

# Red Savina Review *spring 2018*



# Red Savina Review

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**Red Savina Review (RSR)** is an independent, bi-annual e-zine publishing short films, creative nonfiction, fiction and poetry around March and October. RSR is a nonprofit literary review headquartered in southwestern New Mexico. For submission guidelines visit our website [redsavinareview.org/submit-2/](http://redsavinareview.org/submit-2/).

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# Chila Woychik

## A RURAL APRIL – 12 DAYS



© watercolor by Carol McCoy

You think we hide behind these rows of corn with some lopsided notion of loyalty. You think our days rattle on along the furrow end of insignificance. But that's where your logic flattens. We have mouths to feed, and nothing weighs more than a hungry globe hurtling through space. See those tiny shoots? We played God and dropped them there. Turn, chisel, turn. Dig 'til your palms leach salt into the already-rich loam. Oh farmer stooped so low, your son behind that plow won't go to college, and when morning comes, no one will remember your name.

April 1 – Arizona. Signs near Yuma Proving Grounds and around the city say, *Danger: U. S. Government Property. Impact Area. Unexploded Ammunition. No Trespassing.* Curiosity fuels a writer; fear or anger drives her forward.

April 2 – (Arizona) More signs: *44 miles to Mexico. Watch for animals next 20 miles.* The border patrolman follows me around back country roads. I pull over to ask him why. He tells me the area has “lots of criminal activity,” your rental car, he says, and a face we've never seen before. But my mother's birthday, I say, and see, my dad's walking stick. I'm hiking, want to hike, search for trails. So we talk and talk, he checks the car, the trunk, tells me about last week's 40# of meth found in the door panels of a newer pickup truck driven by another stranger. I hope he doesn't tear my rental car apart, and does anyone care that his name is Doug?

April 3 – (Arizona) I call them mountains; they call them foothills, a sultry bronze and orange. The desert sleeps after every mellow winter, and each blue sky drags its clouds along. The roads to the mountains have names: Muggins Pass, Coyote Peak, Telegraph Pass, Jasper Trail. Miles of paths and a bad hip to hobble on.

April 4 – (Arizona) The heat is a killer in the desert southwest. During 2016's summer heat wave, several hikers died along these sands, because into everyone's chronology slides a million sunsets, but these sear deeper, flare from the bone-side out.

April 5 – (Arizona) The sun plays poker this far south, games of chance, betting on odds. Water is the costly chip and a freak thunderstorm can bankrupt slovenly players. A dry sand gulch is called a wash which floods when rains heave down the mountain passes. Dad warns me to keep an eye to the sky and my feet dry.

April 6 – (Arizona) Mom sings a short refrain in her kitchen, a wash of sound from an aging pass. The breeze swings in. This is comfort. No fear in suns today, and every bird has wings. If I never had to leave here, could heaven exist in a hell this hot?

April 7 – My parents have always been old. "Huh?" is still Dad's favorite word. Mom hears well enough but staggers on that one bad knee. She used to swim like a fish, she says, and Dad raced us running backwards, and won. On a third trip to Arizona, the sand leapt, always leaping.

April 8 – Back home in Iowa, there are farmers in the fields, always farmers in the fields. I'm not sure another kind of geography exists anymore, only a day away from flat sands and paltry peaks. I tell my farmer: those seeds you hold fast, spill a few here where fresh furrows wait, and where rain gently gathers on the horizon.

April 9 – Persephone rises. The upside of April is spring's somewhat passé triumphs: new green tips poking from the sod, a long-awaited warming of our winter bones, and every kind of pleasant going. April defines forward movement, a sweet hope. In April, the Midwest shows a leg.

April 10 – Days are not sequential. Life is not. A cold early spring day is followed by two early summer days, back to spring, and forward again. Sequentiality is a myth, but it's how we order our lives for the sake of stability. We are abacus-lovers—each peg neatly slid from one shaft to the next. The last peg slid, we look back, there we go: a tidy existence. A dose, a dot, a line, a story. Patience is the repeating decimal of our days.

April 11 – My latest self-realization is that I don't know how to relax. I fall asleep thinking of what I can accomplish the next day. I wake wondering how much I'll get done, if I'll live long enough to make good, make up for lost time. Vacation? Isn't that a thing rich people do when bored? I consider taking a day off and end up with a notebook or camera in hand, not to relax but to document, to consider. I take Jeep rides but never for fun: to hike, to exercise, to *do* something, *record* something. This is a great failing.

April 12 – Tomorrow is Easter. We recline in a conservative stronghold; churches run wild and farm folk are notoriously family-centric, live off the land. We see calves born and fresh life;

there is little that discomfits us. Skies skip blue, loam runs black and deep, but floods trawl us along too and remind us of our subcelestiality. And sometimes we stop dreaming.

What brought us here? A river of years, a dust of desire, paths of obsession, houses of habit. What brought us here is Fate mixed with decisions blended into will. Oh the heaviness of philosophy and the redundancy of theology. I am here under the bright stars of evening and houses lit and strung along these country miles. I am here in the middle of Happening and Will-Be, in the midst of an unfolding.

# Abby Caplin



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

## COLD

Sky is cold and darkening though it's early  
afternoon. A friend called to say  
you died on Friday smashing

into a parked car. I know  
you had a way of saying your truth,  
meaning you may or may not have been helpful,

meaning it may or may not  
have been the truth.

The point is that your death is a great

way to raise funds  
for the institute, pay  
you craved for yourself.

I search my heart  
and desk for sorrow,  
but find only this white crystal

I bought last summer  
that looks like a nugget  
of coconut meat knocked

out of its shell, but isn't.  
And this brass lamp, its light  
warming the frozen landscape

of your wrinkled face,  
your stained teeth, your sprightly,  
icicle-blue eyes.

# ANCESTORS

I had forgotten about our fox  
and gull relatives, until a Brooklyn-  
born shaman reminded me that we  
are all born of the first  
celled beings, that all living

things are cousins,  
and all stones want comfort.  
The wild parrots rest  
in the old pine out back  
where I spot their toddler

eyes and toy beaks, their feathery  
cherry helmets,  
born of enslaved  
Ecuadorian ancestors.  
My ear breaks

rearranging itself  
to unscramble their chatty squawks  
as they bounce  
on telephone wires.  
*You are poisoning us, they say.*

*Unless you take responsibility,  
we'll be wiped out.  
This is why we wake you up  
at noon and don't  
give you our feathers.*

Under the picnic table,  
garden spiders weave  
a gentle web around  
my ankles. Their tenderness  
is almost unbearable.

Then, Uncle Skunk gassed  
the garage, and the Toyota mutated  
from black and white to Technicolor,  
the cement floor cracking  
along fault lines.

O Ancestors, I had forgotten you!

Today I bathed in garden dirt,  
threw ashes on my head  
and over my left shoulder,  
asked forgiveness from the bells  
of flax, the stout calendula,

the nursery rows of romaine.

I dreamed of Siberian  
permafrost where a Yakutian great-  
grandmother looks for me  
with my mother's eyes,

her village now tarred in Gap  
and McDonald's, and too much time  
has passed. I try to forgive her children  
for forgetting her,  
try to remember spider

grandmothers and their looms,  
the way they gather,  
a circle of weavers in council,  
the way they bless those home-  
grown tomatoes that taste so good.

# Matthew Bruce Harrison



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

## We Find Ourselves Where

The trees between us  
and the shifting planks  
of shadow between

the trees, the blank scape  
of the farthest trees  
we wonder if shadow

too. Our walk is long  
inside outdoors, roof  
implied by branching

sounds, deep boat sounds  
and around us a moving  
picture—like a fading

negative—pursues  
a rumored light between  
the planks we walk, straight

or in tracery—route  
leaf shaped, it can seem,  
but which leaf there

is no telling. There are  
so many. There is much  
weary applause. Rasping  
breath or breeze. You cough  
or claws autograph close  
bark. Sap or sweat. Wisps  
of hair fall in our eyes  
or most everywhere  
webs. I smell crushed  
fruit, you decomposing  
shadows. Do we seek  
an out door or the room  
to wait—the possible  
clearing? Our walking  
imitates our questions—  
together—you direct  
circular me, then vice  
versa. Why is the way  
so long? Because it goes  
a long way. This is sense  
among the redundant  
trees. How long before  
our hands are hatchets  
and open these trunks  
to find cradles, homes?  
Our mark is dot dot dot—  
three knobs carved some-  
where. The difference  
between making a home  
and being at home  
disappears in trees. Lost,  
we learn to belong, and I  
am glad you are with me.

# Katrina Hays

## Equinox

*Admiralty Inlet, Puget Sound*

In balance, one thing against another  
The dead hawk and the white foal  
The female, the male  
As if you could be safely ferried across

Before this was the urgency  
The drive  
After this is the sorrow  
As if you could be ferried across

This is the balance  
This is the tipping point  
The soul is an estuary  
The body, a boat

# Starfish

Adrift in my kayak,  
I see a crimson  
four-armed starfish  
clinging to black-green rock.

I'm told if you chop  
off one arm  
then comes another.  
Does a phantom remain  
calling back to the body?

Mangled heart,  
ghosting back  
towards old love,  
grow in me a new  
transparency.

## ad hoc life

I wish I could slide aside  
the steel membrane of choice

Step into the me who spun right  
danced back or slid sideways

I might be cooking spaghetti with meatballs  
for my three kids

Or waking up next to that German baritone  
after a performance of *Carmen*

Perhaps I'd be plucking some dumb tourist from the belly of the Zambezi  
before the crocodiles showed up

Or sporting orange robes and a shaved pate  
meditating in the Himalayas

The rough reality of this pen  
scrolling ink across page after page

Makes me wonder  
what those fractals of self

Think of this ad hoc life

# Gayle Kaune

## A Story About the Journey

I am window over water,  
wheat fields with sharp stubble,  
gum in the mouth of a swan.

One day I took the anvil of my soul  
and gave Father a room in a nursing home.  
It was easy, the red envelope was empty  
and I'd watched peaches in the blue bowl  
for so long they grew rank  
with bruises and flies.  
All it takes is time.

And about my heart—  
One day it stands in protest  
lines against the war  
and the next makes love  
in a velvet room.

I want to read Bazooka comics  
and pretend I'm in an art museum  
studying Roy Lichtenstein  
when really, I'm at my desk  
praying the Virgin Mary will deliver  
me from routine.

Once I went to Paris  
and the pissoirs were missing—  
all those art-patterned urinals removed  
from the sidewalks.  
Or maybe not.

Memory is like that: on her deathbed  
did Mother say, *Goodbye I love you,*  
*or, I wish we'd fixed your teeth?*

# Suzanne O'Connell

## Kimchi Fried Rice

Where naked chicken breasts  
sat in repose every other night,  
a bubbling deforestation project sat instead.  
A blazing firepot,  
a volcanic fusion of funk,  
a cauldron of atomic goodness.

Orange smoke,  
the kind magicians use  
when they pull a live bird  
out of a secret compartment,  
blew through, hot and dry.  
The wooden cabinets breathed in,  
coughed a little,  
but will remember the scent.

Vegetables were added:  
shiitake mushrooms, spinach,  
onions, garlic, peas, broccoli.  
Master Kimchi,  
hands on hips like Yul Brynner  
in *The King and I*,  
pointed and laughed.

Kimchi  
doesn't hide from anyone,  
is an extrovert,  
doesn't sneak up on you,  
has been told to tone itself down,  
wears orange and red. Together.  
Kimchi may be a Scorpio.

When I washed my face for bed,  
I felt renewed, worldly, traveled.  
Like life itself had snuck up on me.  
I smiled into the mirror.

# Luke Roe



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

## Polarizing Filter

I won't see Occam  
Cut himself shaving. He  
Hides his bloody tissues and throws away  
The razor. My face is in the window my  
Face is covered in small equations.  
I won't know that dialectics will blur  
Into each other, that even our  
Idols have puss in their search histories.  
My face is on the screen I paint my face  
An ugly color. All other answers are too  
Sinuous and convoluted. I've given up nuance. I've given up  
Debate. But when logic and reasoning fail,  
Who will feed the neural plants  
Who will give the animals water  
Who will bathe and dry the poems,  
Those small creatures  
On which so much depends?

# Stan Sanvel Rubin



Photography © by Tammy Ruggles from RSR Featured Art Gallery

## Read Before Playing

The rules include never having to say you're sorry.  
The rules include knowing you should be sorry.  
The rules include feeling sorry without knowing why.  
This is too bad, if you want simple rules  
go somewhere that has simple rules,  
rules that are easier to understand,  
the way you can understand the difference  
between day and night, which is easy  
except in certain latitudes where at midnight  
the sky is lit by yellow fire or the Polar sky  
darkens everything and turns day to night  
like a filmmaker shooting to save money,  
only there is no cinematographer, no director  
to hold accountable, just the darkening  
so that your life slows down to shadow  
or quickens to shadow, you can't know which,  
you can't know whether you follow it or it follows you.  
Either way you can't keep up, can you?

