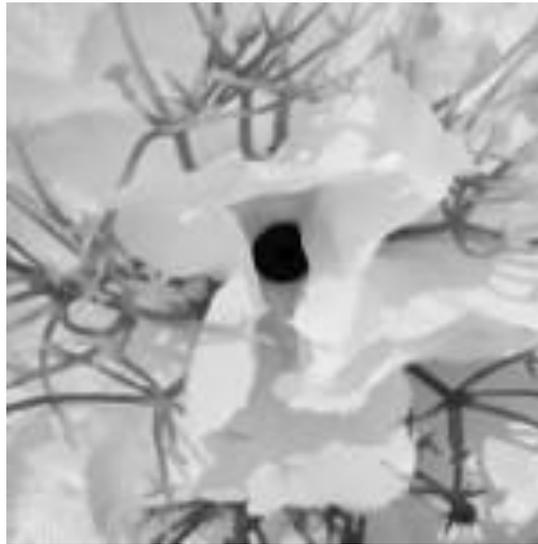
customary memorial service  
often without the presence  
of the vanished one's corpus  
long cremated into the jar  
for the closet shelf or  
the plot in some family  
grave site where it  
joins the earlier caskets  
before space became an  
issue or the green world  
took over even for the dead  
but nevertheless the mourning  
is more or less the same  
only the ceremonies change  
but not the eulogies or the  
reminiscences of happier times  
when life was taken  
for granted until it was not.

# CAT

The cat steps through forget-me-nots  
spreading from some central  
point now unknown  
that fight the grass of a lawn.  
Blue petals, gnat wing size  
color the grass in the path  
he makes from yard to yard,  
and if I speak he stops  
to consider being kittenish  
about my shoes and trouser cuffs.  
He rubs and rolls belly-up,  
a lover of earth and green,  
which momentarily levels miniature  
flowers and stems. They do not  
stay, but rise again in his wake.  
He reappears as Cat,  
observing Pharaohs in the underbrush,  
not watching me but waiting  
for royal barge in purple and white.  
It is good that forget-me-nots  
are delicate and tough.

# Khanh Ha

## THE BLUE-GHOST FIREFLIES



*From RSR Featured Photography © by Tammy Ruggles*

It's late in the afternoon when the funeral procession shows up on the road that goes past Old Lung's dwelling. Standing outside his abode and watching the cortege move along slowly, the coffin bearers shaded by the setting sun, I remember years before watching men carrying new caskets to the front, time and again, shouldering the palls as they climbed the hill, the long line of soldiers bearing the coffins silhouetted against sunset, moving slowly up the hill slope that grew wild with passion flowers like yellow daubs of fresh paint.

"Must be the hour," I say, "this late."

"Must be," Old Lung says, brushing off the cigarette ash that fell on the front of his shirt.

"These folks surely believe in the right hour to bury someone."

It's one of those new coffins that Old Lung made for families of the deceased in the buffer zone. He made this coffin on a day he stayed home because Mrs. Rossi, having been sick, was still recuperating. She came to this U Minh region in the Mekong Delta to search for the remains of

her son, a lieutenant who served in the U.S. Army in 1967, exactly 20 years to date. I have recommended Old Lung, whom Mrs. Rossi eventually hired to help her search for the bones of her son. Back then, within a year after the war, people in the region were familiar with the sight of the poor citizens who traveled to this land looking for their lost husbands, sons, relatives. Sometimes you would see soldiers, but they didn't stay at the inn. They would camp in the woodland with their trucks and it would be a week or even longer before they left. There were many soldiers coming to this region. Came in organized groups called remains-gathering crews. During the war thousands of them were stationed in this region, always deep in the swamp forest. Many died. Most of them died from bombing and shelling and ground assaults. In that forbidden swamp forest you had flesh and bones of the soldiers on both sides. All lay under the peat soil.

Old Lung asked me when she'd need him again and, knowing Mrs. Rossi, I told him I wouldn't be surprised that she would be back into the forest before she was fully well. Old Lung said nothing. But moments later he said, shaking his head, "Poor old lady." He stroked his gray tuft of goatee. "You know that I done whatever she asked me to? But it just makes no damn sense at all. This whole business. Few times I wanted to tell her that. Like . . ."

I looked at him quickly. "Like she's gone out of her mind?"

Old Lung snorted.

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The procession passes by. Silent. Solemn. The coffin bearers step slowly, keeping the poles level so as not to jolt the miniature altar, the candles, the flower vases, sitting atop the pall.

"Let's give 'em a shoulder," Old Lung says, tossing away his cigarette stub.

Reluctantly I follow him. He always lends them a shoulder when they pass by his house, because all of them are his clients. We each put our shoulder to a pole, walking parallel. The rock-heavy weight sinks through the pole into my shoulder. I wonder who the dead might be to weigh this much. Old Lung says, low-voiced, "Relax, don't strain yourself." He walks easily in step with the bearers and we move slowly in the dying sunlight, and the air is full of chirps the bush crickets make in the undergrowth and roadside weeds. A canal appears in sight, and if you follow its course due east for a fair distance, you will reach the cemetery below a commune.

Halfway down the road Old Lung detaches himself from the pole. "We get off here," he says to me.

I stand back, watching the line move on in the trilled *kr-r-r-ek* the tree frogs chorus from the water. Old Lung heads for a dwelling that sits back from the road behind a banana grove and hummingbird trees. He disappears in the twilight, and I wonder what he's up to. I light a cigarette, closing my eyes in its aroma, dark, endearing. Frogs are calling from the water and mosquitos whine in my ears. It's their feeding time.

Old Lung comes out of the darkening trees. He's lugging a sampan that makes a dry scraping sound as he drags it to the water.

"You borrow it?" I ask him. "What's the idea, old man?"

"Let's go get drunk," he says, pulling the sampan with me pushing it. It's a flat-bottomed boat powered by a shrimp-tail motor.

"Where to?" I'm stopped by a sudden cough.

"To see a buddy of mine," he says.

The boat hits the water and slides in with a splash. Old Lung starts the motor with one quick yank of the cord. The motor roars, echoing across the water, the stillness.

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In the twilight we go past a logging camp, then the district town flickering with gas lamps from the thatch-roofed dwellings on the northern bank of Cái Tàu River. I have been on this canal, among others, where the sunlit water during the day glitters with gourami, translucent blue and red-striped. We are on the river, wide and eddying and gurgling over deep-bottomed drops, where the river flows fast before entering the sea. The boat goes down a creek and in the dusky light you can see the land, bare and brown, and hear the sound of waves coming from the sea.

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Mr. Rum is a fisherman. Old Lung introduces me to him in the twilight outside his place. By the door sit two pots of cycads, their woody trunks crowned with stiff leaves. As we enter his dwelling, we can hear the seaward wind humming under the aluminum roof. A dark smell of tobacco and burned wood hangs about the house, lit by a gas lamp that sits on a square table in the center of the room. The yellow light casts a fan-shaped glow on the rafters. Hung from a rafter is a bamboo cage. A bluish-gray, red-beaked parrot stirs at our sight, clucking its tongue. *Tak-tak-tak.*

"Guests coming! Guests coming!" it squawks.

"Don't you know me by now?" Old Lung shakes the cage gently and the bird bobs its head nervously.

"He's not a dog, mind you," Mr. Rum says, his bass voice drawling in a southern accent.

