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RED SAVINA REVIEW

Red Savina Review

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Peter Galligan

SENSELESS

A few months after the trial concluded, on a brisk overcast day in Denver, I drove toward the alley at Federal Boulevard and Florida Avenue. I didn't expect to find any answers, and I struggled to remember why I wanted to visit the alley where Chicon had died. Maybe I wanted some context, some connection.

The alley was near my neighborhood, a ten-minute drive located behind an intersection I've sped through innumerable times, behind a street on my wife's daily commute. I took Federal north, glancing out the window at the people loitering on the street, lingering by bus stops and store fronts, covered in jackets. Among the homeless, who are ever-present along Federal, I looked for the witnesses from the trial, but found none. I turned underneath the sign of the Shell gas station at Florida Avenue and traced the route of the police when they arrived on scene that St. Patrick's Day morning a year and half ago.

I propped my phone on my dashboard to take photos of the landmarks that I had only seen previously in crime scene photos. I snapped a picture of the day care with a red sun painted on it and of the large sinkhole filled with muddy water. I turned down the alley and studied the fence that the cops had scaled. It had since been repaired, and it felt more familiar than I expected.

A shopping cart with trash and bottles of liquor sat outside Rick Perez's old encampment. An empty 40 of King Cobra sat on top of the trash. Where Perez once lived now served as a toilet, with feces piled along the base of the fence, some of it dripping from the fence a foot or so above the weeds, so I didn't get out of my car.

Then I saw something surprising, something obviously placed long after the crime scene cops had finished photographing the area – a large plastic wreath of ivy and roses strung on the fence in the shape of a heart. Inside and around the wreath, plastic flowers were woven into the chain link. A decorative plaster angel and a plastic cross were affixed to the fence above the wreath. I thought of the distraught woman in court, the one with the shawl, the one crying as we heard the sounds of Chicon gurgling on his blood. I let the weight of this small tribute sink in.

In August, seventy-five potential jurors gathered outside Courtroom 5G in the Lyndsey-Flanigan Courthouse, crowding the hallway, gazing out the window to the gold-leafed dome of the Colorado State Capitol a few blocks away. Two clerks, Kenzie and Stanford, directed us into the court when it was ready. I was called as Juror #1, so I led the jury pool inside. I was the first to see the defendant.

Shane Grant was a large man with a goatee and flattop, black hair peppered with gray. His face was stoic, his eyes narrow and angled above puffy cheeks. He turned his head towards me as I walked by, holding a narrow glare.

As Juror #1, I gladly took a comfortable seat on the top riser in the corner of the jury box, directly across from the prosecution and defense. The rest of the courtroom filled in, with jurors crammed into temporary rows of folding chairs between the judge and defense.

The lucky seventy-five of us looked around this courtroom, this place that we were packed into, by law, on a Friday morning, some of us noting the maple furniture, some following the straight lines of the desks and benches, the large rotunda of recessed lighting in the ceiling above the witness stand – the sole architectural flourish in a room without windows. Some noted the fashion of the attorneys, while others found the wall clock and watched the slowly moving hands.

I noticed the quiet, the sterility of emotion.

Two tall, white men sat at the prosecutors' table, both wearing suits. The man nearest to the jury box was older, balding, and gangly. The other prosecutor, equally tall, was a younger man with a cropped haircut, wearing a grey tailored suit and 1950's-era black-rimmed glasses.

The defendant wore a wrinkled white dress shirt. He didn't wear a belt, which I assumed was for safety.

The judge took his seat at the bench, behind several computer screens, and introduced himself as Judge Laff. He had a persistent quirk, a facial tick that pulled the corners of his mouth into a smile, then relaxed, relenting into a scowl. This happened in a repeated cycle. I wondered if this was some unconscious effort to balance his countenance, to avoid revealing any prejudice for all that proceeded before him. The scales of justice, after all, are never completely still, even when balanced. There is always a small lean on either side, a constant back and forth, wanting for homeostasis, yet always overreaching.

Judge Laff informed the courtroom that the death penalty would not be sought, answering one question in the minds of the potential jurors, but sparking many more. Shane Grant, still expressionless in his beltless trousers, was the defendant of a murder charge.

The defendant was flanked with his own two attorneys, both short. The defense attorney on the left wore a suit that seemed slightly too large. He was a Hispanic man with grey, receding hair. What was left of his hair was combed strait back. We were told his name is Rios. The second defense attorney wore a blue suit. He was pale, around my age, perhaps a little younger, with a full beard. His name was John Galligan (no relation to Juror #1).