## Lucky You

The story of my life  
would bore you  
if you had

time to hear me tell it  
the way I might  
right now

if I trusted you,  
but I don't,  
you can just get up

and walk away  
like a person  
who stole a drink

at a party he  
wasn't invited to  
but happened

to pass by  
and took a shot  
at something that

looked promising  
on such a hot day  
but wasn't.

## An Elegy For My Elegy

When I step back  
I step across a grave,  
the one I dug

by stepping forward.  
I have buried parents  
under stone,

seen the gray dust  
of a loved wife  
settle in a plastic bag

inside a set  
of plastic urns  
she chose for this,

nested like words,  
one inside  
the other.

My own death  
weighs on my tongue  
like a small piercing

made of titanium  
and silence  
no one knows is there.

My final breath  
will slip over it and be gone,  
a secret held no more.

So it's not as earth  
or ash we end,  
but indecipherable consequence,

a hash of language and desire  
punctuated by the slow  
forfeiture of meaning

which was implicit  
in the contract  
I never signed.

## Documents

There's always the document of silence.  
And the mountain.

There's the document of pain.  
And its children.

They identify you  
before you can identify yourself.

They ring your head with sorrow  
even you don't see.

There are no words for this  
and everybody knows them.

# Cecile Barlier

## MRI

Thirty minutes into the procedure, Mathias Drane, a bike courier, tightens his neck muscles to lift his head from the scanner table, noticing again that his forehead is held in straps, as are his hands, as is his chest. Although thirty minutes is a conjecture, it seems to him a fair assessment, in line with the tingling feeling in his right calf; he rotates his ankle and bends his toes. The tingling doesn't go away. With more ankle-rotation, the tingling eventually goes. It is the first time he has an MRI—the first time his body slips entirely into a tube. In some way, it is an experience, something fresh, like the first time he saw Juliane, like his first downhill time-trial race, like crashing his bike into a cliff. At noon, a compassionate doctor declared his body officially broken, and now he is waiting for the final decree, which will come out of the box where he now lies.

There is a miniscule drop of water condensed on the surface of the tube right in front of him. He looks at the drop; he blinks a lot—he always blinks a lot—feeling the stillness of the air around him. The only atmospheric motion in the tube comes from his own breathing. He exhales through his nostrils and feels the small gust traveling over his philtrum and further out. He follows the breath-volute around in the tube—up it goes, and then down again. He feels like an opium smoker in his own cloud, smoking his own breath. He floats needlessly. There is pleasure in that sensation. The condensed drop is about to roll. He has no idea how he knows that: that the liquid pearl will set itself in motion, that gravity will pull on the delicate skin of the pearl and distort its shape. He knows. While the drop knows nothing about itself, about the vapor that made it, and yet in a second it will drop onto his face—shameless. He makes elaborate computations about the probable point of contact. His nose bridge—the drop will navigate onto his nose bridge, not for very long, then flow through to his cheek, down his jawline, along the upper part of his neck, and will end on the surface of the scanner with a plip. It's as if, lying there in this tube, he's both the weatherman and the weather map.

There is a loud rushing noise, like a whipping noise with a small bird at the end of it. Mathias is wearing earplugs, but he can hear it very clearly. It is not so much the loudness as it is the repetitiveness that is striking. Every thirty seconds or so, there is a loud alarm sound like a foghorn, followed by more horns and then claps as if someone wearing oversized clogs was walking and tripping around the tube. In an effort to deflect the noise, Mathias closes his eyes and imagines himself at the top of a very steep hill on his bike. He can throw himself full speed down the hill with as much realism as one sitting with goggles in a 3D theater. He experiences such ease and looseness in his trip that he suspects at once that he could be falling asleep—the

effect of the Diazepam. If that's the case, he will resist. He doesn't want unconsciousness. Not now.

He jumps to thinking that there is no such thing as chance, that everything is linked, Juliane would say. It is no accident that precisely this morning before the crash, he received her package in his mailbox, a stack of photos. She could have sent an email with the pictures as attachments, a link to a Dropbox if the files were too big. Instead she picked a brown paper envelope, licked a series of antique stamps, went to the post office in Boseong, which, according to a short consultation of the Internet, is located on the southern shore of South Korea. His mind wanders back to the inscription on the sticky note affixed on top of the stack. *For you, my dearest Mathias, with all my love.* Nothing else. He closes his eyes and visualizes the inscription again, the elegant tilt of the letters. His mind stays there for a while; it drifts like a bird on her aquatic words. He swallows his saliva—warm and salty. He presses his head deeper in the pillow that the operator added for his comfort.

Gazing upward at the strips of fluorescent light on either side of him, at the white plastic surface of the tube, Mathias doesn't see plastic. Mathias sees Juliane's skin, pale and microscopically textured. There is a bit of sweat behind her knees and at the base of the neck, there is one drop entirely formed between her shoulder blades—about to roll. There is one mosquito trying to get through the bed canopy, called in by the blood pulsing in the wrists of the sleeper. Hzzzz. Nothing for a while. Hzzzzz. It is sixteen hours later in Korea; the sun is rising there. Outside Juliane's bungalow, the clouds are kissing the cliffs. Vapor comes off the ground. Someone is burning incense nearby. It smells of a warm and powdery and almost creamy wood.

Mathias tries to shift position, but of course he can't. His sense of smell—always acute—seems to have sharpened. He smells the odor of the MRI operator. It is an honest smell—overlaid with the bleached and soupy hospital smell but unmistakably human and a little citrusy. It travels toward him and into the tube like a meteorite, and with it comes something smoky as well—the morning spell of Juliane in Boseong. And now he wonders about this elation of his, this capacity to recreate Juliane in all her fundamentals: her skin, her smell, her sweat. Perhaps it is how she wants to manifest herself in him: like a fearless explorer, a pioneer of her own body, a freedom fighter able to break the distance with a few photos. When he, Mathias, really never travels any farther than a few hundred miles away from home—with his padded pants, his cycling glasses, and a breathable rain jacket *just in case*. It is a bit depressing to think that he hasn't changed, that all his riding hasn't made him more of a man, that his tan is all but on the surface, that his apparent health is just for display. He still feels like himself: a sickly, shy boy silent in a group of adults who ask him questions that he never answers. Because he can't. Because he doesn't know what to say.

There is a voice—out of nowhere—feminine and calm. “How are you, Mr. Drane?” the voice asks. He focuses simple-mindedly on the meaning of the question. There is more than one truthful answer. He is working his mental way through the tangle of the words to be honest. “Mr. Drane, are you okay?” the voice asks, now with a slightly more pronounced upward intonation. He is about to respond. At the same time, he is very much conscious of the futility of this dialogue. In a way, he doesn't wish to answer. So he doesn't. “Mr. Drane, we have another thirty

minutes to go. I need to know that you're okay or we'll have to get you out and start all over again. Can you hear me at least?"

"Yes." He thrusts the word out with superhuman effort, pushing either side of his tongue against his upper premolars, pulling his lips out into his cheeks. On a three-second time scale, it starts out with the wetness of the "iii," rolls forward to the "eee," glides into the "sss," which skids ahead until it pulls his mouth shut. Once it is said, he feels the impact of a thought in the lower left part of his brain—like a rubber arrow. He feels like a nine-month-old saying "yes" for the first time.

"Thank you," the voice says, audibly irritated.

Bing. The tremor is gone. That is all. What is left is a mild yet lingering sense of being exposed.

And then he holds on for what, two minutes without hardly thinking?

The side light in the tube flickers. It's a slight flicker, perhaps more like a very brief dimming that corresponds to another machine turning on. The MRI operator has most likely noticed it. He should wait it out and see whether it happens again. If it happens again, he doesn't want to miss it. And so he tries not to blink for a while, which is hard. His eyes water, and a tear swells and escapes to the exterior edge on the right side. Now he is crying. It hurts and it soothes—it does both. He lets himself go. The tears come, not as a sprinkle, not as a downpour, but as a deluge. Part of him is precipitated onto the scanner. In a moment, the scanner temperature will make his teardrops evaporate and perhaps reform above him. Suddenly he has this flashing memory of a school book in seventh grade: a naïve blue sea and a bright yellow sun, a white cloud, oversized blue raindrops, a meandering river on a green mountain. *C'est comme ça qu'on fait la pluie*. He liked French in school. *Il ne faut pas pleurer, Mathias, ça ne sert vraiment à rien*.

Being in this tube may provoke tachycardia, the doctor said. The doctor shouldn't have said that. Saying things makes them happen. Saying I love you in a drunk delirium made him love Juliane—it wasn't the other way around. And words are irreversible. Mathias cannot unsay I love you; the doctor cannot walk back on his warning. So there is flopping in his chest. Mathias' heart beats too fast; he breathes too often.

"Everything okay, Mr. Drane?"

Juliane is here again. She has this irritating way of returning. She is very much like this upsetting refrain, which Mathias hums quietly in the tube.

*The absence, here it is.*

*The absence*

*Of a child, of a love*

*The absence is the same...*

He should stop humming, he should stop summoning Juliane. But that's not him—he can't stop. And all the while as he hums, he sees himself when he was little (eight?). Eight-year-old Mathias

makes a bet. The bet is to cross a square lined with chestnut trees filled with starlings. It is raining shit on the square—intensely. He needs to run through and dodge it. That is his way to confront shit—head-on. He almost makes it. He gets hit in the very last yard, right when he is opening his mouth to cry victory. This is when he stops humming and starts laughing inwardly. Juliane says he scoffs at everything valuable about himself—including his resolve. Still, it’s funny, she must admit it. The voice calls out to him again, reiterates her question.

This time, his “yes” is effortless, sincere.

The light flickers again. He’s thirsty.

He feels like having one of those sports drinks—with added minerals and electrolytes—something really refreshing, with cucumber mint flavor. He has a collection at home—little tabs that dissolve into his plastic water bottles. The collection sits in the pantry on the uppermost shelf, just above the assortment of energy bars. Juliane says that Mathias’ pantry looks like a medicine cabinet. She says a real pantry smells of apples in a crate, of sawdust and permanent humidity, which is another way of saying that a real pantry is a morgue for food with preferably northern orientation and no windows. And him, with his tubes and bars, he is trying to escape the pantry rule. He likes food so unfoodlike, so abstract that the idea of death cannot touch it. Nothing can rot in there. Not even the pickled vegetables on the lower shelf. In fact, he’s trying to turn his pantry on its head, to make it a chamber of eternal, colorful life-pellets and ever-enduring fermented food, a place he can crawl into when the world explodes. He does what he can with what he has.

A side ache starts to run on the left side of his head. Mathias did not think a side ache could reside in the head. He assumed like everyone else that a side ache dwells under the rib cage. But now he’s feeling this stabbing pain that compares accurately to a side ache. It starts with a sharp swelling sensation, like rising sea waters. And once attaining its maximum intensity, the pain sloshes back and forth, as if stuck in his long and narrow skull. Mathias doesn’t seem to be equipped with the necessary mental sluiceways. In short, he is going through a cerebral climate change, an expression that would no doubt delight Juliane.

There is the sound of clogs moving in the adjacent room not far. The room has a screen that displays all his bodily commotion. In a way, it must be entertaining, like some special exhibition—Mathias’ Side Ache or The Rising Blur. But if it comes to a choice between allowing his broken body to be on display and pedaling in the sauerkraut, Mathias would rather ride in his own cabbage. The side ache must be beautiful by now: Blazing Sun in Skull.

“Mr. Drane. How do you feel?”

“Fine.”

“Any pain?”

“Mmmmm.”

“Where?”

“The head.”

“On a scale from one to ten, how would you rate the pain?”

Mathias calls on the worst possible pain he can imagine. Like being skinned alive with a peeling knife, bit by bit, starting with his extremities—a ten. On that scale, the scale that ends with the skinning, the side ache rates a solid four.

“Four.”

“We’ll go on then. Would you like me to turn on the radio gently so you can listen to music through the rest of the procedure?”

“...No.”

He just said no exactly like Juliane—like a short and disconnected note—after a small rest—followed by the noticeable absence of thank you. And because he said no just like her, Mathias knows that the ache in his side will not leave him anymore. It is here to stay. The pain has progressed to a new stage; it is becoming part of the whole that defines him. Mathias has clear blue eyes, a yellow road bike, and a side ache on the left side of his head. When he emerges from the tube, his head will be slightly tilted to the left, as if someone had driven a screw to his skull, wound a yarn around it, and tied a calibration weight at the end. The weight will change under the dedicated effort of an invisible hand—it should not remain the same at all times because it is constantly adjusted, and that makes it alive. Mathias can accept alive pain. The only thing that Mathias is truly afraid of is to feel nothing, something until now he could combat with a 2 a.m. bike ride on the hills near the ravines.