He's half a head taller than me. About Old Lung's age, his closely cropped hair is cloud white. His skin is amber dark, like fish-sauce color, more red than brown. In his white undershirt his sinewy arms are tattooed with a tiger's head on one upper arm and a whale on the other. He yanks off his undershirt and drapes it over the bird cage. We can hear the parrot purring and clucking in its cloaked world.

“Keeps him quiet for a while,” Mr. Rum says.

A shiny gash runs from the middle of his chest to his abdomen. You can't help thinking that, at one time, someone tried to cleave him open with a butcher knife.

“Sit down,” he says, “sit down.”

Old Lung sits on a rush mat in the center of the room next to a tall hardwood, coal-black column. In one corner, atop an aging armoire, sits a small altar. A black-wood tray holds a teaset in white ceramic, the teapot decorated with a hand-painted bright red dragon. In a corner of the tray is a Bastos cigarette pack. I come close to look at the brass-framed black-and-white picture propped behind a candleholder, its white candle just a stub. A young-looking girl, her hair wrapped in a polka-dot headscarf, carries a boy astride her hip, smiling happily at the camera. A charming girl with beautiful white teeth. Hung on the wood-paneled wall behind the altar are three stingray tails, leathery looking and blackish. You can still see the barbed stings on them. I wonder if he ever dusted the altar, for cobwebs hang across the corner, filmy and gleaming in the gas light.

Mr. Rum goes out the back door to the veranda. On the top step stands a metal barrel. He lights a fire with his cigarette lighter and the barrel roars, the fire growing brighter and brighter, and though it burns on the windward side, the fire's insect-repelling smoke of cajeput leaves and twigs drifts, warm and rank, into the room. In this season mosquitos swarm the land and feed on cattle and people until they are so swollen with blood they eventually land somewhere, anywhere, to rest.

Mr. Rum brings in an iron brazier and a clear plastic bag bulging with blood cockles. Old Lung begins building a fire in the brazier while Mr. Rum hovers over a horseshoe-shaped bench in a corner that frames a brick hearth. Steam puffs in gray wisps from a pot that sits on a wrought-iron tripod. He comes to the mat and puts down a tray—bowls and spoons and short glasses and salt-and-pepper shakers, three oyster knives, a thin wooden rod that pierces through six fresh lemons. In the center of the tray stands a bottle of pale yellow liquid.

Old Lung uncorks the bottle, passing it back and forth under his nose. “Devil you,” he says, grinning. “Devil wine.”

“From friendly neighbors,” Mr. Rum says, sitting down to inspect the hissing cockles on the smoldering brazier.

“What neighbors?” I ask.

“The Khmers,” he says, sitting back, legs crossed over each other. “Over the border. They grow unbelievable crops of glutinous rice over there. Cook this rice and the fragrance is so rich it brings down sparrows from the sky. They let it ferment in copper stills and then steam it inside banana leaves.” He arranges the three short glasses and watches Old Lung pour the wine into each glass.

We toast one another. I sniff. A bursting bouquet of baby rice kernels, buttery smelling, baked-bread dark. The wine spreads in my mouth, numbing my tongue with a mellow sting. Momentarily I feel a small fire warming my stomach and I feel as if I had known Mr. Rum for a long time and I appreciate his company.

He swirls his glass and, holding it out in front of us, says, “Look at those streaks. Only devilish wine has ’em.”

Clinging to the side of his glass are silky- and oily-looking long legs. Old Lung slaps me on the thigh. “Told you,” he says, his eyes twinkling. “Brother Rum knows more than just fish.”

Mr. Rum simply nods. His eyes are red, the opaque red from sand and seawater that permanently stamps a mark on fishermen and seaside dwellers. He pulls two lemons out from the rod and, with his pocketknife, slices each of them into several thin wedges. I mix salt and pepper in each smaller bowl while Old Lung blows at the brazier. The coals glow red, the cockles sizzle and bubble along the shell margins. When the shells open, we pick them up by hand, feel the smoking heat cut through our fingertips, and drop them into our bowls. I squeeze a wedge of lemon into a shell, pry the meat loose with an oyster knife and touch the meat, pinched between my fingers, in the salt-pepper mix in the smaller bowl. The heat stings my tongue, then a seawater taste sets in. Chewing, I raise my glass. The chewy meat tastes sweet, tangy with a whiff of cucumber like when you just slice a knife into it. I down my glass. Instantly my eyes water. I exhale a buttery-dough scent through my nose and reach for the bottle.

“I’m gonna visit you more often, Ông Rum,” I say to him.

He lets me fill half his glass, asking me where I came from originally. I tell him between sips. In the clanking of shells, the smacking of lips sucking the cockle’s juice, he says, “Ahh!”, while grinning like a devil. “You’re like me,” he says, raising his glass to mine. “I was a Viet Minh fighter, say, before you were born. Have lived here in the Mekong Delta all my life. . . .” He spreads more cockles on the brazier, the red-hot coals hissing and smoking from the spilled juice of those cockles already eaten, and tells me there are many old Viet Minh fighters like him in the region, and I think about Ông Ba who took Mrs. Rossi to the forest every day until she fell ill. “Then the French left,” Mr. Rum says in his deep voice, “and the Americans came. I was married and we had a son. Had a piece of land up near Trẹm River and Ra Ghe Creek. One day their helicopters flew in and spirited away just about everyone in my village. I came back from the field and my-oh-my I was all alone, like an alien. They quarantined all of my people in a barbed-wire camp in the town district until every living man from our village showed up to claim his family—men they believed were either Viet Cong or deserters. They got me and set my family free. They ran a check on my background and though they found out I was a civilian, they knew I was a Viet Minh during the Indochina War. So they said to me, ‘You’ve been dodging our national obligations during wartime. Now serve the country or stay behind bars.’ What did I do? I became an ARVN soldier.” Mr. Rum pours the bag onto the brazier, the cockles rolling around like stones, and empties our bowls filled with shells into the bag. He lifts the bottle, almost gone now, and refills our glasses, except his. “You can say that I was a South Vietnamese soldier, but I had no desire or intention to kill for them. I missed my family. Months went by and still they granted me no leave. Then the day came when they said I could go on leave. I remember

someone laughed in the room. I saw a smirk on their faces and it was then they told me that my village wasn't there anymore. They played with me while I asked, Relocation? One man slapped me on the back, said, 'New-Life Hamlet woulda been too good for 'em. Your whole village was a Viet Cong village. Tell ya this: they fired at our patrol from inside the village, and guess what? We relocated all of 'em to Hell.' No one survived, they said. I felt my life exploded right in front of me. I told them I quit. They threw me into a cell and asked me three days later if I changed my mind. I told them I wanted to die and they laughed. 'Let's have some fun before that happens,' they said. So they tied me to a river craft and sped it down a river and I was bouncing up and down on the water holding on to the rope for my dear life, and they changed the speeds so that one minute I sank, drinking a belly full of water, and the next minute my body was flung about like a rag. They turned into this swamp and the muddy water was so thick I took a mouthful and knew this was where they wanted me to die. They sped up the boat and something sharp in the mud cut me lengthwise, cut loose the rope, and I sank into the stinking mud, my mind was half gone, but my body still had enough strength left and I managed to move on foot in that shallow water, keeping my head under as I heard them doubling back, the engine noise, the men cursing, and I had in my mouth a long reed stalk and I breathed through it as long as I could till I heard 'em no more. Know what I did after they were gone?" Mr. Rum checks me, squinting. "Put mud on this wound here and lay in the reed till nightfall and then found my way out of that town." Mr. Rum peers down at his naked torso, oxblood dark, at the gash that seems to bisect his trunk. An ugly looking cut. "Before long I joined the Viet Cong's regional forces. I might not be as educated as those from the main force and not likely to become a Party member, but I never gave a hoot about that. I was a full-time soldier again."