Shane Grant's presence loomed. The jury pool looked him over, studied him, put him on trial in our heads for any number of imaginary crimes. Some of us found in him certain relatable features, like the round belly protruding over his beige slacks. Some found in him the signs of a sociopath, with his glare fixed on the table in front of him. Some of us wanted nothing more than

escape the windowless courtroom, to continue our lives outside. And others were curious, desiring the opportunity to weigh the lurid details of a heinous crime.

Voire dire began with Juror #1. I took the wireless microphone and answered a series of questions that the judge would ask each potential juror crowding the court.

“What is your name?”

“Peter Galligan,” I said, confident in my truth. Then the judge inquired about my reading and television tastes, my hobbies and my employment.

“Is there any reason you would not be able to serve on a two-week trial?”

“No sir.”

The questions were rinsed and repeated, down the row, one by one. The microphone traveled around the room, and some prospective jurors spun their answers in attempts to escape. Most answers fell short of dismissal. But a few found a way out of the pool.

“You are excused with the thanks of the court,” the judge informed the man who complained in front of the room that his IBS would create a burden. Justice for all.

After hours of monotonous voire dire, Judge Laff dismissed us for the day. He smiled and frowned, smiled again. “Enjoy your weekend. Please do not discuss the trial. Do not look up the details of the trial.”

So, we spent our weekends across Denver enjoying our freedom. I sunbathed at a swimming pool in my parent’s neighborhood deep in the south suburbs, out of the jurisdiction of the trial. With my wife and daughter, mom and dad, I snacked on popcorn and sprayed sun tan lotion and thought about Shane Grant, wondering who he was accused of killing. I knew I had a good chance of being selected, and I braced myself best I could. How does one prepare for a jury, though? Was fairness an ideal I could commit to? Compassion?

After the weekend, back in the sterile courtroom, the prosecution and defense danced through the hand-wringing procedures of presumptive challenges. Back and forth, prosecution and defense dismissed one of us at a time, each with the thanks of the court. The crowd thinned. The pace picked up. Then it was settled. Fourteen sat in padded swivel seats. Fourteen of us – twelve jurors and two alternates – would decide what justice meant for Shane Grant.

This newly designated body of justice was led into the jury room, which was tight, barely large enough to fit a conference table and a small sink for a coffee pot. We formed a line for the single bathroom. We shuffled around the table and bumped into each other to get to our seats. We introduced ourselves, let out breaths, texted out to the world, and leafed through the jury binders in front of us.

After giving us instructions and contact information, Kenzie noted, “Ya’ll seem so bummed out,” to which someone reminded her immediately, “It’s a *murder* trial.”

We let that truth sink in during a short break, then we were ushered back into court. Judge Laff announced the case, and opening arguments began. We began taking notes in our new jury binders.

The younger prosecutor spoke. He used all of his height and dramatic skill as he guided us through the prosecution's case. Shane Grant was accused of a brutal murder, motiveless, random, in the alley behind the Shell station in the early hours of St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2017. The prosecutor proclaimed that evidence would show Shane Grant dropped John Chicon on his head, kicked in John Chicon's face. The prosecutor's performance was rehearsed, but not refined. He acted out the kicking of a head on the ground.

Mr. Rios gave the opening arguments for the defense. He stumbled over his words. Mr. Rios' point, however, came across – that the key witnesses were homeless alcoholics with contradicting, evasive statements.

“When you consider their testimony, ask yourself, who profited from this?” Mr. Rios asked.

It seemed an odd line, one that Mr. Rios pulled out instinctively, a dull arrow in the quiver of an overworked public defender. Profit played no part in this matter. That was obvious.

The brooding statue at the defense table, Shane Grant, played some role in the assault. This fact was clear after the opening arguments. But the crime was still an abstract notion in our minds. That changed quickly with the first witness.

The prosecution called Officer Johnson. After establishing that he was in fact who he said he was, and that he policed Denver's District 10, Officer Johnson identified his body cam video as it was submitted into evidence. The prosecution rolled a flat screen TV on a cart in front of the jury box.

With Ms. Sharp from the prosecution asking well-rehearsed questions, Officer Johnson led us through the video. It took as much as forty-five minutes for the cops to arrive after the first phone call, according to Johnson, because the caller didn't identify the location or the situation.