Did the operator put on the radio even though he said not to? No. He just imagines it, but the idea of music gets on his nerves, and layers an oddly familiar form of violence with his pain. Mathias starts having terrible thoughts. Thoughts that get stuck in his heart like rust spots on his bike chain. He’s in a tube that has dissolved all sense of outsidersness. He is so enclosed in himself that the violence budding in him feels as unprompted and irrepressible as an epileptic seizure. He’s thankful to be fully strapped, and at the same time, his leg muscles tighten as if they may rupture. Tendons and hollows get drawn around his muscles—barely covered in skin. He feels unnerved and tight, about to burst at the seams, fully disqualified to exist outside of this tube. Right now, he could hurt Juliane, pull one of her eyes out of its socket, burn the skin on her breasts with a lighter, kiss her in a way that would choke her—catching the nose and the mouth all at once—and wait. It’s a feeling of evil joy and immense distress, a feeling close to what Juliane once described to him as the philosophy of a poet whose name he forgot, but whose words wedged into his cortex:

“The unique and supreme delight lies in the certainty of doing ‘evil’—and men and women know from birth that all pleasure lies in evil;

“But what can eternity of damnation matter to someone who has felt, if only for a second, the infinity of delight?”

And as usual his violence spurt comes in spasms and is already receding. It's a little like sex or like jet lag, in that it is the accumulation of little waves—of pleasure, of fatigue—that gradually build up to a seaquake, which crashes to the ground and then shatters into pieces. It is delightful and shameful and exhausting. Once it is over, it is over. If he hadn't become a bike courier, he wouldn't have quit smoking, and it would be time for a cigarette or a joint, like after the battle, like after the rain, like after the procedure. Juliane once told him about a trip she took to Jordan—before they met—where she was invited to a private room in a restaurant, and they passed around an argileh full of marinated tobacco and molasses. As she told him the story of the pipe being passed around, he could visualize the smoke getting out of her lips—coming out like a dream, rolling out—every last bit. It makes him happy to relive that story she told him. He smiles with his lips closed. He says to himself that it was the right move to tie him in this tube, where he is protected by the warmth of his imagination. He doesn't care that he is wrecked, that perhaps he's going to die, that the machine will confirm his sentence. He may as well smoke his last pipe here, eat his last supper, watch the sunset, hold Juliane's hand, choke her with a kiss, pedal away. He can do all of this here, and the machine will not stop him. The machine will settle for projecting splashes of color onto the operator's screen, and it will look nice and incomprehensible.

Observing his own thought is dry and infinite like the desert—a clean process with a lot of recycling involved. There is a recurrent meandering to it, which snakes a bit like a Brazilian dance. Mathias is a good dancer—all types of dances. It's one thing he can claim without second-guessing himself. When he was an adolescent, his friends admired him for a particular series of dancing steps he could execute at full speed onto any rhythm. He can still do it, although he has less opportunity as he gets older. Not long ago he attended a workshop close to his apartment—mostly cha-cha-chá. He tried to teach Juliane one night, and he owes to that the only moment he ever held her tight.

Mathias' lower left leg lifts up and hits the tube before it goes back down—the first of six steps. It strikes him how the memory of dancing is all in his muscles, his nerves, in the privacy of his connective tissues. It soothes him to think about dancing because it is done without thinking—or if it is thinking, it is a very ancient form of it, a form that seeps into his bone marrow. Once dancing is learned, it cannot be forgotten, like biking. The body knows forever. Only in death will they part: his body and the dancing. And even then, how would he know what will be happening inside his dead matter? If nails continue to grow for a while, the same inertia must leave the memory of dancing somewhere.

Perhaps the tube is growing on him. It is a bit like a house growing on an older person. There is this moment where having been in one place for so long, a node gets formed between the content and the container. This is where the light flickered and the eyes winked. This is where his opioid breath has curled and met with the white plastic surface before it fell back down and he could smoke his own odor as if it was pure Afghan. This is where his heels define the end of the tube and where the tube defines the end of him. This is where the strap inlays his forehead. This is where his skin has sealed with the tube, and no one can tell whether it can be unglued. He's tired now; he starts fossilizing.

Somewhere something makes the sound of a buzzer and there is motion. Whether the motion is Mathias's or the tube's is impossible to sort out. It is as if Mathias has been sitting on a train for a long time and the landscape starts to move—the first impression is that the land is moving, not the train. The sun rises at the end of the tube, the floor beneath him drops as if in an elevator, yet Mathias is still lying on the firm, glassy surface. There is this idea, a bit panicky, that he is an astronomer stepping out of his shuttle into infinity. It's so bright out there, so painful to the eyes. He closes them tight. In that short moment, he fears that some essential piece of equipment will fail—his hair will get caught, he will get partly scalped, the straps that tie him to the tube will rupture and he will impale himself onto something sharp, he will lose control and urinate and set off multiple short-circuits, leading to abundant electrical contact burns—the smell of his carbonized flesh will make the operator pass out and there will be no help. Obviously, beneath this shell of stress, Mathias is excited; the hair on his arms spikes up like a platoon of miniature toy soldiers. As he glides out of the tube, he stretches in length, he fills his lungs with a big breath, he feels what all creatures feel as they step into a new world—an urge to shout out and expel the overflow of euphoria, the spirit of conquest. Mathias gliding out of the tube is Tarzan swinging out of the forest. And now he opens his eyes wide and lifts his eyebrows to help. He decides he likes it here—the muted pale green color, the cleanliness of the ceiling tiles, the rows of neon lights that seem to guide out to an invisible yet heavenly exit.

“We're done,” the operator says.

She's pretty—not as pretty as Juliane but pretty. With slightly darker skin around her eyes, the near absence of eyebrows, her round face, her fine hair tied in a ponytail, and a somewhat frozen smile, she has a dignified yet enigmatic look. A medical Sphynx—minus the cruelty. She has the look of someone launching into interior debate about how she will say what she will say next.

Part of Mathias would like to help her: the romantic part. That part would like to talk and say that he knows already and that there is no need to take oratory precautions. It's a chivalrous instinct—generous and self-guided. In the millisecond that follows, Mathias feels valiant, able to brave the danger. When unstrapped from the machine, he will rise and stand tall, hold the operator in his arms, embrace her impetuously, tell her it is okay, not to talk, not to worry. They will elope and seize the days that are left, taking sunny breakfasts under the olive trees. But if Mathias looks closer, deeper into his desires, if he allows the clarity of mind that accompanies the certainty of his death, where he truly sees himself, where he truly wants himself, is in an extraordinary freefall—out of a small airplane, a very loud machine, a propeller-driven aircraft. There, knees bent over the edge, the door wide open, the wind frantically beating his hair onto his face, he will watch the curvature of the earth, and before that at the forefront, a small and shy cloud, full of melancholic dampness. He will hold on to the fuselage, his knuckles temporarily white under the gloves, his body will make one with the plane, and he will let go, tumble into the air as in a drum-type washing machine, no up and no down, the blue and the brown dancing like the remnants of lights from a disco ball, followed by the calmitude: his body flattened into a napkin, his legs and arms bent out of the way. That is all.

“Would you like a glass of water?” the Sphynx asks as she touches the skin on his forehead with her very cold hands while untying the straps.

“Please.”

He must sit before he stands. Quietly, he tightens the muscles in his abdominals. It is a gigantic effort, mobilizing all his strength; he feels like an old self summoned out of a deep chair. The room has no windows, and it is cold in here. There is a clock tied perpendicularly to the wall to his left, a round white analog clock. Time flows normally and the operator walks across the room toward a small metal sink. He is starting to rise out of his lying position and feels some light-headedness as gravity plays tricks with his blood flow. He helps himself with his hands pressed onto the sides of the scanner-bed. The hospital gown slips from his shoulders as he sits. Facing away from him, the operator fills a paper cup at the sink. He closes his eyes. This time there'll be no trouble hearing what she won't say; there is nothing that can stop that now. His body damage is no longer a concept. The machine has captured it and marked him like cattle. He is branded for the same reason livestock has been since ancient times, to prove ownership. The damage owns him. He fits himself on the scanner, adjusts the gown back up, expels a small excess of air. The Sphynx comes back to him with the paper cup held forward. He takes it gently from her hand. There's always this, he thinks, and the photos. And he drinks slowly, letting water drown the last of his resistance. And finally, progressively as if on a dimmer, the hope to see Juliane again is turned off.

# Richard Bentley

## REMAINS

Gerald Hughes's wife, Gloria, died peacefully. Now he was alone. He kissed her hands and left the hospital room. A nurse ran after him.

"Sir, are you going to make arrangements for the deceased?"

"No!"

"Then what do you want us to do with the body?"

"Burn it."

"That's not our job, sir."

"Give it to science," he shrugged.

"Sir, you'll have to sign papers, legal papers. They take a while to draw up. Can you wait in the guest lounge?"

"I don't have time."

Hughes stepped into the elevator.

Going down to the first floor, he reflected on his marriage. It had to be counted a success, he thought. Of course there was the problem with John McIntyre. Gerald Hughes sometimes thought that Gloria had had an affair with John McIntyre, but at other times he doubted it. McIntyre was too shy, too gracious to be considered an adulterer. Not like Flora, his friend, with whom he had shared hotel rooms many times.

A few months later Gerald Hughes went to the cemetery to look for his wife's cemetery grave. He thought that possibly there was no grave because there had been no body to bury. Still, it was

the family lot, and he could honor her memory by leaving some flowers somewhere, perhaps under the bushes at the entrance to the burial plot.

After a few years had gone by, Gerald Hughes decided he had made a mistake. He wished he had created some marker where she was-or-was-not buried. The cemetery was the burial site of most of the townspeople, so, he thought, she must be in it somewhere. He paid a visit to the cemetery office and spoke to the director.

The director tapped lightly on the keys of his desktop computer. He studied the screen with a squint and shrugged. “Her name was Gloria Hughes?” he said. “It doesn’t come up on my screen. But I’ll keep trying.”

“The quicker the better,” Hughes said. He still regretted his behavior at the hospital when his wife died, but he had been pressed for time, having made an appointment with his friend Flora at a small hotel down the street.

Next day the cemetery called him. The director said, “Mr. Hughes, did you say your wife’s first name was Gloria? We have a Gloria, but she has no last name. She is buried in lot 47E. I doubt if a visit would establish her identity but you’re welcome to visit.”

Gerald Hughes drove to the cemetery and was given a map. The director had carefully marked out the path to lot 47E. When Hughes first entered the lot, he saw nothing but a field of gray tombstones, but gradually a tombstone marked Gloria came to his attention. It seemed a lighter color than all the others, almost flesh-toned.

Then he noticed the stone next to it. It read *John McIntyre 1936-2016*. On the back of the stone were chiseled the words *requiescat in pacem*. He noticed the same words—*requiescat in pacem*—were carved on the back of the stone marked Gloria. Then he noticed, beneath the sign marking lot 47E, a brass plaque with the words *McIntyre Family*.

He leaned against his cane, staring at the two stones. “So there they lie,” he thought, “death has brought us the hideous truth. McIntyre, the shy adulterer, has his decaying putz installed in my wife’s rotting pudenda for all eternity.”

He rushed home, determined to find his friend Flora. Perhaps he could resume their relationship. Perhaps she had died by now and was buried in the same cemetery.

If so, he would notify the cemetery director. He knew exactly what to do with her body.

# James Hanna

## THE PHOENIX CLIMBS

The dawn of maturity—that critical moment when a boy becomes a man—varies. Taking over the family farm might qualify; going off to war would suffice; and slaying Goliath with a single stone would certainly do the trick. But one’s passage to manhood need not be severe: there is too great a shortage of nine-foot giants or the temerity to go out and slay one. So consider instead the term “rising manhood,” a phrase I found in the cock books I snuck from my dad’s bedroom closet. That an epiphany can come from a cock book is an irony best disregarded, but the flower of revelation should not be crushed when it springs from fetid soil. As I read through those well-fingered, slightly stained books, a light as profound as a burning bush seared itself into my soul. One’s ascension to manhood need not entail more than a generous debut: the instant one’s eyes first linger upon a beautiful, naked woman.

My rite of passage did not take place until well after I turned sixteen. Admittedly, this is a little bit late to claim one’s rise to manhood. But there is much to be said for late bloomers: a seed I might have wasted in the back of a car—in some tacky lover’s lane—had ripened within me until it became a pungent, glowing flower. When it came to the worship of fannies and breasts, Hugh Hefner had nothing on me.

It happened in the summer of ’64, during our annual family foray to Delaware’s Rehoboth Beach. I spotted her while strolling the boardwalk, and instantly fell in love. She was as lean as an eel, as brown as a penny; her long dark hair hung in braids. And her tiny bikini clung to her as though it had been painted on.