I lift my gaze toward the altar. "That your wife and son?"

"Yeah." Mr. Rum taps his fingers on the empty bottle, musing as he looks at it. "He was four in that picture."

"And how old was he when they wiped out your village?"

"Seven." Mr. Rum rises and goes to the hearth. He carries back the pot still bubbling with steam and places it on the brazier. As he lifts the lid a rich smell of onions wafts up. My mouth waters. Old Lung clucks his tongue and dips his head to sniff the aroma. Inside the pot is creamy rice porridge, flecked with fried onions in brown. Meaty looking fillets of fish float about.

"What you got in there, Brother?" Old Lung asks, lining up three bowls alongside the brazier.

"Sea bass." Mr. Rum ladles the porridge into Old Lung's bowl. "Caught it today at sunrise."

"You got nothing else to do at that hour?" Old Lung grins at Mr. Rum.

"Just me and the bass at that hour." Mr. Rum dips the ladle in the pot and fills my bowl.

I sprinkle black pepper on the porridge while Old Lung slurps it from his spoon. I hold the broth's dark peppery taste in my mouth until my nose breathes out warm, wet air. I break a small

chunk of fish and chew. Its firm texture flakes in my mouth and melts with a smoky flavor. I glance up at Mr. Rum, who is blowing steam off the bowl.

“You catch stingrays too?” I ask.

“Stingrays?” he says, gulping. “No. Have no use for ’em.”

“Saw their tails on the wall over there.”

“Ah.” He draws in a sharp breath, his gaze lingering on wall. “Reminders of something I’m not too proud of.” His hand holding the spoon stops in midair. “Used to discipline my son with those—the tails. You can say I was a bad-tempered man. Used to beat him till his mother threw herself on top of him to make me stop. She used to salve his cuts from the lashes and made him sleep facedown to ease the pain. You see, I’d lived my life with rules. Couldn’t tolerate anything that breaks them rules. Until one day I was out fishing and got whipped in the face by a stingray and it stung like hell. So bad I had to go ashore and find some liniment to take the pain away. From that day on I never touched a stingray tail again—as a whip. Ever. But memories. Ah. They never die, right?”

Old Lung nods, smacking his lips. I say a soft yeah, feeling his remorse. His voice, empty of emotion, and his face, devoid of expression, make me feel the pain for him. Mr. Rum says, “See the cycad pots when you walked in? Well, she used to have them around. She had some sort of affection for ’em palms. Strange species. Grow slowly and live very long. She said some live to a thousand years.” He gives a soft chuckle. “I guess I grew them to keep the memory of her around. Maybe something that outlasts all of us like those palms allows us the illusion to hang our memories onto it.” He shrugs. “To keep our memories alive. Wouldn’t you say?”

“Well,” I say, “if you really love someone and the person dies, will the love die in you after that?”

“No,” Mr. Rum says. “I think of them every day.”

I muse briefly. “So you don’t need the cycads of that sort.”

“I guess not.” Mr. Rum grins, a rare grin. “Maybe to spice up my life, that’s why, eh?”

Old Lung yawns, shaking his head. Mr. Rum reaches out and slaps him on the shoulder. “Don’t fall asleep on me now. Bring your glass with you outside.”

The fire in the metal barrel has died down, now smoldering, and the air smells bitter. We arrange three folding metal chairs along the wall on the rear veranda. Mr. Rum puts out the gas lamp and removes his undershirt from the birdcage. In the sudden dark the parrot croaks, Tak-tak-tak, chào Ông Rum! And Mr. Rum says, Chào con. Hello son. He has his white undershirt flung over his shoulder. In his hand is a fresh bottle of rice wine. It’s pitch dark and a steady breeze coming from the sea drives the faint leaf-burned smoke toward the land in the back of the house. Mr. Rum lights his pipe, a long curving one, and the darkness smells sweet.

The land lies bare, stretching until your eyes can see a grove of trees, dark and dense, screening off the horizon. I ask Mr. Rum if the trees are cajeput and he says yes, for reforestation. After a brief silence, he says “Bad land. Bad soil. Just black or brown acidic soil. Can’t grow any vegetables. Any time I crave vegetables I have to go off into the cajeput grove and look for climbing fern—those that thrive only in cajeput forest. Here people eat the fern’s sprouts as salads.”

He refills our glasses and we sit sipping our rice wine and slowly the cockles’ seawater taste is gone from my tongue. I pop a cigarette into my mouth, drawing deeply on it without lighting it. I think of Chi Lan, Mrs. Rossi’s eighteen-year-old Vietnamese adopted daughter, hearing her soft chiding words each time she sees me reach for my cigarette pack. I feel a sudden urge to cough and fight it. Eyes closed, I let my mind go blank. I can hear the stillness. Then a bellow sounds across the air. Deep, spiraling, mournful. Like the sound of bugle on the battlefield. A chorus of it fills the sky. It breaks the peaceful quiet and I hear Old Lung curse. Mr. Rum raises his voice, “I know, people hate that sound. It’ll be gone soon.”

“It sure plays with my nerves,” Old Lung says.

“Sounds like a whole lot of bugles blowing, eh?” Mr. Rum says. “From those fluted clam shells they blow on. Have that queer sound, quite irritating. But it drives off ’em bats from feeding on their fish let out to dry.”

Old Lung chortles. “You got me there, brother. Them bats can hear those sounds?”

“Certainly. Go down to the fishing hamlet and take a look. What you see is dead bats all over the shore. Like they were shot down when the horns get going with all those terrible sounds.”

“Aya,” Old Lung says, smacking his lips.

“Those bats came one day,” Mr. Rum says, “when they saw fish laid out to dry. They just dropped down and feasted on ’em fish and before folks could react, everything was gone before their eyes. Bat plague, they called it. Went on and on, the worst nightmare to fishermen’s families. For years, mind you. After they’d tried this and that and nothing worked, they tried the fluted clam shells. Them shells are big, biggest one I saw is forty centimeters long.”

Old Lung flicks off his cigarette butt and scratches his cheek. “Who coulda thought of that?”

Mr. Rum pours some more wine for Old Lung. I close my eyes, steadying my nerves. The irritation in my throat begins to recede. “When they blew on the shells,” Mr. Rum says, “them bats went berserk. Many flew off, many dropped like rocks, many died. They’d come back, though. And the sounds of fluted shells would drop ’em again and again. Then one day the bats stopped coming.”

“Aya,” Old Lung says again. “True story, brother?”

Mr. Rum laughs, then drops his voice, “Told to me though.”

They say nothing for a while and both must have thought that I dozed off, for I can hear Old Lung say in a low voice, “Who was the genius who came up with the fluted clam shells?”

“This young fisherman,” Mr. Rum replies. “They said when they were still chasing those bats away with sticks and oars, they caught one of ’em big bats. Wingspread’s a meter wide. This fellow was playing with his fluted clam shell nearby and every time he blew on it, the bat seemed to struggle in confusion. Or pain. He stopped blowing and the bat seemed to be its own self again. He blew and blew and the bat went berserk and then lay dead. It was then folks found out that the bat could hear the sound the fluted clam shell made. Lethal sound.”

“All this happened before you came?”

“Way before. Our hero would be one hundred years old now.”