The footage bounced around as the cops pulled behind the Shell station and stopped short of the alley. The officers exited their vehicles, rounded the corner, and found a man on the ground. That man's pants had been removed, and his boxer shorts were pulled down over one bony hip. His shirt and jacket were wrapped up around the top of his torso. The body cam captured all of this. It recorded the head of the victim. Whether it was the darkness of the alley or the settings of the camera, the footage did not capture the color of the blood pouring out of the victim's face. The blood was just black on film, and it was too dark to see where the blood was coming from. This was the first and last time I'd see John Chicon alive.

We heard the gurgling of blood captured by the body cam microphone. And I heard the quiet weeping of a woman in the courtroom, one I hadn't noticed before. She had a handkerchief in her hand and a shawl over her shoulders. The television was facing the jury box, so the woman could not see the video, but we could all hear the gurgling. And each noise from John Chicon wrung more tears out of this woman in the courtroom audience.

On the video, Johnson rotated Chicon onto his side, clearing the throat of the blood. It poured out on the gravel. The cop began chest compressions.

“Keep breathing.”

The choking sounds continued. The woman in the audience held a handkerchief to muffle the sounds of her grief.

“Keep breathing.”

Chicon’s face was mostly black with blood, but we saw the results of the damage, like a rubber Halloween mask discarded on the road. But it wasn’t a mask. It was John Chicon’s face, barely left with enough structure to breath. This was all captured on the video, the body cam bouncing with each chest compression.

Johnson testified with an even, polite tone, watching his own monitor in the witness stand. The judge smiled and frowned behind the bench. Shane Grant, at the defense table, sat unflinching, his stare fixed ahead on nothing at all.

“Keep breathing.”

Through the magic of body cam technology, we watched cuts of footage from multiple officer cams, and we heard slices of audio, experiencing the intense moments through the raw video, scouring the scene exactly as the officers scoured it. Rick Perez, the 911 caller, appeared from stage right, in front of the day care, holding the phone with dispatch still on the line.

Perez was no more than a hundred yards away from the alley, from the spot in the dirt where the victim was still choking to death on his blood. Perez crossed the parking lot between the liquor store and day care to talk with police. He wore a Denver Broncos sweatshirt and a goatee, the same style as Shane Grant. He was older, maybe fifty, and smaller, maybe a hundred and forty pounds. His eyes were wide, and his jaw was trembling when he spoke, falling open when he didn’t.

Perez directed the police to the alley, where there was a gathering by his encampment earlier in the night, after the liquor store closed. Perez’s “house” was a small area behind the gas station enclosed with chain link fence that had slats blocking the view. Perez told the officers that, in this small area, Shane Grant hid beneath Perez’s cardboard camouflage with Crystal Varga.

We concentrated on the screen in the courtroom and saw the police climb into the crowded camp. We watched as the brave cops shouted for Grant to come out. We held our jury notepads in our laps, and some of us took the occasional note, but otherwise we kept our eyes fixed on the video. Crystal Varga, with crooked glasses and a sweatshirt, rose first from the cardboard cover. She was shaken and asked to grab her belongings, denied by the shouting police.

“Did Crystal Varga seem disheveled when you found her,” Mr. Rios would ask later during cross-examination.

The cop would reply, “I don’t know how Ms. Varga typically keeps herself,” bringing some chuckles from the jury box.

After Crystal Varga had stepped out of the cramped quarters, Shane Grant appeared, unwilling to raise his hands at first, as if he was wiping them clean, out of view. He was strong, but he wasn't overweight like the present-day Shane Grant sitting on the defense table. Under different circumstances, I may not have even realized they were the same person. The street Grant was muscular but lean, his jaw square. The man at the defense table was large and plump, the beneficiary of three hot meals a day, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, and probably some medication.

Prompted with a question from the prosecutor, the cop drew our attention to Shane Grant's eyes in the video when flashlights on the officer's guns flooded him with light. Grant looked sideways and paused. Grant was considering whether to attack or whether to attempt an escape. But where and how? The encampment was less than eight feet across, about four feet deep. His eyes refocused.

"I love you guys," Grant said, breaking into a smile, before surrendering to arrest, stepping out of the cardboard, wearing a grim reaper t-shirt.

This occurred while John Chicon was clinging to life in an ambulance racing to Denver Health. Shane Grant was hiding just five feet away from John Chicon's beaten body when the cops arrived, a danger lurking stunningly close to the unknowing cops who rendered aid to John Chicon.