She was standing alone at one of those spin art booths, squirting dye onto a whirling paper square. Absorbed in this casual pastime, she did not see me approach her. A mole the size of a thumbprint lay under one of her cheekbones, and I hoped that she considered it a blot upon her beauty. It was that heavy mole, that proverbial damn spot, that gave me the courage to speak.

I almost said, “Gee, you’re pretty,” but I caught myself in time. I did not wish to sound like what I was: a gangly horny kid. So I puffed out my chest and deepened my voice. “Tommy Hemmings at your disposal,” I said in my best James Bond imitation.

She was clutching four tubes of dye so my intrusion was not untimely. But she looked at me noncommittally before handing me three of the tubes. I resisted the urge to squeeze dye onto my

fingers and decorate her face. With her prominent cheekbones and shoulder length braids, she looked like an Indian maiden.

“Don’t drop ’em, kid,” she said, and she smiled when I blushed like a berry. Her teeth were white and even, like the keys on a brand new piano.

She squirted the paper several more times then handed me the final tube. “Whaddya think I should call it?” she said, plucking the paper from the wheel.

As I studied the concentric circles, my heart pounded in my ears. The pattern suggested a whirlpool that might pull me to uncharted depths. “A Siren’s Seduction,” I offered.

She giggled and patted my cheek. “You’re quite the romantic, aren’t you, kiddo? I think I’ll call it ‘Paint.’”

“Can I have it?” I asked her.

“Kid,” she said. “Your mother know what you’re doing?”

“I’m a spin art collector.”

She laughed. “Don’t feed me that line of crap. You’re trying to pick me up, aren’t cha, sonny?”

Stung by her candor, I reverted to form. “G-gee, you’re pretty,” I stammered.

She handed me the painting and shrugged. “And you’re pretty lamo,” she said. “Guys hit on me all the time, ya know, so you’re going to need some game. A spin art collector—that’s gotta be the most pitiful come-on I’ve heard.”

I folded her artwork meticulously and tucked it into my bathing trunks. “If it’s pity you’re offering, I’ll take it. I’m a pretty needy case.”

“Is that why ya talk like an out-of-work actor? That’s really, like, freaky, ya know?”

At least, I had her attention so I decided to quote some Shakespeare. I’m extremely well-read for a sixteen-year-old kid. At Jefferson High, where I go to school, they put me in a college-level English class. I’m also in the drama club, and I played Prospero in *The Tempest*.

Looking into her smoke-grey eyes, I gave her a dose of the Bard. “The weight of your kind gaze I must obey.” Damn, if I didn’t sound like a Renaissance man, all I needed was a sword and a cape.

She looked at me incredulously so I paused for further affect. I then bowed like a reed in the wind and hit her with another line. “I never saw true beauty ’til this day.”

When she feigned a yawn and clucked her tongue, my cock shrank to the size of a bean sprout. Had she noticed that I had mixed up Shakespeare’s plays? I prayed she wasn’t a critic.

“Keep that crap for the stage,” she said. “You sound like a total dork.”

“If all the world be a stage,” I replied, “you must be my Juliet.”

She laughed so hard tears dampened her cheeks. “What a loada shit.”

I slapped my chest as though wounded. “I hope it will nourish a rose.”

Her laughter had barely subsided when she gripped my hand in hers. “C’mon,” she said. “Let’s dodge a few waves. You need some cooling off.”

\*

If *Finnegans Wake* is the most challenging of books, I had much to bring to it. Because I spent that entire summer in Cleo’s magnificent wake. With her, the beach and the boardwalk became as magical as a Joycean rant. Tossing bean bags into baskets was like piercing the Cyclops’ eye; returning the surfer boys’ envious stares was like slaying Penelope’s suitors; and rubbing lotion into her back was like yielding to Circe’s spell. Not that turning men into pigs was a challenge in my case. As my hand roamed between her warm shoulder blades, it was all I could do not to grunt.

Of course, she had a boyfriend; he was in the Army somewhere. Why else would she spend time with the likes of me: a cock-flogging adolescent? Clearly, she regarded me as safe, not sexy—fun yet conveniently harmless. I was suitable only to carry her beach umbrella and rinse off her boogie board. But I accepted my role as her servant with the deepest of gratitude: a reverence befitting a drowning sailor whom a mermaid had plucked from the sea. As we bicycled along the boardwalk, as we bounced among the breakers, a maudlin line from a country tune bespoiled my literary brain. *Yes, if I can’t have all of you just give me what you think is fair.*

Although I treated her like a princess, she did not have a regal soul. The entertainment magazines she tucked in her beach bag filled the horizon of her mind; top ten songs, like “Ring of Fire,” blared from her portable radio; and clichés like “dork” and “lamo” peppered her conversation. She had no interest in going to college although she’d been offered a gymnastic scholarship. Instead, she planned to attend beauty school and work in a salon.

I told her I was going to major in literature, but I didn’t want to teach it. Instead, I wanted to be like Jack London and take off on adventures. I wanted to pen novels about diving for pearls and sailing the South China Sea. I wanted to be like Hemingway and write about giant marlins.

“So why are you reading *Paradise Lost*? Ain’t that a little bit lamo?”

She was lying face down on her beach towel, digging her toes into the sand. Even so, she had noticed that dog-eared paperback that I read whenever she napped. Since we were only a passing liaison, the stuff of midsummer dreams, the title of Milton’s worn classic did not seem inappropes.

“I like the Devil in it,” I said. “He’s an independent guy.”

“What are ya tryin’ to tell me, kid?”

“That I’m gonna be my own man.”

“Is that why you’re lugging my bag around and rubbing lotion on my back?”

I shrugged and tickled the arch of her foot. She pushed me away with her toes. “Buy me a hot dog, Satan,” she said. “Go easy on the relish this time.”

Her sense of entitlement was remarkable, but who was I to object? Were she more than a self-absorbed vixen, what use would she have for me? Yes, I was only her lackey, her fawning pitiful page, but the wages of my debasement were as rare as pirated gold.

When I returned with her hot dog, she was lying on her back leafing through *Paradise Lost*. Her leg was propped on her bended knee, her foot swung like a pendulum. Her eyes did not stray from the book as I handed her the hot dog. Instead, she wrinkled her nose like a rabbit and waved me away from her. Oh, how I envied that lucky frank as she slipped it between her lips.

After another minute, she tossed the book into the sand. “So that’s what gets you off,” she said. “Snakes and fallen angels.”

“Isn’t that kind of obvious?” I said.

“I s’ppose it is,” she replied. She devoured the rest of her hot dog like a seagull gulping a fish. She then rolled back onto her stomach and rested her chin on her forearms. “So many times have ya jacked off to my image, Mister Beelzebub?”

I poured sand onto her ankles and pretended not to hear her. The actual count was forty-six, but she did not need that much information. “I jack by the book,” I said finally, once again parodying Shakespeare.

“The fuck you saying?” she said.

“Your image is not yet complete, my queen—it barely rivals a cock book. I won’t do you so great an honor ’til I see you in the flesh.”

“’Til I contribute to the delinquency of a minor, you mean. Kiddo, I’m not *that* depraved.”

“Corrupt me,” I begged her. “All it would take is the innocence of Eve.”

She laughed and rubbed my thigh with her foot. “That’s all your gonna get. Now be a good little buccaneer and fetch me a Royal Crown Cola.”

\*

Parting is sugary sorrow, if I can borrow from Shakespeare once more. But humor can fan dying embers and make sunsets brilliant again. Yes, my time with Cleo was dwindling, but why sour it with gloom? It was in this spirit of lively rebellion that I came up with our little game.

I planted my copy of *Paradise Lost* whenever she wasn’t looking. I slipped it into her beach bag, I rolled it up in her towel, I even tucked it under her feet whenever she was napping. On discovering that mothy paperback, she flung it away like a frisbee. “Tommy, don’t force me to read that,” she’d cry, and we both dissolved into laughter. She got pretty good a flinging the book: her record was thirty feet.

“Why won’t you read it?” I asked her one day. We were sitting on our beach towels, having finished a jaunt on our boogie boards, and we were dipping into a box of animal crackers she had bought at a Seven Eleven.

“Kiddo,” she said as she bit the head off a hippo, “I don’t want smoke in my eyes.”

Her willful insularity was becoming a little bit tiresome. So when I answered her, I did not try to disguise my irritation. “I revere you like Pygmalion. I live to give you a soul.”

“Waddaya talkin’ about, kiddo.”

“This guy carved a woman out of ivory then fell deeply in love with her. One day, Aphrodite took pity on him and brought the statue to life.”

“You’re crazier than Lucy Ricardo,” she said. “And you live in Tommy Land.”

I should have been more amused; I should have kept eating my cookies. What else could I expect from someone who read nothing but *The Hollywood Reporter*? I felt like a prince whom fortune had doomed to wait upon a goat herder.

“Maybe it’s time you sampled a little forbidden fruit.”

“Like Eve in that goddamn book of yours? You see where she ended up.”

“The Land of Nod,” I said, and I gave her a sporting grin.

Was it the sugar in the animal crackers that animated her scowl? Or were her eyes too muddied by *I Love Lucy* reruns to handle a bite of culture? Whichever the case, our relationship changed when she threw a giraffe at my head. “Whenever you look at me, Mister Pig Malion, all you see is a pair of tits.”

“What else do you have to offer?” I snapped.

“How about a view of my ass?”

When she packed up her beach bag and strode towards the boardwalk, I should have been heartbroken. But as I looked at her elegant backside, I felt the Phoenix rise. No, it wasn’t because of the oil on her thighs or the wiggle in her butt. It was because she had lost her temper. We had actually had our first fight.

\*

Reconciliation is easy when you’re grateful to be a flunky, when beach umbrellas and boogie boards are more than your heart throb will tote. And since she was staying at a flat next to my family’s beach house, a reunion was all but assured. The following morning, she knocked on my door and I practically fell at her feet.

“Tommy,” she said matter-of-factly. “I’m givin’ you one last chance.”

It was one last chance to carry the beach bag that hung from her slender hand. It was one final chance to haul the umbrella that sheltered her face from the sun. But gone was my independence, forgotten my reckless pride. Laden like a pack mule, I followed her back to the beach.

It was after I put up the beach umbrella, fetched her a taco, and rubbed Coppertone onto her back, that she broke the news to me. She told me her boyfriend was on leave from the Army and that he would show up tomorrow morning. She said they were going to get married in the fall, and he had bought her a diamond engagement ring. After an enormous wedding, which two hundred people would attend, they would honeymoon on a Caribbean cruise and dance to a ballroom band. She was especially looking forward to the smorgasbords because she loved ice sculptures and cold salmon.

I was not upset that our summer was ending; I had long been prepared for that. But the thought of Cleo as an Army wife was something I could not endure. A vampire, yes, a dominatrix for sure, but not a Military spouse.

“I’ll give your marriage a week,” I said. “The honeymoon will probably last longer.”

Removing her sunglasses, she looked at me stonily. “Did I ask for advice from the king of the dreamers?”

“I think you’ve done me one better.”

“Pig Malion,” she said, sitting up on her towel, “that’s a helluva thing to say.”

“You’re my island witch, my Circe. You turned me into a pig. Yet you’re selling yourself to servitude for the sake of a cut-rate cruise.”

“Maybe,” she shrugged. “But don’t lecture me, kid. I bought you much cheaper than that.”

I cleared my throat dramatically then opened up my heart. Balling my fists and fighting back tears, I dared to raise my voice. “Cleo,” I said, “you make me feel like a goddamn teaser stallion.”

“The hell is that?” she muttered.

“A runt horse that hangs around breeding farms and never gets any ass. The breeders use him to excite the mare before they bring in the stud.”

She sighed and rolled onto her stomach. “Seabiscuit,” she muttered, “you’d better go take a swim.”

Later, after I walked her home, she gave me a peck on the mouth. Her lips were chapped, not velvety; her breath smelled of garlic, not spice. Was this to be the blossoming of my cherished ivory girl?

”Kiddo, it’s been real,” she joked as she disappeared into the house.

\*

When Cleo transformed me into a pig, I was not without concessions. Pigs have remarkable hearing; pigs have noses like radar; pigs have a talent to scour and sniff out forbidden fruits.

Did I mention the beach house she stayed in was adjacent to our own? Did I mention that house had an outdoor shower that I could see from my second-story bedroom? It took only the sound of water running to draw me to the bedroom window, to pull my gaze to the courtyard below and spot Cleo showering nude.

I stood like Romeo scorning the east because Juliet was the sun. I stood like Odysseus lashed to the mainmast and drinking the sea maidens' song. Since the slings of fickle fortune had brought me to this moment, I was ready to pardon Olympus the capriciousness of its ways.