Old Lung snorts. I hear him click open his lighter and soon the cigarette odor seeps through the air. Then Mr. Rum’s voice. “Know what happened to that fellow?”

“Still around?”

“No.” His bass voice drops even lower. “He was working for this man who owned a big fishing boat and one night the man caught him screwing his wife on the boat.”

“Musta been a night with a full moon, eh?” Old Lung laughs in spurts.

“You got that right,” Mr. Rum says, clearing his throat. “They said his boss saw fish jumping and thwacking their lives out on the deck. Said a whole container of live fish musta been knocked over when those two lovers wrestled each other on the deck. And that’s how our hero met his end.”

“Boss killed him?”

“With an oar.”

“From hero to villain over a woman, eh?”

I can hear Mr. Rum’s lighter click, him puffing and drawing on his pipe. The air on the veranda smells of a warm sweetness of tobacco and brittle bitterness of cajeput leaves still smoldering in the barrel. I hang my head back, stretching my neck. The fluted clam horns have stopped and in the stillness drifts the sound of waves. I breathe slowly, emptying my thoughts, and I can feel myself float in air. Old Lung’s whisper comes across. “Look, here it comes.”

“I see it,” Mr. Rum replies

I open my eyes a slit and see the blue-ghost fireflies massing a short distance down the length of the land. A soft stationary blue orb hovering above the ground.

“You think he’ll come?” Old Lung says.

“Likely,” Mr. Rum says.

“Last time it took a while.”

“I remember.”

I sit up, fixing my gaze on the blue sphere. It moves slowly, at times keeping still, at times whirling. “You talking about a ghost?”

Both of them turn their heads toward me.

“An old ghost,” Mr. Rum says.

“Yeah,” Old Lung says. “Just keep your eyes open.”

I raise my glass to my lips. “Hey old man. Can I see this ghost without putting lime on my toes and fingertips?”

“Don’t have to,” Old Lung says, lowering his voice. “Once you break the barrier between you and them—and you did at my place—you won’t need lime again.”

“I’ll keep quiet this time,” I say, resting the glass of wine in my lap. Mr. Rum’s voice drones on in the quiet, saying that when there are not many living souls on the land, the yin force overwhelms the yang, that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are too far away and demons and ghosts are at your door every night.

Across the land katydids call from the cajeput grove, a rattled ch-ch-ch chorus pulsating endlessly. The orb glows bluer and brighter, and as we watch in silence a human figure suddenly manifests in the center of the bluish sphere. An American soldier. He wears the army combat uniform and it looks wet. His hair too, the dirty blond hair matted wetly in strands on his brow. He stands in one place, his hand clutching his throat, his other hand holding the clutching hand’s wrist. He looks lost, turning his head left then right, as if to take his bearings in the night. Then he moves toward the cajeput grove, the blue orb following him, and somewhere before the woods the blue light disperses into the night and he too disappears.

I lean back, hard, in my chair. The chair’s legs scrape the cement floor. “Ông Rum,” I say to him, “how often do you see him?”

“Once in a while,” Mr. Rum says. “He’s harmless. Every now and then I put out food to pacify him.”

“This region’s full of them,” Old Lung says and lights another cigarette.

“He just shows up like that?” I say. “Out of nowhere?”

“Nah.” Mr. Rum puffs on his pipe, the red pinheads glow then dim. “He’s got a place over there on my land. I buried him.”

“How?” I lean forward. “How’d he get there?”

Mr. Rum exhales with a great effort. “You know, over the years I’ve buried a few people here on my land. Dead. Unclaimed. Drowned in the ocean and drifted ashore. I remember one time during the war the Americans dropped shallow-water mines along the seacoast and not a day went by without seeing a corpse come floating in. Most of the time you can’t make out the faces. No, sir. Not after birds and fish have made a meal for themselves. Personal effects, I kept. Got a marine wristwatch that you can read the dial at night. Got a pair of heavy-duty binoculars. Got a French beret. Hope they don’t mind me keeping ’em.” He stretches his legs, turns toward me. “This fellow who shows up occasionally on my land is one of ’em. Wasn’t drowned, though. Just drifted in from somewhere and got caught in my fish trap.”

Mr. Rum lifts the bottle and motions to me for a refill but I shake my head. He pours some wine for Old Lung and himself, and after a sip he draws deeply on his pipe before it goes out. “That morning about sunrise I went down the creek, where you came in earlier, to where I set my fish trap overnight just before the ocean. I usually got out there earlier but that morning I skipped one tide cycle and was sure there’d be plenty more of fish. Was plenty of ’em all right by the time I got there. Low tide and my fish trap just shook with giant sea perch and threadfins and sea bass and prawns. They jumped, they smacked and I reached in with my hand net and felt the waves push something against my fish trap under the water. Thought it must be a giant grouper so I lifted my hand net to let the fish go into the trap. I couldn’t see its shape. Huge, though. It went sideways, blocked the trap’s mouth. I dipped my hand into the water and felt something other than a fish. I grabbed a handful of hair. Felt like a handful of kelp. Felt around and seized a part of a shirt and pulled the thing up. Damn if I didn’t try. But I finally got it to float up with my oar as a lever. Quite a sight. A soldier. American soldier. He was wearing a rain poncho. His boots were so soaked through they felt soft. He didn’t smell. Musta died the night before by looking at his poncho and remembering the hard rain we got the previous night. By the time I got him onto the boat with fish jumping around him it was first light. Just misty all around. But I could make out his face. And what I saw was a hole in his throat. Another hole in the back of his neck. He musta been shot there and the bullet went through his neck. His hands. I couldn’t straighten their fingers. They were bent like crab’s claws. So I just let them be and rowed home.”

I lift my face. “When was all of this?”

Mr. Rum rubs his nose a few times. “When? Hmm. Nineteen sixty seven.”

“Remember the month, don’t you?”

“August.” Mr. Rum shakes his head. “The ninth. Was my birthday, that day.”

I take a quick sip. “He got any personal effects on him?”

Mr. Rum nods. “Wallet, dog tag, a plain old wristwatch. I kept ’em.”

I lean forward to see him better. “Ông Rum,” I say, “can I see his personal effects?”

Mr. Rum tilts his head back. “His stuff? Yeah. Why?”

“Just let me see them. You mind?”

“Not at all. Lemme get ’em.”

Old Lung turns in his chair, pats me on my shoulder. “What’s the idea?”

“Curiosity.”

Mr. Rum comes back out, holding up the gas lamp and carrying in the other arm a burlap sandbag in faded green. Without saying a word, he holds the lamp, sitting on the chair and watching me pull out the poncho, ripped in places. The poncho comes out of the sandbag, like it emerges back into the world, shaking off a horribly musty smell. The sandbag sags. Mr. Rum lowers the lamp as I empty its content onto my lap. A plastic-wrapped packet. Inside is a paper-wrapped packet and inside it are a wristwatch, a leather wallet, and a dog tag. The stainless steel dog tag shines in the light as I lift its long ball chain to read its stamped letters, numbers in five lines: ROSSI, NICOLA, followed by a line of numbers, then “O”, CATHOLIC.

I feel a rush of blood to my head. I could never forget the date. Everything from that night comes back. As if it moves around on the shiny dog tag. Time suddenly shrinks. Twenty years is merely a blink of an eye.

“He was a lieutenant, wasn’t he?” I ask Mr. Rum without looking at him.

“I think he was,” Mr. Rum says. “Heaven knows how many times I looked at his uniform before I buried him.”

I stare at the dog tag. *Nicola Rossi*.