At night, I couldn't tell my wife that she was driving by the crime scene each day on her way to work. I sat at the dinner table with her, with my daughter, planning a fourth birthday party. I talked about the job I was applying for, my resume, my interviews. I discussed anything but the trial. I couldn't because I wasn't allowed, and because I didn't know how. Thoughts about the gurgling of John Chicon kept coming. The gravity of the trial had landed on me, my wife could tell, and the mystery I imposed only fueled her curiosity more.

Our jury began settling into routines. I bought coffee each morning and during each break at the small shop on the first floor, next to the body odor-infused jury staging room. I bought two Kind coconut almond bars for breakfast and talked longer than intended to the chatty barista who tried to convince me that oatmeal or a breakfast burrito would make a better meal than coconut almond bars.

My fellow jurors waited outside Courtroom 5G each morning, discussing our occupations and family, looking at the floor as the attorneys walked by. There was a social worker among us, and a food marketer, and two political consultants. There was project manager for a commercial contractor and a man who worked at a pizza joint by my house.

Once Kenzie opened the doors, we gathered in the jury room in the back of the court and took our jury binders, reviewed our notes, wondered out loud about the elements of law unfolding before us. We shuffled into our seats in the jury box and noticed the wardrobe changes of the attorneys. Ms. Sharp wore more color today. Shane Grant's shirt was patterned and more wrinkled than yesterday. Judge Laff and Stanford wore neckties instead of bowties, and the judge's facial tick didn't seem so pronounced. The trial settled in.

We pieced together the night of the murder through the eye witness testimony, though it was not readily forthcoming. Rodriquez, Crystal Varga, and another friend who was only briefly in the alley confirmed the general facts – that Shane Grant, Perez, and others were drinking all day at the park, that they gathered outside Perez’s encampment that night to drink more, that Grant was in a mood, coming down from a days-long meth binge. And we learned that John Chicon was an acquaintance, but not a friend, and he wandered down the alley sometime after the liquor store closed. As luck would have it, Grant didn’t take Chicon’s arrival well.

Rodriquez intervened, and Shane Grant bloodied his nose. Rodriquez saw Shane Grant pick up John Chicon and slam in on his head.

“Maybe three, four times,” Rodriquez said, “I already told you. I already told you.”

They all split from the alley once the worst of the violence began, except Perez and Crystal Varga.

Crystal Varga arrived as a witness in court in a conservative suit. She wore her hair back, still had the same glasses. She remembered drinking earlier that day at the park and buying alcohol with Perez shortly before the liquor store closed. She didn’t remember the violence. She said that she was sober now.

The testimony of eye witnesses culminated with Perez. He looked the same as the man in the body cam video, small, his frown framed by a goatee. He gave an emotional account. He noted that Grant left the alley at some point, Grant’s mood had darkened when he returned.

“I tried to calm him down when he got like this” he said, “We were family. I called him cuz.”

“Do you want to be here?” The prosecution asked.

“I do,” Perez answered, nodding with his whole upper body. Shane Grant lifted his eyes during the testimony. He stared down Perez. Perez tried to look back at him but could only manage a glance before returning his gaze to the ground.

According to Perez, the assault on John Chicon took hours. During the assault, Perez hid in his encampment with Crystal Varga. He stayed out of it, trying to ignore the repeated bouts of violence until the sound of the pounding flesh became too much. He called 911, placing the phone in his pocket with the dispatcher on the line.

“He fucked up my home, man,” Perez said. He shrugged and pounded one hand into the other, “I invited him to my home and he fucked everything up.”

At times during his testimony, Perez was in tears.

Mr. Rios took no sympathy in his cross-examination.

“You were interested in Crystal Varga? And Shane had slept with her?”

Perez nodded.

“Is your answer yes?”

“Yes.”

“You and Mr. Grant weren’t related. You just called each other ‘cuz’ as a slang term, correct?”

Perez nodded.

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes.”

The testimony from Perez painted Grant an angry bully who took it too far on a stranger one night, for no reason other than that Grant was the self-described “regulator.” Perez heard the sounds of pounding flesh. It sickened and frightened him. It destroyed his home. It traumatized.

Perez’ account was confirmed when the 911 call was introduced as evidence. We were handed a transcript to help while listening to the muddled voices. One piece of dialogue that came through clearly on the recording was Grant’s.

In a slow and slurred sentence, he said to Perez, “Because I’m the regulator.”

John Chicon was bleeding out somewhere in the background of that 911 call.