As I watched the spray pucker her nipples, the rivulets caress her brown skin, the shampoo stream from her cascading hair, I managed a stiff salute. But I wished I could erect something more than my Willie—it hardly did her justice. Why not the string of my bathing suit or the towel that lay limp on my bed? Why not the hose in the courtyard below or the very hairs on my head?

She showered for only a minute before vanishing into the house, and I thanked Aphrodite for giving me no more that I could handle. Who was I to ponder Nirvana, to fathom its hillocks and swamps? Who was I to stare into a vision as fiery as the dawn? If I could turn back time to that glorious minute, I would hesitate to do so. I fear such an indiscretion would turn me into stone.

\*

The memory of Cleo haunts me like Banquo's unsinkable ghost. Thirty years later, I commissioned a painting and hung it in my den. So stark was my recollection of her, so potent my memory, that I described her to the artist as though she were standing before my eyes. She hangs behind my writing desk, a glowing ocean sprite, the spray from the shower forever anointing her shoulders and upturned breasts. "What's that?" my wife asked when I hung the painting.

"A passing," I said. "The pyre of my childhood. The day I became a man."

"The day you became a perve," she sniffed, and she walked out of the room. She had spoken like an ingrate, she had desecrated a shrine. But I swallowed my indignation and forgave her callous reply.

And where was I in that painting? I was peeping from a window like the Kilroy caricature. That ubiquitous voyeur, that phantomish stray, that mooch at the banquet of life. No, her beauty could not be done justice by the specter at the feast—she deserved a gift as epic as the one she had given me.

I placed a worthier tribute on the corner of my desk. A plaque with a cherry red finish that read: The Phoenix climbs.

# D. Nolan Jefferson

## MARC

People might have looked at the car anyway because it was a looker. A '70 Chevelle Super Sport, the color of Dijon mustard, low, squat and bold in its stance. Black stripes on the hood and deck lid. Goodyear curved in white typeface on wide black tires, the front of the car with the split bar grill cutting through the air, triumphant as Winged Victory. Car nuts got it. They knew. She was a beaut. To others it was just some old car from the olden days which had since given way to smooth, aerodynamic bogs missing the flair of angles or corners or fins. Cars nowadays try to cheat the wind. Elude it. Slip through it like an arrow shot from a bow. The Chevy did not care about your wind. It pumped leaded gasoline through a carburetor into three hundred and ninety-six cubic inches of American-made, iron block V8 and spat it angrily out the back by way of dual chrome tailpipes. It had no desire to slip through the air because it didn't need to; it flat out stomped into, through, and out of it. So those in the know appreciated the car and nodded when they saw its girth taking up space in parking lots and mall garages, and in driveways and at red lights. Those who did not, didn't.

But people looked today.

This grown man, just shy of six feet tall with inky black skin stepped out of the car, popped the trunk, and took out a kick-push scooter. He draped a messenger bag across his body and nonchalantly rode into the pharmacy. Blowing pink bubbles, he sailed down the store's linoleum aisles, gliding past shelves stacked with cans of Pringles and neat rows of colorful Starburst candies, heads swiveling from other patrons as they shopped for antacids, Sharpies, hair dye, dryer sheets, and pregnancy tests. He stopped in the makeup aisle and eyeballed lip gloss while murmuring folks gathered and craned their necks from a safe distance. People like that, whatever he? it? was, didn't dare set foot in town. Not here, not in Person. Women's hands shot up to cover their gasping mouths and grown men's baseball caps were pushed up and back in astonishment on the crowns of their balding heads, perched just so, defying gravity.

The man who drove up in the yellow Chevy realized the attention he garnered. It was nothing new. Just as the makeup on the racks in the aisle was nothing new. Boring. Basic. Ordinary. This man was decidedly not. The lip gloss would work because he would make it work, though it wasn't his preferred first choice. He was resourceful and assured in his ability to make the best from what was available to him. No signs of the goods he picked up in Paris, or even Chicago. But here he was back in Person, at the very dime store where he once innocuously slipped a tube of Max Factor in a shade called Tuscan Bronze, up his shirt sleeve before floating out the door as a nine-year old on his way to school. The store had changed—hell, he had changed, but Person?

Not so much. And certainly not the people who gawked and clucked their tongues at the man pondering beauty products. Not with that face.

A mousy white girl named Becca who traded live Dave Matthews Band bootlegs with her circle of friends she met online when she wasn't working at the store, or taking classes at night towards her degree in child development hovered over the cash register. She was brought up to exemplify the golden rule and she did exactly that when the man in the full beard walked up to the register, blowing bubbles, and placed a single box of lip gloss on the counter.

"I like..." her voice was weak and trailed off a bit before clearing her throat in an effort to be heard, "...your dress. It's very pretty."

The man smoothed his hands down the bodice and over the ruffles of the off-white fabric. She'd remember later how surprised she was when he said: Thank you. That she hadn't expected his voice to be so deep. "It really like, resonated," she tapped out on her phone in a text message to one of her DMB pals. "Like a movie trailer narrator," she added.

"Vera Wang," he said. "Last season. I got it for a song."

He smiled and placed a pack of gum on the counter.

"And this, too."

Becca tried not to stare but, like her fellow residents, couldn't help but be drawn into the man's face, eyelashes like butterflies; his neat, close-cropped beard framed his mouth with lips painted a shade of purple so vibrant, it was as if they had their own power source; fine lines of black edged his eyes, each lid iridescent in gold, violet, crimson, green, and teal, depending on where you looked when he blinked; an explosion of color, as if his goal was to use every color from the box, in some dissonant fashion but somehow it all worked. Like a model, Becca thought, a high fashion model from Europe. Or outer space, her sometimey boyfriend Wayne would add that evening over hot dogs grilled outside their apartment.

The man paid in cash, dropped both the gum and the gloss in the bag that draped across his body, and left Becca with a ciao as he motored back across the parking lot. And in sneakers, no less. People watched him, the midnight-toned man with the full beard and face made up like it was applied by airbrush, wearing a wedding dress kick push on a scooter that he returned to the trunk of a muscle car. Then he slid behind the wheel, turned the key, revved the engine, and chirped the tires as he drove up and out of the parking lot of the pharmacy in a town called Person.

# Dean Jollay

## TUESDAY NIGHT CLUB

*For Brynn, who's got her own stories to tell.*

The man formerly known as Daniel Anthony McAlister, Esq., Attorney-at-Law, sits in a circle with twenty-five other souls, members in good standing (more or less) of the Judson Memorial Hospital Codependency Group. He wears a charcoal-gray Armani he purchased for a big trial a few years back. Though he can no longer afford to have the suit dry-cleaned, he rescues it from his closet for special occasions, to remind civilians of his identity. Others, patients and their codependents, are dressed more comfortably—in jeans and OSU sweatshirts, camouflage pants and *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* T-shirts, acrylic slacks and fake down vests, pilled sweaters and Wayfarers, slick running suits and shoes with a swoosh. In a room barely large enough for this circle of friendship, fluorescent lights wink as the seconds stretch to minutes. Patients and their guests, spouses and parents mostly, stretch, stare at the ceiling, hide their faces behind Styrofoam cups filled with burnt coffee, smack chewing gum, mouth unlit cigarettes, slouch forward with elbows on their knees, and pick their teeth.

Daniel taps his watch crystal. It's seven thirty-three on the first Tuesday evening in November. He might be a drunk, an alcoholic, an addict, but his time is valuable. Where the hell is Group Leader Martha, a recently minted MSW, the freshest face in the rehab biz? Daniel wants this meeting *finito*. No matter how late she arrives, Martha demands they work a full hour. Her tardiness merely prolongs the agony. One more night to endure before he can reclaim his life.

And where is Judith? A fellow patient due to graduate next week, she alone interests him. Only she has done as many opioids and fallen as far. Once a head flight attendant and supervisor for a big airline, she was demoted for drugging, then fired for slapping an unruly male passenger. The union went to bat for her before—got her reinstated after failed drug tests, missed flights, and shouting matches with coworkers. But the union's patience ran out. Several times outside of group he's tried to talk with her, but she's shy and elusive. Her mother, a sweet lady, is constantly at her daughter's side.

If Judith would lighten up, they'd make a great pair. When she was telling the group about the passenger she assaulted, Dan interrupted. "Man, you've got a big career ahead of you in mixed martial arts."

She shook her head. "Really? You think I'm proud of that?"

Later, at break, he sought her out to explain that he was only making a joke, trying to keep things loose. He asked if she liked bagpipe music, told her he'd started a group, and suggested she come

to one of their practices. She walked away. Wouldn't even make eye contact. Stuck-up bitch. What would it have cost her to accept his apology and show a little interest in his hobby? Still, he's always been attracted to women who ignore him. When Kate divorces his ass, he and Judith will become better friends.

Beside him, Kate stirs. Her neck is taut, her mouth is drawn into a permanent look of displeasure. Knee-length leather boots firmly planted on the soiled beige carpet are braced for a roller coaster's plunge. Her hands vise-grip the edges of the chair. If she'd acknowledge him, he'd tell her to chill. Group is an hour. Even she can put up with an hour of this bullshit. But his wife hasn't spoken since they left the house. Except, that is, to tell him to fuck off: "I have to drive because you lost your license, but I don't have to talk." He doesn't want to be here any more than she does. He could be playing his bagpipes in the basement rec room—filling the sacks, squeezing, his fingers dancing, working the chanter, losing himself in the poignant skirl. He conjures his bagpiper self in full regalia, the McAlister tartan on display.

If only Betsy were here, he thinks, Kate would have to suck it up and behave. Their fifteen-year-old daughter wanted to come. "I can help him," she told her mother. "He listens to me." Kate said she was naive. "A room full of drunks and addicts with their pathetic stories is no place for a girl your age. And besides—what's the point? Your father is hopeless. Far beyond your help or mine." They argued right in front of him, as if he were invisible. When he did begin to speak, did begin to say that having Betsy at group wasn't such a bad idea, Kate shook her finger at him. "Shut up, Dan. You don't have a vote. Not in this you don't." Well, okay then. The soulful Otis Redding vocal "Try a Little Tenderness" popped into his head. He had half a notion to sing it: "*Oh she may be weary, them young girls they do get wearied...*" But he didn't. After all, Kate flat out disenfranchised him. So, as she turned away in a huff, he hummed a few bars instead.

Still no Martha. He's thirsty as hell. He closes his eyes and imagines the taste of an icy martini with no vermouth. He shakes two Percocet from the vial in his pocket and washes them down with vodka. He smacks his lips. *Yes*. He finishes the martini and sucks the olive into his mouth.

Beneath her camel-hair skirt, his wife's legs flap like butterfly wings. As they gather momentum, her fingers tighten on the chair till her knuckles are white. She's about to jump from the roller coaster, screaming hateful things at him as she tumbles to the ground. Kate thinks he can stop drinking and drugging if he wants to, as if there's some magic sobriety lever he can pull. You'd think she might've learned *something* all these years in all these meetings. His wife can't figure out why she's here, what she's done wrong. "My mistake was to marry you. You've screwed up again, and now I'm being punished."

"You're not being punished," he told her. "Group is part of the drill, one of the hoops we have to jump through."

"*We?* Screw we, sweetheart. I'm not your trained seal."

He can see her side. Up to a point. Tonight he needs her to stay calm, to keep her mouth shut. Otherwise, she'll draw Martha's attention and they'll become the evening's entertainment. Easier said.

Hugging an accordion file, a yellow legal tablet, and a bottle of water, Martha bursts through the door and takes her seat. Out of breath, she apologizes. A white headband restrains tight ringlets of dirty-blond hair. She has a large sloping forehead, pale skin, and blushes easily when a patient jumps in her shit, which happens often because she is so young, dresses in preppy skirts and sweaters, and, in spite of her training, has absolutely no clue what they're going through. Dan supposes her large black frame glasses are meant to disguise her age, but she looks like a teenager nonetheless. Her soft nasal voice is difficult to understand.

She clears her throat, welcomes the newcomers to the group, and reminds them of the rules—first names only, be constructive, treat everyone with respect, don't interrupt, and don't ever, ever repeat what we discuss this evening. "Understood?" Heads nod. "Well, then, let's begin. Who would like to go first?"

Eyes look down, up, sideways—anywhere but at Martha. A distant siren's wail grows louder and louder. An ambulance pulls up to the emergency room entrance two floors below. Dan pictures the rear doors opening, medics pulling him from the van into the bright lights of the hospital canopy, wheeling his gurney through double glass doors, a doctor asking what and how much he's taken. He can barely recall several such trips, the last two months ago. Seventy-two hours in detox—sweating, shaking, his body begging for a hit. Was Kate in his room then? He thinks so. Did she say, "This is it, Dan. I'm leaving for good, taking the children, and moving in with my parents"? Perhaps. He knows she's seen a divorce lawyer. She left the bloodsucker's business card on the kitchen counter for him to discover. Her parents, never charter members of the Daniel McAlister Fan Club, are cheering her on. They'll gladly pay her attorney's fees, let her and the children move in. Whatever it takes to get rid of him.