“But what are you looking for?” Mr. Rum asks as I open the wallet.

The photographs’ colors in the plastic sleeves aren’t sharp any longer. I look at Nicola Rossi, youthful, sandy-blond haired, standing in a white shirt outside a house. I look at another photograph. Mrs. Rossi, I can tell. Reddish-blond hair, in her forties. A man, handsome, dark-eyed, wearing a white shirt with a red tie. Nicola Rossi looks more like his mother than his father. Solemn-looking, even smiling in the picture.

Holding the opened wallet in my hands, I tell Mr. Rum about Mrs. Rossi who came to look for the remains of her son, a lieutenant who went missing-in-action during the Vietnam War. Old Lung listens, says Aya repeatedly, thanking Heaven and the Buddhas who finally cast their merciful eyes earthward and put a stop to Mrs. Rossi’s ordeal. Mr. Rum sets the lamp on the floor and, stroking his stubbled chin, says, “Did she tell you the date her son went missing?”

“No.” I fold up the wallet. “I don’t think she was aware of it. It probably means nothing to her.”

“Then why’d you ask me about it?”

“Because that night,” I say, “August the ninth, we overran his base before daybreak and we killed every survivor and then we pursued those who got away and he was one of them. Me and my men got into the forest chasing him in the torrential rain until we spotted him near a creek. He was unarmed. We shot him. I did. Just as he turned around facing us. Got him in the throat. We kicked his body into the water and left.” My throat feels sand-dry. “We’ll bring her the news tomorrow. Can I take his stuff with me?”

Old Lung smacks his lips, scratching his head like he had lice. “You gonna bring her peace or you gonna bring her hell?”

# Nancy Scott Hanway



## ELK CALL

For six months, from his thirty-fifth birthday in April, until the season arrived in October, Martin Riordan practiced elk calls. Elizabeth had given him the long plastic tube with crimped ends, which came with a tape called *Sounds of the Bull Elk*. Every night after dinner Martin crouched in the living room, first listening intently to the instructor calmly explain how to blow into the tube. Then followed the live animal call, a real bull elk bugling for a mate, and Martin nodded as though a secret had finally been unfolded to him. He inserted the mouth diaphragm into his cheeks, raised the plastic tube to his mouth, and blew: A husky mid-octave bellow led to a long, slow, high squeal, almost like a tin whistle, ending in a low grunt. A month before his hunting trip, he had everything perfected except the squeal. The squeal, said the instructor, in his precise voice, is a key element of the call, essential to attracting the doe and, therefore, the rival male. Martin tried every variation of breath and tone; some days he wet the tube with saliva, and other days he dried it clean. Yet he could only manage uneven squawks, and he was not satisfied.

What made his attempts more frustrating was that Elizabeth could do it perfectly. She lifted the tube to her mouth, relaxed her shoulders, and puffed quickly: And there issued the sound—exactly like the animal on the tape—of the bull elk in heat. If he could bring her with him on the hunting trip, what success they would have. He doubted if the pompous instructor had ever sounded so real.

When Elizabeth did the call, he could see her in his mind trailing a bull elk in the woods—her long, white-blonde hair tangled in the brush. She would lift her knees in rhythm along with the animal, calling insistently, ardently, until the buck grew agitated and turned to face its rival. When it saw Elizabeth it would draw short, tensing its muscles in preparation to mount. It would die, sweating with excitement, Martin's bullet in its forehead.

"You've got to come with us," he told her, a few weeks before he was scheduled to leave. She was cooking soup, stirring it, and tasting, pushing back her hair. "It's in the deep woods." She picked up her teacup from the counter and took a sip—from where he stood, he could smell cardamom and fennel. "If you were hiking or bird-watching, I'd go," she said. "I don't want to kill animals. You know that."

He knew. He'd always loved what he called her hippie quality. It had attracted him when they first met on a blind date set up by a local newspaper in Saint Cloud that ran an online column called "Opposites Attract." You sent in a description of yourself, and the editors tried to match you with the most unlikely person possible.

Martin had described himself as "Cubicle Man," not because he thought of himself that way, but because he knew it would make the paper pick him. Elizabeth wrote that she was a "Child of Nature," although that was nearly true. She loved everything to do with the outdoors. She could stare at a maple leaf for minutes at a time, exclaiming at the color, the translucent veins, the leathery feeling. When she walked into the restaurant that first time—tall and lean, in a long, gauzy dress, with dark wooden beads woven into her light hair—Martin could see them together, could see how they would look as a couple.

"She's awfully independent," his mother had said, the only criticism she offered. "What do you mean?" He was crazily in love. "She's changing her name." "It's something else," his mother said. "I think she's a little wild for you." He had just laughed.

"And what do we know about her?" his mother continued. "She doesn't have family—you'll be everything to her."

"That's what I want," he had responded. "Someone who will only pay attention to me."

He knew from how his friends stared at Elizabeth—how his manager Brendan stared when they'd invited him to dinner—that she was the kind of woman men dream of marrying, that in movies, she was the kind of woman who made guys dump their boring girlfriends.

He loved everything about her. Still, after seven years of marriage, he liked that her parents were dead and she had no dull and chatty family to invite them to barbecues or interminable Thanksgivings. He loved that she didn't do things just because he wanted. It made her trustworthy. And she had few interests outside her job at the Department of Natural Resources, where she kept herself apart from her colleagues. He felt like the center of her world.

There was one thing about Elizabeth that worried him. She had explained at the beginning of their marriage that she sometimes needed to get away from civilization, but he hadn't realized that civilization would also include him. She sometimes disappeared for weekends at a time without telling him. She returned with leaves and mud clinging to her shoes, a little sunburnt, out of breath, sometimes with scratches along her legs and arms. When he asked where she had been, she simply said, "The woods. A little farther north. You know."

She had no other strange habits, other than keeping a bowl of autumn leaves by his side of the bed, which she claimed would increase his fertility. Occasionally, she became intrigued by some quirky religion or odd mythology and researched it for months before she lost interest. She was intrigued by religions that believed in animal totems or worshipped nature, and for a brief period, she said Wiccan incantations over their suppers. He told himself that eventually she would lose interest in escaping to the forest. When they had children. Someday.

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On the first trip with the guys from work, they had hunted deer in Michigan. Martin was only a salesman then, still working the phones and living on commission—and they brought him along because he knew how to hunt with a bow.

Martin disliked everything about it—cold, sodden boots, getting up at dawn to sit in a deer blind, blood soaking his jacket. But he enjoyed nighttime when they sat around the fire, drinking beer, while the older men talked business. And they'd say to him, "You thinking of staying in sales? It's a good life." He always lifted his head, trying to look young and sincere. "Yes, that's my plan." After they got back, for months Brendan would lean over him when Martin was about to pick up the phone, and say, "God, I was just thinking about that day in the U.P. when Johnson nearly shot you in the ass. That was a hoot." By the second trip, they had promoted him. He and Elizabeth finally had enough money to buy a house on a lake with—most important for her—acres of woods that separated them from other people. He thanked heaven that he had agreed to go on that first trip.

At work sitting in his glassed-in office, Martin watched the salespeople work the phones: gesturing, pleading, bullying, and waving frantically for a supervisor to come and verify the sale. When he first became a manager, the actual day-to-day work used to make him happy; particularly the image he had of himself sitting in his navy suit, frowning over his laptop, attempting to put sales reports into some kind of order that would change the workings of the company. But after a while, he saw the mass of information as a phenomenon of nature in which reports produced more reports, like seeds shat out by animals that produced new plants in unlikely places.

One day he tried to discuss it with Brendan, an Irishman married to an American, who often complained about the obscene bureaucracy. He said in his humorous accent, "Too much effin' documentation, that's for certain."

"I mean it feels unstoppable. Doesn't it?"

Brendan cocked his head to one side. “When I get in one of those moods, I always remember that other people’s jobs depend on me. We’re the cannon fodder, y’know.”

Martin closed his laptop. “Maybe we’re all doing this for nothing.”

“You need to go hunting,” Brendan said. His voice was falsely hearty. He obviously didn’t want to have this conversation. “Only a week’s countdown. You’re just chomping at the bit.”

“Yeah,” Martin said.

“By the by.” Brendan stroked the top of Martin’s cubicle. “You mind staying for that call from corporate? I was supposed to do it but I’m cratered.” He smiled. “Might help you remember why we’re here.”

“Sure. And thanks,” Martin said, although talking to Brendan hadn’t helped, and he’d gotten roped into a late meeting. But at least Brendan had listened. And Martin trusted him.

Martin thought it had something to do with Brendan’s Irishness, which reminded him of his own family. While drunk one night in Michigan, Brendan had even admitted to believing in ghosts. He saw the ghost of his grandmother in Dublin, he said, after she had passed. She first appeared in his room the night before her funeral. And then she appeared again as a white bird alighting on the coffin before they buried her.

Some of the other guys had gossiped afterward about Brendan and “his freaky grandma story.” Martin hadn’t joined in. He knew that Elizabeth would love the story, and he had asked Brendan to tell it when he came over for dinner.

“That’s beautiful,” Elizabeth had said, breathing out her approval. “Your Nana was saying good-bye in the best way possible.”

“You get it!” Brendan was half drunk and he picked up his glass, nearly sloshing wine on the table. “My wife doesn’t. Here’s to you, Lizzy. If I’d married someone like you, I wouldn’t be getting divorced.”

Elizabeth had shaken her head, smiling. When they went to bed that night, she had said, “Brendan has depth. He’s not your typical sales guy.”

She was right. Brendan was trustworthy, Martin thought. He wouldn’t tell anyone about Martin’s fears. But Martin reminded himself not to be so open. He didn’t want Brendan thinking that he didn’t care about the job.

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When he finally got home that night, the lights were out. For one second Martin thought Elizabeth had gone away, and a surge of fear made blood come to his mouth. Then he saw a flashlight trained on the ground near the edge of the lawn. As he got closer, he saw her moving

slowly, bent over and picking at fallen leaves, blending in with the dark woods behind her. When she looked up, he thought she was going to bolt.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

She stared at him for a moment, as if she were trying to pretend she wasn't there, and then she leaned down and grabbed a handful of leaves. “I lost one of my new earrings. I thought it might be easier to find in the dark.”

He reached forward and brushed mud from around her mouth and a few leaves from her hair. “You been rolling around in the dirt?” he asked, laughing.

“Wow,” she said. She wiped her mouth. “I've been out here too long. Come on, let's go in.”

The flashlight glinted on something beneath her feet, and he reached down to pick it up, sure he'd found the earring. His hand closed around something else—a small medallion of some kind, cold to the touch. As he picked it up, a silver chain dangled from his hand.

“What's that?” she asked.

He took her hand and guided the flashlight to the medallion—an old-fashioned religious medal, like old ladies used to wear.

“Oh,” she said. “Wonder where that came from.”

She'd never been a good liar—he could tell that she had seen the medallion before, that it must be what she had been looking for.

“Saint Christopher?” he asked and then peered more closely. “No. Saint Hubert? Never heard of him.”

“Oh,” she said. “Hubert is the patron saint of hunters.”

He laughed, uncertain how to take it. “How do you know that?”

“I just do,” she said, holding out her hand. He put it there, with a jolt of fear. She was lying again. “I must have read about it somewhere in my studies.”

“It can't have been here too long.” He couldn't see her face in the dark, but her hand was trembling. “It's too clean.”

“Maybe from the landscapers,” she said.

“You can tell me if you're into Saint Hubert,” he said. “You don't have to hide it. I know I make fun of your obsessions.”

“Not mine. I promise.” She pocketed the medallion and chain. “I’ll ask around.”

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At work the next day, he cornered Brendan at the vending machine as Brendan was about to push the button for a Diet Coke. Divorce had turned Brendan into a gym rat, and he had lost about twenty pounds. He looked handsome, Martin thought sourly.

“Hey,” Martin said. “You know anything about a saint called Hubert?”

The can slid noisily to the bottom of the machine. “That’s pretty old school,” Brendan said, scratching his chin. “My Nana—the one I told you about—she was into Hubert. If you wear the Hubert medal, it protects you from wild animals.”

“Really?” This was too much of a coincidence, and Martin’s chest grew hot and tight. He pretended to examine the choices at the vending machine. He slid his card into the slot and jabbed at a number without looking.

“I thought you hated the diet stuff,” Brendan said, as another Diet Coke thunked against the lip of the machine.

“Not anymore.” Martin picked up the can, resisting the desire to crush it, or throw it at Brendan. “Your Nana ever have, like, a necklace with one of those medals?” he asked.

If Brendan and Elizabeth were having an affair, this would show Martin’s hand, but he didn’t care. The thought of losing her made him crazy.

“Not that I know of,” Brendan said. “Why?”

“Elizabeth found one,” Martin said. “Thought you might have dropped it at our house.”

“Nope,” Brendan said. “Not mine. Some other crazy Irish fellow’s been sitting on your sofa.”

Brendan looked relaxed, and Martin convinced himself that he was imagining things, although he wondered why Brendan had said, “on your sofa.” It seemed pointed, as if to prove that he didn’t know that the medal had been spotted outside. And a little nasty, as if he wanted to suggest that Elizabeth regularly entertained men in their living room.

Yet from that day on to the moment they left for Montana, Martin found nothing else to make him suspect anything was wrong, although the next time he said something about Brendan, Elizabeth made a face. They were driving to town to buy supplies for his trip, and Martin knew that she didn’t realize he had been watching her.

“What’s that?” he asked. “I thought you liked Brendan.”

She turned away toward the window and the dense foliage that grew along the side of their long driveway.

“He was cheating on his wife, you know, before they separated. And he was cruel to her—hit her once over the upholstery.”

“Who told you that?” he asked, still suspicious.

“I ran into her at the farmers’ market.”

That was possible—he knew that Brendan’s wife loved the farmers’ market. He had a vague memory of once seeing her and Brendan, both of them tense and unhappy, arguing over a box of blueberries. The wife had glared at them when they said hello.

Martin shook his head, suddenly disappointed. He had convinced himself that Brendan was the soul of honor.

“Well,” he said, “I wouldn’t trust the word of an almost ex.”

“I believed her,” Elizabeth said, her voice vibrating with it. “I don’t like males who betray their mates.”

He wanted to say, “What about females?” but he didn’t. He was afraid he wouldn’t like her answer and reassured by her statement about cheaters. She must feel that way about women too.

They had come to the end of their drive, to the local highway, where cars passed in thick procession. It was a Saturday, and some SUVs had deer strapped to the roofs. Elizabeth blinked when she saw them, giving the little shudder she always did when she saw a dead animal. The sight made Martin shudder too, but only because he worried about his elk call—how he hadn’t perfected it. Brendan said he had it down so well that people couldn’t tell the difference between the real elk and him.