"Dan," Martha says, "we haven't heard from you in a while. Is there anything you'd like to share with the group?"

*Crap.* He knew his turn was coming, that he couldn't hide forever. But he shakes his head anyway, reluctant to speak, though he's certain what to say and how to say it: *He owns his addictions now. He's hit bottom and wants to change. This time will be different—he'll stay sober.* These lyrics play in his head like a country-and-western ballad—the music Martha likes, the old vinyl record Kate despises because he's spun it again and again. He'll do whatever he has to do to get his old life back—admit he's an addict, an alcoholic; go to group every week; see his therapist, Little Miss Sunshine; attend AA meetings, get a sponsor, and make amends with the people he's supposedly hurt. He'll play the recovery game. But it's one thing to write the song, another to climb up on stage and sing it. Tonight, performing doesn't feel quite right. He'll wait until Kate's in a better mood.

"I'll pass."

"This is an important part of your treatment." Martha furrows her brow and snaps the band on her file. "Your wife is here. You can't just sit and say nothing."

*I sure as hell can.* He wants to set her straight, but doesn't. *Careful now.* He needs Martha to put in a good word with the lawyer disciplinary committee and the judge. He's sick of washing

dishes at the men's shelter, his wife treating him like excrement. He's tired of peeing on command. Trying cases is his life's work. No one is better in a courtroom. Not every lawyer has saved a physically abused wife from lethal injection, representing her pro bono, much to his partners' dismay. Back when battered wife syndrome was just some cockamamy theory, he'd convinced a jury—after multiple broken ribs, arms, and teeth; after contusions and permanent scars; after a nose splattered all over her face; after her jaw had to be wired shut for two months; after her husband cut her with a knife—his client justifiably shot and killed the bastard. For months his case was all over the news. Judith must have read about it. Surely she's seen footage of him on TV or his photograph in the newspaper. The Junior League voted him Person of the Year for his efforts on behalf of abused women.

"I have a cold." He wills his voice to sound phlegmy. "Next time. I promise, Martha."

The addicts snigger.

*Screw you all.*

Judith and her mother enter. There are no empty seats, so they stand by the door. Judith leans sideways against the wall. As always, she wears comfy gray sweats and a black baseball cap pulled down over her eyes. Her tea-colored ponytail sticks out in back. In spite of her baggy clothing, something quite wonderful lurks.

"Okay," Martha says. "How about you, Kate? Since your husband won't participate?"

The room is silent. Attention shifts to Kate. Sweat trickles from Dan's armpits. Usually Kate's double-barreled-shotgun stare is sufficient to warn off intruders, but there's no telling how many times she'll pull the trigger once she gets started. He wants to loosen his tie and unbutton his shirt collar. He covers his mouth instead, closes his eyes, and sends her a message via tin cans connected with string: *Say no, baby.*

"Kate?"

"Actually, you're lucky Dan won't talk. Fortunate to be spared all his bullshit."

"In this room we speak truth," Martha says. "Nothing is spared."

*Fuck.* Dan wishes he were anywhere but here, but the lawyer disciplinary committee he once chaired continues to insist. The judge who sentenced him three times for driving under the influence insists. Kate and his children insist. Completing the program is a condition for getting back his law license. Along with community service, proof of long-term recovery, restitution of the money he stole from his clients to buy drugs, and a few other things he can't remember right now. The disciplinary committee took a dim view of his larceny and was hell-bent to make an example of him.

Martha presses Kate again.

"Eighteen years we've been married," Kate hisses, "and he's been an addict the whole time."

The depths of his wife's hatefulness never surprises him, but Dan smiles to himself, thinking, *What if I actually told her the truth? I like drugs. I don't want to quit. Have a problem with that?* How much fun would that be, to flummox his wife and her sidekick, sweet little Martha?

"He hid his habit from me when we were dating. Back then he took quaaludes and amphetamines, smoked dope. Booze of course. Vicodin. Prozac. And as it turned out, those were the good old days, before cocaine and heroin. After we got married, he didn't even bother to cover it up."

He has to grab the shotgun before it's too late. Before she reloads. He starts to interrupt, but Martha puts a finger to her lips. "You know the rules. You had your chance. Let her speak."

"He makes drunken calls to our friends late at night. We were supposed to go to our neighbors' for dinner to watch the Oscars. He never showed, never called. I made excuses. When I went home, I found him passed out on the bed. The front of his car was caved in. Not a day goes by that I don't think about leaving him. We have a son, Will, in junior high school, and a daughter, Betsy, a sophomore. For years they've begged me to do something about their father. Do you know how helpless that makes you feel? I've told them it's up to him. He has to make the decision to get sober. We can't force him to do anything. They've never believed me. Still don't.

"Now he's out of work and we have no money. I've got a part-time teaching job. On my way to work every day, I drive by empty houses with "for sale" signs and imagine how much better our lives would be without him. This is the fourth program he's been in. He says he'll make changes, but doesn't mean it. He agrees to rehab to humor the kids and me, the court, and then goes back to his old ways. Three months ago, in the middle of the night, I found him comatose underneath a bush in the front yard. I tried to get him up, but he wouldn't budge. Finally, I said, 'If you want to die out here, be my guest.' Frankly, it would have been a relief. In the morning he acted as though nothing had happened, as if sleeping in the shrubbery was the most normal thing in the world."

Martha stops her note-taking. "Dan? Anything you'd like to say?"

"No. I've heard this stuff already. Do I look like a man who sleeps in his yard or who'd miss a party? Me, miss a party? Really? Use your common sense, ladies and gentlemen of the jury." He raises his eyebrows and looks around the circle, hoping the group appreciates the humor. No one chuckles or even smiles. "I love my children and they love me."

"We're not judging you," Martha says.

"Right!" Immediately Dan regrets this. In the old days he'd have let her remark slide. He looks at Judith, hoping she'll cut him some slack. She's saying something over her shoulder to her mother—possibly shaking her head—he can't quite tell. If only she'd spend a little time with him, he'd convince her that he's not the man Kate thinks he is.

Across the circle, close to Judith and her mother, Peter begins to hum—a loud monotone that resembles a monk's or a Krishna's incantation. In black leggings, an ultrashort black gauzy skirt,

a sequined turquoise jacket, and red Chuck Taylors, he tilts his chair and rocks back and forth in synchronicity with his atonal droning. Painted crimson lips sparkle. Gold hoops dangle from his ears. A turban matches the color of his jacket.

“Shut up, Peter,” Dan barks.

“Lay off Peter,” someone says.

“Yeah, leave him alone.”

“All right, settle down,” Martha interrupts. “All of you... Dan, this is about rewiring your brain. Cognitive behavior modification. Genetics aside, drug and alcohol habits are learned. We’re helping you unlearn them, changing your neural feedback loop. It’s all about biology.”

Kate laughs. Throws back her head and laughs some more.

Martha’s neck and face flush. She moves her lips for a moment, then stares at Kate. “Our program is science-based, state-of-the-art.”

“Congratulations,” Kate says. “Good for you.”

“We need your buy-in.”

Kate opens her purse, grabs a tissue, and blows her nose. She points at Dan. “Talk to him.”

Dan cops another look at Judith. There’s a sadness about her, as if she’s endured the unspeakable. He guesses it has to do with her father, who’s never shown up here, some problem in their relationship, perhaps a misunderstanding between them on account of her substance abuse. Noticeably large ears, her only defect, are hidden beneath the baseball cap. Her dimpled chin, nose, and cheekbones are perfectly formed. And the drugs haven’t messed with her complexion—pure white and soft. She has the face of a twentysomething and doesn’t wear makeup. Not even lipstick. Amazing. He wonders if he can catch her alone sometime this week, at the daytime sessions Kate doesn’t attend, when Judith is separated from her mother. At a break, maybe, or on the way to the restroom. Just a few seconds to say hello and ask her to lunch: *We ought to compare notes.*

Peter’s chair falls backward, his head recoils, and the turban unwinds from his shaved head. His humming ceases. He rolls onto his side, draws himself into the fetal position, and doesn’t move. The third or fourth time this has happened. Martha pretends not to notice.

“Dan,” Martha says, “why did you start using drugs?”

He knows what she’s getting at. She thinks he’s broken like the others. Believes he loathes himself. Thinks he finds solace in the substances he takes. But she’s wrong. He doesn’t hate himself. He started using because his friends used. He likes getting high. “I was thirteen. Smoking pot was cool. All my crowd smoked.”

Judith raises her hand.

“Yes?” Martha says.

“Kate is right. Dan intends to kill himself. He doesn’t want our help. He’s wasting our time. I’m getting a little bored back here. Can we move on?”

“Nicely put, Judith,” a father says.

“Awesome, girl.”

“Yesss!”

Several in the group clap their hands. Kate takes a deep breath and snaps her purse closed.

On the floor, Peter pushes himself into a seated position and starts to hum.

Dan jumps up and opens his mouth. He wants to shout, *No! Please hear me out. Judith, please. You and I aren’t like them. We have nothing in common with these people.* The appeal dies in his throat.

“Dan, is there something else on your mind?” Martha asks. “If not, please sit down.”

He feels a sharp pain in his gut and can’t move. He watches as Judith turns to her mother, cups a hand to her mouth, and whispers. They link arms and exchange a look. With the back of her hand, Judith’s mother brushes her daughter’s cheek.

“Judith.” Dan has remained standing. He hunches his shoulders and turns up his palms.

“Judith...”

“What?” she snaps.

Rising, Kate says, “Excuse me. I’m done here.” She navigates across and through the circle to the door and disappears. Judith and her mother follow.

Dan drops onto the chair and lowers his head. He imagines Kate and Judith outside in the hallway, Judith telling his wife she’s known a hundred men like Dan—pilots, passengers, old boyfriends, her estranged father—fraudsters one and all.

“Let’s take five minutes,” Martha says.

Dan and the group filter out into the hallway. Kate has vanished. Where might she have gone? He takes the elevator to the lobby. Outside, in the parking lot, he looks in vain for her navy Volvo SUV. He phones her on his cell, but the call goes to voice mail. He leaves a message: “Can you please pick me up at the entrance? I’m sorry.” How pathetic he sounds. There was a time when... He waits for her inside the glass hospital doors for five, ten, fifteen minutes. She doesn’t show or even return his call. He texts her: *Waiting for a ride. Will you come?*

He looks at his watch. Group will be over in another ten minutes. He must be gone before they file out past him, heading for their cars while he waits in the hope that Kate will relent. He can only imagine their looks of disapproval, as if they’re better, stronger, more amenable, while he is beyond salvation.

He waits five more minutes, then starts to walk. Turning his topcoat collar to the chilly air, he needs a drink, just one, then he’ll call a cab from the bar. He limps down Prospect Street toward

the Alley Cat Tavern. Only fifty-three and his hips and knees are arthritic. Marching with his bagpipers, he tries to disguise the limp, but his effort only makes the pain worse. There will come a time when he can't march, when this thing he loves so much, his remaining purpose, will be taken from him. Then what?

As he quickens his pace, an ancient bagpipe tune plays in his head. He learned it as a boy: "Lament for Mary MacLeod." Mary, the tale goes, was banished from the Isle of Skye for writing a song that displeased Chief Roderick MacLeod. When Roderick died, she apologized to the new chief and begged that he allow her to return. He agreed on the condition that she write no more songs. She complied, but on her deathbed, Mary regretted her apology and asked to be buried facedown, in shame for her submission. He pinches his nostrils, imagining Mary's nose slamming against the bottom of a hard, rough-hewn coffin. Blood leaks from the orifice. Cartilage splays. Her dead eyes bulge.

*Facedown? Not me. Never. He fancies writing his own postmortem: Weary of reading obituaries about this or that person's courageous battle against drug addiction, Daniel McAlister wanted everyone to know that he enjoyed a wee nip now and again and made no apologies. Founder and past president of the Legal Eagles Motorcycle Club, founder and director of the Loch Lomond Pipes and Drums, he practiced law masterfully until the do-gooders took his license. He is survived by his beloved parents Stuart and Irene, devoted (ex-)wife Kate, son Will, and daughter Betsy. He wanted especially to bid farewell to the lovely Judith, wherever she might be: If only, my dear. His in-laws can kiss his ass.*

\* \* \*

The Alley Cat is dark and nearly empty. A covered pool table sits in a corner. Neon Budweiser and Miller signs give off the only light. A couple sits at a table in the shadows. Wearing a silver and blue Detroit Lions jersey, the bartender is bent over, his elbows on the bar rail, checking his cell phone. When Dan takes a seat and orders a dry martini, the man makes a sour face, as if mixing such a drink were a serious violation of his manhood. To underscore the point, he serves Dan's drink in a beer glass. "Got no martini glasses," he says. Dan doesn't care. The lemony taste of cheap grocery store vodka is what he wants. A second drink might be in order, so he runs a tab, intending to pay with an off-brand credit card, the one he hid from Kate when she cut his American Express, MasterCard, and Visa into little shards of plastic.