Brendan never mentioned the medal and didn’t seem at all worried when Martin brought it up in front of him, except to ask, “Ever figure out who dropped it?” And Martin didn’t have time to worry because he got busier at work. He spent twelve hours a day in his gray-blue square—he was starting to feel like a true “cubicle man.”

After Brendan inquired about the medal, Martin asked Elizabeth if she’d discovered the owner.

“No,” she said, blinking her ash-blonde lashes. “I think it must have been some hunter on our land. We’d better put up signs.”

He didn’t believe her—her gaze wandered when she spoke—but he didn’t know what to do. And then something strange happened that convinced him that he had misjudged her. The morning he left on his trip, she put the medal around his neck and made him promise he’d wear it.

At first he wriggled away from her like a child, swatting at the medal, angry she would do this. But finally, feeling ridiculous with her stalking him throughout the house, he let her fasten it around his neck. It couldn’t belong to Brendan or some lover, he thought.

“You will keep it, won’t you?” she asked. “I’ve been looking up Saint Hubert. There’s an active cult to him. People are serious about it. There really have been miracles.”

“Oh, God,” he said. “We don’t know who it belongs to.”

“You have to,” she said. “Please.”

She had tears in her eyes, and it shook him. “Okay,” he said. “I promise.”

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On the drive to Montana, Martin sat beside Brendan in the backseat of an SUV that belonged to one of the IT guys, who drove maniacally, at high speeds, drinking Red Bull and exchanging terrible jokes with one of the salesmen in the front seat.

Brendan looked at Martin. “What’s that?” he asked, his Irish accent suddenly sharper and more insistent.

Martin felt his face grow red. “Elizabeth made me wear it. It’s that medal she found.”

“Can I take a look?” Brendan asked.

Martin wanted to refuse, but he didn’t know how. He undid the silver chain and passed it to Brendan, who examined the medal. His face was calm, but he had developed an odd facial tic that made a vein pop at his temple.

“Curious,” he said, passing it back. “These old superstitions.”

“Elizabeth—well, she believes,” Martin said.

“An old-fashioned girl, that Lizzy,” Brendan said.

Martin grew angry. In some ways that was true, but how did Brendan know? And why did he keep calling her “Lizzy,” which Elizabeth had once said was her childhood name? He kept reminding himself that he had no proof that anything had happened.

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In the woods, they rode mules for two hours into the back country. As they rode, Martin had the strange sensation of being watched. Was it his imagination that every time he turned around, Brendan was quickly looking away? Once he thought he saw a person in the woods, just a flash of something, as if another hunter had followed them. When Martin asked, the guide shook his hand.

“This is private land,” he said. “No one but us here—unless they’ve been traveling across the mountain to get here.”

When they set up on the downhill side of an open area, where bulls were said to roam, the guide split them into pairs. He was going to work with the two younger guys, while Martin and Brendan, the more experienced hunters, were on their own. Martin was irritated, but Brendan seemed pleased by the arrangement, saying in a low voice to Martin, as the two others went off with the guide, “Jesus. Couldn’t take any more of those jokes.”

And then there was just the waiting in the chilly morning. Lying alongside Brendan, listening to his hoarse breath, the screeching of squirrels overhead. After about an hour, they heard a bull elk bugling—and Martin felt the glow of recognition. There was an answering squeal from a doe—the estrus call, the call that meant she was ready and waiting, that she would be there for him.

“Want to try?” he asked Brendan, who nodded and inserted the plastic diaphragm between his lips and raised the tube. When he blew, Martin was astonished. Brendan was right—he sounded so perfectly like the bull that it was eerie. He was better than Elizabeth. And Brendan’s face changed too, taking on the wide, alert look of an elk that Martin had seen in YouTube videos.

The call pulled Martin, like anger. It stirred that animal part, that jealous part that made him hate Brendan, although it was obvious that nothing had happened between Brendan and Elizabeth. Could he ask? It would be terrible if he was wrong, and it could affect his future if his boss knew Martin suspected him. What would Elizabeth say if his suspicions lost them his job, which would mean the loss of their house and the ten acres that protected them from the world?

Martin got his bow ready, the stiff arrow, his hand pressing on the trigger, ready to let the arrow fly. There was a rustling behind them, and suddenly he saw her, an enormous doe elk racing toward them, running like crazy, her head down, and Martin let the arrow go. It hit her in the shoulder, and she staggered for a moment, bucking her head, before running off into the forest.

“Follow her!” Brendan shouted, and they ran after her, tracking the trail of blood and the haphazardly broken brush. At some point the trail stopped, and they couldn’t hear any more crashing. Either she had collapsed or she was hiding somewhere.

Brendan pointed up ahead. “Look,” he said. “There she is. Let’s get closer.”

They were almost upon her, seeing her lying there, panting and bloody from her shoulder, when she suddenly lunged at them. Martin felt her breath on him, sure she was going to knock him over when she turned on Brendan. Then she had Brendan pinned against a tree, butting him while Brendan cried for Martin to help, to do something. The minute Martin raised his bow, the elk turned and looked at him, a slow, almost contemptuous look, before she walked off slowly. Martin ran to help Brendan, who scudded against the tree trunk, pale, eyes closed, one arm bloodied, bones visible through the skin.

Everyone said it was a terrible tragedy. There was no question about it. Brendan had been making a video of the hunt, and his phone picked him up hissing, “Let’s get closer!” to Martin, and later—the video pointing at branches and the sky—recorded his cries for help and the sound of Martin raising his bow, of the elk wandering off, of Martin screaming for the guide and

eventually having to leave Brendan to go get help, and then the sound of the elk returning—a rogue elk, they all said—to stomp Brendan to death.

The saddest part was—as one of the sales guys said—no one outside the company mourned Brendan. Not his estranged wife, who inherited his 401(k), or the kids from his first marriage. Martin had never even heard Brendan mention them. At the funeral, Elizabeth said she knew about the children and the first wife.

“That was a sadness for him,” she said. “The children wouldn’t speak to him after the divorce, and his second wife never wanted kids.”

He didn’t ask her how she had known this—maybe Brendan had told her that night at dinner while Martin was out grilling the steaks—and anyway, it hardly mattered. Elizabeth was busy and happy, finally pregnant. She hung the Saint Hubert medal in the nursery above the crib she had bought for their future child. Pregnancy brought some aches and pains, especially in her shoulder, which never recovered from an injury she suffered while painting the nursery. As he had hoped, she stopped her sudden forays into the woods to meditate, or whatever it was she had done there.

# Beth Sherman



*from RSR Featured Art © by Artist Allen Forrest*

## LESS

They sit on the porch and watch fireflies blink. Sometimes she will nurse a glass of wine. He might have a book, which remains in his lap, unread. The occasional car trundles by. They do not speak. Not because there is nothing to say but because all the words have already been spilled and to start over, they would have to pick them off the grass and swallow them whole.

The fireflies give off a light like burnt honey. Up close, they are uglier than any creature has a right to be. When she was young, she trapped some in a jar, held them under the covers. Anxious flashlights. By morning, they were dead. She buried them beside the maple tree, holding a brief ceremony with Pooh and Chatty Cathy. This is what happens to stolen light.

A kiss. A promise. A contract to love until it unwinds from the spool. Do you take . . . Thou shalt. Thou shalt not. Children born, children leaving on school buses, in trains, with friends and strangers, driving away from home for good. They sit like two old people cast in bronze. The sun trips over its own rays, sliding behind the tallest maple. She drinks the last of the Cabernet, thinks about throwing the glass on the lawn. A shattering. Like rusty bells slicing the silence. Fireflies spark and wink, glow and fade.

# LITERARY BIOS

## Fall 2017 – Volume 5 Issue 2

- **Roy Bentley** is the author of **Starlight Taxi** (Lynx House), which won the Blue Lynx Poetry Prize. Books include **The Trouble with a Short Horse in Montana** (White Pine), which was the winner of the White Pine Press Poetry Prize, **Any One Man** (Bottom Dog), and **Boy in a Boat** (University of Alabama Press), which won the University of Alabama Press Poetry Series. Recipient of a Creative Writing Fellowship from the NEA, six Ohio Arts Council fellowships, and a Florida Division of Cultural Affairs fellowship, his poems have appeared in *Moon City Review*, the *Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere.
- **Mary Cresswell** is from Los Angeles and lives on New Zealand's Kapiti Coast. Her most recent book – **Fish Stories** – is a collection of nature poems in ghazal and glosa forms and can be found [here](#).
- **Khanh Ha** is the author of **Flesh** (Black Heron Press, 2012) and **The Demon Who Peddled Longing** (Underground Voices, 2014). He is a five-time Pushcart nominee, a Best Indie Lit New England nominee, a two-time finalist of THE WILLIAM FAULKNER-WISDOM CREATIVE WRITING AWARD, and the recipient of Greensboro Review's ROBERT WATSON LITERARY PRIZE IN FICTION (2014). His work, **The Demon Who Peddled Longing**, was honored by Shelf Unbound as a Notable Indie Book. Ha graduated from Ohio University with a bachelor's degree in journalism.
- **Theresa Hamman** is a poet from La Grande, Oregon. Her poems can be found in the following literary journals and magazines: *Red Savina Review*, *The Tower Journal*, *Oregon East*, *basalt*, *The Paddock Review*, and *Nailed*. She also teaches undergraduate composition and creative writing courses at Eastern Oregon University and Southern New Hampshire University. She earned her MFA in 2016 from Eastern Oregon University, where she was also the editor of the student literary journal *Oregon East*. Although she enjoys writing in all creative genres, her first love is poetry. She gets lost in the musicality of it and how it bends language to create new objects.
- **Nancy Scott Hanway** is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she received an M.F.A. in fiction writing. She received an M.A. and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Iowa. Hanway has won many awards and honors, including a Fulbright Fellowship for International Dissertation Research to Argentina. Recently, she was named a finalist for the 2015 McKnight Fellowship in Creative Prose. Her short fiction has appeared in *The Florida Review*, *Portland Review*, *Washington Square Review*, *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, *Inertia*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Willow*, *Southern*

*Humanities Review, Conte, North Dakota Quarterly, Limestone, Apalachee Review, and elsewhere.*

- **Gordon Hilgers** has published short stories, poetry, book reviews, and journalism fairly widely. His poetry has appeared in *Chiron Review, Poetry Quarterly, Sequestrum, Red Fez, Edgar Allen Poet Journal, The Texas Observer* and many other reviews, journals and magazines. Currently, he lives in the Five Points neighborhood of Dallas, Texas, an area The Los Angeles Times dubbed “the Ellis Island of Texas” due to the over 30 languages spoken in a five-mile quadrant. His work as an advocacy journalist with a street newspaper, Endless Choices, led to the formation of the Dallas Homeless Coalition, a HUD Continuum of Care agreement and a new city-owned homeless shelter.
- For 35 years, **Sandra Kolankiewicz’s** poems and stories have appeared in reviews and anthologies, most recently in *London Magazine, New World Writing, BlazeVox, Prairie Schooner, Bellingham Review, Gargoyle, Prairie Schooner, Fifth Wednesday, ArGiLo, Per Contra, and Pif*. **Turning Inside Out** won the fall Black River contest at Black Lawrence Press. Finishing Line Press published **The Way You Will Go** in 2014 and released **Lost in Transition** in March 2017. **When I Fell**, an e-novel about aging, redemption, and time travel, with 76 color illustrations by Kathy Skerritt, is available from Web-e-Books and will be coming out in book format.
- **Evalyn Lee** is a former CBS News producer currently living in London with her husband and two children. Over the years, she’s produced television segments for 60 Minutes in New York and the BBC in London. Lee studied English literature both in the U.S. and in England and has had the opportunity to interview writers, including Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, Dick Francis, and Margaret Atwood, about their work.
- **Thomas Locicero’s** poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Roanoke Review, Boston Literary Magazine, Long Island Quarterly, The Good Men Project, Adelaide Literary Magazine, Jazz Cigarette, Quail Bell Magazine, Antarctica Journal, Rat’s Ass Review, Scarlet Leaf Review, Tipton Poetry Journal, Hobart, Ponder Review, vox poetica, Poetry Pacific, Brushfire Literature & Arts Journal, Indigo Lit, Saw Palm, Fine Lines, New Thoreau Quarterly, Birmingham Arts Journal, Clockwise Cat, and Snapdragon, felan, and The Ghazal Page*, among other journals. He lives in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.
- **Pete Miller’s** work has appeared in *Bayou Magazine, Slice, Superstition Review, Minus Times, The Moth*(Ireland), and 491 Magazine. His chapbook, *Born Soap*, was published online by H\_NGM\_N. Miller received an MFA from Arizona State University and currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska. He works as a Community Health Worker at a clinic for the homeless. Miller co-edits the on-line poetry journal *A Dozen Nothing*.
- **Sergio A. Ortiz** is a two-time Pushcart nominee, a four-time Best of the Web nominee, and Best of the Net nominee (2016), 2nd place in the 2016 Ramón Ataz Annual Poetry Competition sponsored by Alaire publishing house. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *FRIGG, Tipton Poetry Journal, Drunk Monkeys, and Bitterzeot Magazine*.

He is currently working on his first full-length collection of poems, **Elephant Graveyard**.

- **Cassandra Rockwood-Rice** is a single mother, birth doula, activist, artist, and writer. Her poems have been published in *The New Delta Review*, *Savannah Art and Literature Magazine* (SALit), *Understory*, *Cirque*, *Oakland Review*, *Arkana Mag*, and *Rip Rap*. She holds a Bachelor's Degree from California Institute of Integral Studies and is an MFA Writing candidate at California College of the Arts. Cassandra self-publishes a small Art and Literary Zine called "Rag," she is interested in borders, identity, diasporas, and confession. She lives in with her daughter and two cats on a street with a Berkeley postal code and Oakland man-holes.
- **Stan Sanvel Rubin's** work has appeared most recently in *Poetry Northwest*, *The National Poetry Review*, and *The Laurel Review*. His fourth full-length collection, **There. Here.**, was published by Lost Horse Press (2013). He lives on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state.
- **Beth Sherman** received an MFA in creative writing from Queens College, where she teaches in the English department. Her fiction has been published in *The Portland Review*, *KYSO*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *Sandy River Review*, *Blue Lyra Review*, *Panoplyzine*, *Sun Star Literary Magazine*, *Peacock Journal*, *3Elements Review*, *the Rappahannock Review*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *The Delmarva Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Sinkhole*, *Compose Journal*, *Ponder Review* and *Marathon Literary Review*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has written five mystery novels.
- **Howard Winn's** work has been published in such literary journals as *Dalhousie Review*, *Galway Review*, *Descant*, *Antigonish Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Chaffin Review*, *Evansville Review*, and *Blueline*. He has been nominated for a Pushcart prize three times. He is Professor of English at SUNY-Dutchess.