By his fourth (fifth?) martini, Dan's electric circuits buzz intermittently. He remembers he hasn't eaten today. Kate was so upset about group, she refused to make dinner before they left. He asks the bartender for a bag of chips, some nuts perhaps, or even a dill pickle, but settles for a Slim Jim instead and another glass of vodka. He hadn't intended to get drunk. His falling off the wagon tonight is Kate's fault. If she'd picked him up at the hospital, he wouldn't be here, sitting on this barstool, trying to have a conversation with a bartender who's ignoring him.

Last call. He looks at the clock over the bar. It's a quarter to one. He phones for a cab, but gets a busy signal. No problem. By now the snowy sidewalks have mostly been shoveled off. He should walk a while to clear his head, then he'll ring dispatch for a taxi again. Besides, it isn't that far to his home, three or four miles tops, and he's in no hurry to see Kate. He slides off his

stool, loses his balance, and grabs onto a table to steady himself. His body parts are functioning better than he expected, except that outside in front of the bar, he can't get his bearings. To the left or right Prospect crosses Fulton, he isn't sure which. Damn, he knows this neighborhood well. If he can get to Fulton, it's a 5-wood and a wedge shot to his house.

\* \* \*

The cold awakens him. He's lying on a bench. Leafless trees tower above. A familiar empty fountain sits a few feet away. He knows this place—Prospect Park. He used to bring his kids to play here on the swings and the monkey bars and the pirate ship. Home is only three blocks away. He sits up. His nose, ears, fingers, and toes are numb. How long has he been here? He must have stopped to rest and fallen asleep. The grind of rehab has made him especially tired lately. Thank God he has time to get home before sunrise, before the children are up to get ready for school.

As he approaches the front door, he remembers he has no key. He checks the flowerpot on the stoop where they keep a spare. No go. Kate probably took it to spite him. He checks the back door just in case, but it's locked. Returning to the front, he has no choice. He can freeze to death out here or press the doorbell.

The porch light comes on. The door opens and daughter Betsy is there in her quilted turquoise robe and bunny slippers. "Where have you been? I've been sleeping on the couch in the living room, waiting all night for you."

When, he wonders, did his little girl acquire this authority? He mustn't have been paying attention.

Betsy's porcelain face is fissured with worry. He's touched. If only Kate were as concerned. He wants to crush his daughter in his arms, but she'll smell the alcohol. Always the precocious child in this way: No matter what he drinks or what he takes, he can't fool her.

He steps inside. The enveloping warmth nearly makes his knees buckle. "Your mother left me at the hospital without a way home."

"She told us you had an argument. You jumped out of the car and walked away. I was going to call the police to report you missing, but she told me not to bother. You don't care, she said, so why should we?"

A new low, he thinks, even for Kate.

Betsy tells him to follow her to the kitchen. She'll fix him hot chocolate like he used to make for her. She fills the teapot and sets it on the stove. He sits and watches her—best work he's ever done in his life. Crossing her arms, she turns and faces him.

"So, Dad, this was your last chance."

"Yeah, says who? Your mother?"

"Pretty much everyone."

“Never trust consensus, Betsy.”

The teapot whistles. As she pours the hot water over the powdered hot chocolate mix, his daughter ticks off the things he’s going to miss—her swimming competitions; junior prom; high school, college, and law school graduations; her wedding; winning her first big case; the birth of her first child. “Is this what you want?” Tears glisten on her cheeks.

“Come here.” He beckons her to sit on his lap.

She obliges, leans her head on his shoulder, and lays her hand on top of his.

There’s a bottle of Bailey’s Irish Cream in the back of the cupboard above the fridge. *Would you mind, he wants to ask, if I add a shot to the hot chocolate?* Nothing would taste better after so many hours in winter’s grasp.

She slaps his face. “Jesus, Dad. Forget it!”

How does this fifteen-year-old know what he’s thinking? Why has she hung in there with him? Until now, that is? The idea that he might lose her is unbearable. But were he to embrace his last chance, he might not. Were he to revise his story, convert the past tense to present, change *Dad was getting sober* to *Dad is getting sober*, she might give him a pass on his backstory. So easy too. Move his computer screen icon to Find and Replace. Click. Type the words. Click again. Done. Directions so simple, so straightforward, any old drunk can do it.

# Angie Walls

## THIS SOLITARY LIFE

My Uncle Saul used to predict disasters, like some sixth sense. On my eighth birthday, he mentioned a feeling deep from his gut, days before a tornado had even touched down in the Great Plains, even ahead of the usual signs of the air getting suspiciously stagnant or the cows heading east. It was a few years back that he felt that same disturbance in anticipation of Abigail—a woman as unforgiving and ruthless as any storm. Only she was finally here on my eighteenth birthday, a year after we buried Uncle Saul, and I wasn't prepared for the damage she would bring down on us.

When she came late on a Sunday night, she was not the kind of woman who would call in advance to make plans or tape a polite note to our door. Abigail stood on the front doorstep with her arms crossed in defiance and both feet planted firm to the porch, steeled with the unrelenting doggedness of a woman who was collecting on a long-overdue debt—little did I know it would be me. With the weight of her good intentions, she pushed on the door, slammed on it with her fists, kicked her boots until she became winded. She had been such a blur in my memories, so I had depended on old photo albums and old stories from my drunken uncles to fill in the gaps. Abigail had a bit of a reputation in this town that never died down, being the ruthless type with most men even before marrying Daddy at the age of nineteen. Through the tiny peephole, I saw the same turquoise eyes and long brown hair as mine. She was wearing the changeless brown leather boots with faded creases and red-and-black plaid coat, as if it was so important to preserve the exact image from the day she left me, so that I could be certain it was her. There's a danger in wondering the million things that one wonders after not having a mother in her formative years, I know now, but they started to unwind in bits. I thought of her new family back in Colorado and the stories she must have told them about us, her old family. She was the one who loved the name Madeline when she gave it to me. As a little girl, I had some silly idea that my keeping the name and her coming home were closely connected. After Abigail was gone, my next-door neighbor Molly had been left by her mother too, and she refused to talk for an entire year; we took a blood oath that we'd never call them our mothers or let them claim us as daughters again. We decided then, as newfound sisters, that something as sacred as family should have to be earned.

For the record, I was more curious than I was angry for Abigail's absence and far more entertained than flattered by her return at first. Behind me, I heard Daddy laughing so hard he was crying about Uncle Saul and what a kick he'd get out of knowing he was right for so many years. My Aunt Holly whispered under her breath something like, *God have mercy on us all.*

"I am not a fool!" she shouted through the door. "I'm here to save my daughter!"

My ear pressed to the door, I was allowing my eagerness to lead. As it turned out, our relationship did begin again then, whether or not she realized I had caught her midnight performance. Uncle Saul was right: revenge had become art. Imagine the venom of such a woman who had waited six years to have the last word.

Although I was too young to remember the house where I was born or the year we lived in our station wagon, I remember the year Daddy saved us. There was no possible way Abigail could spin a whole new history, that's to say, my entire life story, that began when we first moved in this house. It was more than another new place to sleep. This was the beginning of a better life, Daddy would remind me every day before sunrise while he proudly pressed his uniform. He'd just started working as a guard for the Missouri State Prison, the first real paycheck he'd had after returning from the Gulf. Our lives became ruled by odd rotations, which gradually began with first shift at 6 a.m. and became so irregular with overtime, since he did not have the seniority to demand something as simple as a routine. It meant blacking out the windows, tiptoeing around the house in the middle of the afternoon. On some special days, I'd get home from school and get to eat breakfast with Daddy, who'd come off the graveyard shift the night before. Before long, he ended up working so much at night that he was missing out on everything, leaving before dinnertime and coming back home long after we'd gone to bed. Cold or warm, I usually liked to sleep with the windows open in my bedroom, intent on listening for sounds or signs coming from the prison. At lights-out, I would say good night over the phone, but what I really wanted was to play a game of twenty questions. In my dreams, I was living inside the jail cells, tasting the dirty running water I heard dripping in the background, listening to the whispers of madmen. Every Thursday at 4:00, I'd run outside to hear the weekly alarm test resound from within the gray perimeter walls of the prison.

After I turned twelve years old, I found excuses to visit Daddy at the prison. While he was on watchtower duty, I'd ride my bike over at 7:00, because it was the easiest rotation for sneaking in and dropping off dinner by the gate. As I made my way up the path, I imagined the cars that came before me and the unusual moments that could happen in a day. The dark watchtower loomed large by the main gate. The top floor was shaped like a hexagon with windows all around, where I spotted Daddy looking outward. I had an imagination and took to asking a million questions whenever I had the chance. *What if there was a prison breakout? What does it mean if I hear the sirens on a Friday?* I stopped at the call box by the metal gate. All of the strangeness in this new universe we had found ourselves in was eating away at Abigail, who did her best to avoid the prison walls at all costs, while I was enthralled by its mysteries.

"Special package. Top secret," I would usually declare in a super-serious voice over the box. I could see him up at the top, waiting for me.

"You're cleared to proceed," he'd say without a laugh for my benefit, because some days I liked to be taken seriously. Then came my favorite part of the journey. I'd put the brown bag with dinner—beef stew and a thermos of coffee—in the canvas mailbag and use the rope and pulley to send it up to the top of the tower.

Then there was one day when the gate didn't open for anyone for eight days. The sirens went off in the middle of the night on a Wednesday. Molly slept in my bed; I brushed her hair to calm her. Her father Jimmy was a prison guard like mine, and with him gone, she was a wreck. We snuck out the window, running in our bare feet so we could try to see over the impenetrable gates and through the brick walls. No phone calls in or out. It was officially a lockdown event at the prison, but authorities would only say there was an "incident" involving a group of inmates attempting to escape. There was speculation on the news about the inmates having access to weapons and taking guards hostage; there were also rumors that they were locking down guards in their assigned cell blocks for safety, but they lost communications after the first day. There was a week of madness. After he was free, Daddy never spoke about what happened while he was inside Cell Block D, but the deep cuts down his cheek were a constant reminder of the week I thought my father was dead. I cried the whole first week he came home. Daddy took to midnight drives because of the insomnia. Abigail packed her bags.

\* \* \*

Before Abigail left us, I didn't have anyone else—no brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or grandparents to speak of really. So our family grew into a strange mash-up. Dinnertime suddenly became a spectacular tradition at home after Abigail, even over hard-boiled eggs and peanut-butter sandwiches. With the first few days, I thought it was about the obvious absence of having a mother and the space she once consumed. Between Daddy and me there had been nights I was eating black beans and corn bread alone. On Cell Block D it'd be after lights-out and silent as death, as Daddy would put it, and he'd be eating the same. We'd talk on the phone, each of us in our own solitude, trying to talk about everything but her.

Saul and Jimmy weren't really my uncles. Though, after they were locked down with Daddy in Cell Block D, things changed. At the best times our dinner table was full with the five of us sitting together at one time, happy to be buttering cold bread and reheating black bean soup. After Daddy's rotation would end, they began coming around the house; they joked they had no place else to go. I wasn't too young then to remember how Abigail used to hate entertaining last-minute guests. I found comfort watching my uncles shed their tactical belts and gun holsters and sit at the dinner table. When I began calling them Uncle Saul and Uncle Jimmy, it felt right to do so because of the birthdays, summers, and Christmases and other times when Abigail had chosen to flee—and they had chosen to stay. When I couldn't sleep, Uncle Saul played the guitar like John Denver all night, and Uncle Jimmy told stories.

When I first met Aunt Holly, she'd bounced around as a bartender and just started working at the prison; we only came to know each other when she rented out our spare room. I was at the unfortunate age of fourteen, when I needed to buy my first bra and had repeatedly gotten in trouble at school over "roughhousing." Once after work, she came home with bloody hands, took a pair of scissors, and cut off her hair by the ears. She knew about roughhousing. At lights-out, she and another guard were assigned to do their final checks, but he took an early smoke break and she was alone with the male inmates. She says they do all kinds of things: whistle, holler, masturbate in her direction, and then curse her for rejecting their acts of flattery. A thick envelope came from work, with ten pages of paperwork she was required to sign to keep her

job—for an “incident” and not a “rape.” We spoke of it only that night, a confidence that had made us family. She told me, there are times you might find yourself locked up with the animals. Hope to God, you never become one of them. Someday, I believed I’d be tough as nails like her.

After Abigail’s sudden arrival in town before my birthday, I decided to ask my Aunt Holly what she remembered about her, because she had grown up around here too. I was certain Daddy still went out of his way to avoid telling me the truth.

“Do you think she’s dangerous?” I asked.

Aunt Holly’s eyes went wild, so I wasn’t not sure if she was making fun. When it was just between us, I knew she could tell me the kinds of truths that old men take to their graves.

“She’s a nut, that one, for sure,” said Aunt Holly. She put her arm around me, reassuring me that Abigail would not be a force that could break through us.

Later that night, Molly and I walked over to the 7-Eleven for root beers, and I spotted her in that dreaded plaid coat around the corner, smoking a cigarette, waiting. I avoided her stare, darting through the door as fast as I could.

“Maddy, I just want to talk is all,” she said while following me through the store. Everywhere I went, there she was. I turned my back to her, flipping through an *Entertainment Weekly* left sitting on the counter. I grabbed a root beer and a bean burrito, with Molly trailing behind me.

“I don’t feel like talking,” I said. I shamelessly stuffed the burrito in my mouth, paid the cashier, and started walking out the door again. I felt her cold, manicured hand grab my shoulder back. I spun around.

“Listen to me, I am still your mother,” she said sharply. “I am your blood. And it is not safe with your father. Trust me. You can’t fix him, or his demons.”

“Okay, whatever. Just get back in your minivan and drive to the wastelands of Colorado. We don’t need you.” I reclaimed my shoulder.

“Your father has lost his mind, and it is only going to get worse for you. I’m only trying to look out for you.”

Molly asked what she meant, but I was too pissed to even entertain a response on the way home. Abigail couldn’t know all the deep scars of this place we called home, but here she was trying to tear it down. We laid in my bed with the cool breeze blowing in the window. I stared at the smooth blue walls that we repainted slightly darker shades together over time: gingham, flower box, Avalon teal, and old glory. The low popcorn ceilings that the taller I grew, the closer I was to touching the glow-in-the-dark stars at night. My favorite owls—little glass figurines, plush dolls, and ornaments—they decorated every windowsill in the house, the bathroom sink, and the fireplace, scuffed up and beaten up from over the years. I remembered the day I’d rescued my owls from the trash, the last days before Abigail had left Daddy and me. What Abigail saw as broken parts, they were telling about who our family had become since she left us – a group of

deserted and lonely creatures drawn together, like a magnet, by our imperfections. I couldn't let her break us apart.

\* \* \*

When we were seventeen, Molly and I tried to take up the daily routines of the house as best we could, while our fathers were working. After first shift, our house was mostly empty and quiet. Like clockwork, Uncle Saul would arrive at the end of his rotation for the fresh batch of eggs, bacon, and coffee. At four sharp, the duty was ours alone to wake our fathers, iron their white collars, pack dinner in a cooler. The bedrooms were kept like an icebox for them—underneath the plastic blinds, two layers of trash bags and aluminum foil taped over the window, tight around the box A/C unit that was running on high power during blackout hours. The best way to wake them was by turning on the floor lamp first; shaking their shoulders in the pitch dark was a dangerous gamble because of the nightmares.

On Tuesdays, even in January, Molly and I gorged ourselves on frozen chocolate and banana custards on Wichita Street, three blocks from the house. In the miserable, icy air, we'd bundle up under the space heaters while we licked the whipped cream and nuts off first. This one terrible day, Molly was the first jumping out of her skin to either a loud shotgun or a car backfiring. We ran toward the sound to see what was happening, crisscrossing alleyways. The bright red-and-blue lights of the police cars around the front of the Ferguson Market distracted my eyes at first, and there was a small crowd of people lined up peeking around the side of the building. Around the back entrance of the bar next door, I spotted a familiar brown Ford Ranger, with an old man in a green hunting cap in the driver's seat. It was Uncle Saul, dead. The windshield was splattered dark red, with pieces of flesh stuck to the glass from the gunshot blast; I recognized his twelve-gauge shotgun leaning forward against the dash. Uncle Saul's body was leaning against the driver's window, his eyes wide as though he was still haunted by his ghosts.

\* \* \*

To celebrate my eighteenth birthday, Daddy took me out into the woods, down Highway 54 almost to Lake of the Ozarks. We used to go hunting, a long time ago. When we got to the clearing, Daddy took a pause, and I saw the scars on his arm and face that never quite healed from that day in the prison that Abigail could never bring herself to look at since she left.

"It's a surprise," he kept telling me. He'd been having the nightmares again, only they were much worse than they'd been in a while. There was one night I tossed around in the covers with a tiny kernel of a thought. All this time it'd been Daddy and me, I had been safe and happy, but this treacherous thought of locking my bedroom door had taken residence inside my mind. Because of her.

"Happy birthday, Maddy." Daddy handed me a rifle with a red bow. Today couldn't be a lesson in shooting. When I was twelve he taught me how to hold this very rifle so it didn't kick back on firing. I held it in my hands, practiced until perfect with soda cans and cereal boxes.

How could I have been so cruel? Abigail. She didn't know him like I did.

I held the rifle up to my shoulder. Daddy walked closer to me until the barrel of the gun was pressing into his shoulder blade. Up close I saw the scar on his face, ripples like lightning on the cheekbone, and I was desperate to reach out and touch it with my fingers.

“Not here. Here.” He used both hands to point the rifle to his heart. “This is where you should be aiming. Right here.”

His voice, ragged from the inside out, was steady as oak. I could feel it in my bones, what he was trying to tell me. Neither of us had to speak, but the wound had been festering for days, the one that Abigail had broken open. Uncle Saul was still dead and gone, and I couldn't ask him why; perhaps he didn't understand it either. I wanted to sit down for a while, but Daddy stood on his feet, looking ahead through the trees and deep into the darkness. I could hardly recall the last words between the two of us, me and Uncle Saul, and I wondered if it was possible he knew what made a man's mind tear apart inside.

Two nights later Daddy sat in his favorite recliner with something cupped in his hands, tormenting him the long hours of the night. He stared, uncertain of what he was seeing, apples or grenades. Soon, the sun would be rising and the coffee would be brewing. I would turn on the lamp so he would know me and unburden his heavy hands as best I could.

# LITERARY BIOS

## Spring 2018 – Volume 6 Issue 1

- **Cecile Barlier**'s short stories "A Gypsy's Book of Revelations" and "Forgetting" have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. "Forgetting" is featured in Epiphany's 30th Anniversary Anthology. Her work is featured or is forthcoming in *Amarillo Bay*, *Bacopa Literary Review* (first place for fiction, 2012), *Clare Literary Journal*, *Crack the Spine*, *Cerise Press*, *Delmarva Review*, *The Emerson Review*, *Gold Man Review*, *Knee-Jerk*, *The Lindenwood Review*, *The Meadow*, *New Delta Review*, *Penmen Review*, *Saint Ann's Review*, *Serving House Journal*, *Sou'wester*, *Summerset Review*, *The Tower Journal*, *Valparaiso Fiction Review*, and *Whistling Shade*.
- **Richard Bentley** served on the board of the Modern Poetry Association (now known as the Poetry Foundation). Before teaching writing at the University of Massachusetts, he was Chief Planner for the Mayor's Office of Housing in Boston. Bentley is a Yale graduate with an MFA from Vermont College.
- **Abby Caplin** received her medical degree from Texas Tech University and master's degree in integral counseling psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies. She currently works as a physician, practicing mind-body medicine and counseling. Caplin's poem "Still Arguing with Old Synagogue" was a finalist in Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Award (2015), and she's an award recipient of the San Francisco Poets Eleven (2016) poetry contest. Her poetry and nonfiction have been published or are forthcoming in several journals and anthologies, including *Adanna*, *Alyss*, *apt*, *Big Muddy*, *The Binnacle*, *Burningword*, *Canary*, *Catamaran*, *Common Ground Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Dunes Review*, *Forge*, *The Healing Muse*, *McNeese OxMag*, *Poetica*, *The Round*, *The Scream Online*, *TSR: The Southampton Review*, *These Fragile Lilacs*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Tikkun*, *Whistling Shade*, and *Willow Review*.
- **James Hanna** is a retired probation officer and a former fiction editor of *The Sand Hill Review*. His stories have appeared in many journals including *The Literary Review*, *Sixfold*, and past issues of *Red Savina Review*. Three of his stories received Pushcart nominations. James' books, all of which have won awards, are available on Amazon. Readers' Favorite International Awards gave his book, *Call Me Pomeroy*, the

gold medal in the humorous fiction category. Independent Press Awards gave his short story collection, *A Second Less Capable Head*, the silver medal in the anthology category, Readers' Favorite International Awards gave his novel, *The Siege*, the bronze medal in the literary fiction category.

- **Matthew Bruce Harrison's** writing can be found in *West Branch, Carolina Quarterly, Superstition Review, Bayou, Cincinnati Review, Adroit Journal, Texas Review, Crab Creek Review, Sixth Finch*, and *Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, among others. He lives and teaches in Minnesota.
  
- **Katrina Hays** was an opera singer and river guide before finding her way to writing. Her poetry and essays have appeared in *WomenArts Quarterly, Psychological Perspectives, Bellingham Review, Apalachee Review*, and *Crab Creek Review*, with poems forthcoming in *The Hollins Critic*. She's the founding editor of RWW Soundings, the online literary and program journal of the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University, where she received an MFA in Creative Writing (2010). Hays now serves on the RWW guest faculty.
  
- **D. Nolan Jefferson** is a librarian at American University in Washington, DC. A California native, he has earned MFA degrees in Film from Art Center College of Design and a MLIS from Louisiana State University as a Project Recovery scholar in New Orleans, a program established to help rebuild libraries after the storms of 2005. He is pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at American University and won the AWP Intro Journals Project (2017) for his short story, "South of Eight" which was published in *Tahoma Literary Review*. He enjoys tacos, short fiction collections, and fellow introverts.
  
- As an undergraduate, **Dean Jollay**, studied history and went on to earn an MA from the University of Chicago. His law degree from Capital University propelled him into a career that has ranged from legislative aide and researcher to lobbyist and CFO of a manufacturing company. Jollay has continued to hone his writing skills by studying at Kent State University and attending writers conferences at the University of South Florida, Chautauqua, and Eckerd College.
  
- **Gayle Kaune** is published widely in literary magazines. Her chapbooks include *Concentric Circles* and *N-Sid-Sen Star*. Her book, *Still Life in the Physical World*, was published by Blue Begonia press and her latest, *All the Birds Awake*, is from Tebot Bach.

A new book, *Noise from Stars*, is forthcoming, summer, 2018. She is a retired psychotherapist and lives with her husband in Port Townsend, Washington.

- **Suzanne O’Connell’s** recently published work can be found in *Poet Lore*, *Bluestem*, *Forge*, *Atlanta Review*, *Juked*, *Existere*, *Crack The Spine*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Evening Street Review*, *Paragon Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *The Louisville Review*. O’Connell was nominated for a Best Of The Net Award (2015), and a Pushcart Prize (2015 and 2017). Her first poetry collection, *A Prayer For Torn Stockings*, was published by Garden Oak Press (2016).
  
- **Luke Roe** is a father, student and worker residing in the Pacific Northwest. His poems have been featured previously in *Red Savina Review*, *Wire Harp*, *Uut Poetry*, *Haiku Journal* and others. He has poems forthcoming in *Angry Old Man Magazine* and *Washington State’s Best Emerging Poets*. He was *RiverLit Magazine’s* Poet in Residence for 2015.
  
- **Stan Sanvel Rubin’s** poems have appeared most recently in *America Journal of Poetry*, *Watershed Review*, *Gravel* and *Hubbub* and are forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest* and *Open Journal of Arts and Letters*. His fourth full-length collection, *There. Here.*, was published by Lost Horse Press (2013). His third, *Hidden Sequel*, won the Barrow Street Poetry Book Prize. He lives on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state.
  
- **Angie Walls** is a short story writer, novelist, and screenwriter who grew up in Springfield, Missouri, near the Ozarks. She is the award-winning screenwriter and director behind the “Redmonton” web series, and her stories have been featured in a variety of literary journals including *Carve Magazine*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Cutthroat*, *East Bay Review*, *Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review*, *The Griffin*, *Stirring*, and *The Summerset Review*. Her story “Things We Should’ve Said” recently received an honorable mention from *Glimmer Train*. She will be releasing a new book of short stories, *Anywhere But Here*. To learn more, visit [AuthorAngieWalls.com](http://AuthorAngieWalls.com).
  
- German-born **Chila Woychik** has bylines in journals such as *Cimarron*, *Portland Review*, and *Silk Road*. She won the Loren Eiseley Creative Nonfiction Award (2017) & the Linda Julian Creative Nonfiction Award (2016). She is the founding editor at *Eastern Iowa Review*. [www.chilawoychik.com](http://www.chilawoychik.com)