Over the course of the next few days, we heard testimony from those who treated the unconscious John Chicon until he took his last breath. We heard from the ER doctor from Denver Health who placed a shunt in Chicon’s head to drain the fluid and relieve the pressure, the nurse advocate who documented Chicon’s injuries, and the coroner who concluded that the cause of death was homicide. The testimony included photos of Chicon in the hospital. Rows of stitches held his face together. His chin was lacerated in a starburst pattern that, according to the experts, only occurs in powerful blunt force traumas like car accidents. The side of Chicon’s face was imprinted with a hexagonal shoe tread, as if someone stood on his head, trying to crush it.

The evidence became less about who had committed the crime, but how violent the crime was. Our imaginations were no longer required.

The defense cross-examined the experts with questions about Chicon’s yellow skin in the hospital photos; the aim of the defense seemed to be a desperate explanation of alcohol-induced jaundice secondary to increased loss of blood. John Chicon’s jaw bones were both dislocated, and his brain bled in three out of the four areas of classification. The prosecutor introduced picture after picture, one showing the shunt placed in his head, a couple photos of the ears, both torn.

More medical, scientific, and police witnesses testified to photos of the crime scene, the alley that we were all becoming intimately familiar with. We were introduced to clothing items, to DNA statistics, to the methods of shoe print analysis, to the nuances of chain of custody for evidence, all the little details that the prosecutors must routinely seek to prove beyond a reasonable doubt. The clothing stained with dirt and blood, the DNA evidence, a broken piece of fence with blood, all of it was painstakingly presented in brown bags, cut open by the witnesses, identified, then placed back in the bag and arranged by the prosecutor in front of the court recorder.

Then, after over a week of testimony, the prosecution rested. We looked to the defense. Mr. Rios announced that the defense rested too, without calling any defense witnesses or presenting any exculpatory evidence.

Judge Laff turned to us and announced, “We have come to an important part of the trial where all the evidence that will be considered has been admitted.”

After the tedious days of expert testimony, the sudden transition was jarring. Just as we were relaxing into the routine of taking notes and considering the significance of the advanced stochastic DNA matching, we were staring down the moment of deliberation, and at some point, a decision. Judge Laff dismissed us for the day, to return for closing arguments. We went home and began arranging to resume our lives, a proposition that seemed to me as difficult as arranging for the trial at the start. The deliberation, in my opinion, would not take long.

In the morning, after leading the jury into court one last time, I held in my hand a thick package of paper, the jury instructions. Judge Laff read the instructions, which finally illuminated the charges Shane Grant faced – a charge of assault from bleeding Rodriguez’s nose and a charge of homicide. The degree of homicide was up to us. We’d decide whether the crime warranted a first-degree verdict, or some lesser degree for crushing a man’s skull.

The prosecution’s closing argument laid out these homicide degrees in a PowerPoint presentation that probably was recycled for use in everyday, routine murder trials. After Mr. Rios’ wandering closing statement, the prosecution countered with one last piece of drama. The younger prosecutor stood up with a picture of Chicon’s face, the one with the shoe print, and slammed it onto the projector, itching to get it in front of us one last time.

“This was a man who intended to kill.” In the end, there was nothing much to decide back in the jury room. Sure, deliberations took a few hours. We asked a couple of questions of the judge. We reviewed photos and maps and police marks. A few recalcitrant souls debated the merits of the first-degree charge until they no longer saw any point in arguing the finer points of intoxication and head-stomping.

Juror #1, who volunteered to be foreman, signed the verdicts, the simplest government document I’ve ever signed. Guilty of assault. Guilty of murder in the first degree. Luckily, there was no legal requirement of a motive, and no space on the verdict form to venture a guess.

A year and half after Chicon’s murder, from the shelter of my car, I saw that the encampment hadn’t changed much from the pictures in court, except the human shit dripping from the chain link where Rick Perez once lived, where the Shane Grant the Regulator once roamed and Chicon’s head rested as he saw this crazy world for the last time. But the wreath and plastic flowers were new – the red, orange, and ivory heart arrangement strung from the chain link, the only beautiful thing in the alley at Federal Boulevard and Florida Avenue.

And I wanted to remember that wreath and think of the Chicon’s family, the tragedies that led him to homelessness and the one unlucky encounter that cost him his life. I wanted to be moved out of compassion, but that moment of surprise and appreciation disappeared after I pulled away from the alley and its events and returned to my own nearby home. Now I can’t help but think of

that wreath in the context of the rest of the graffiti in an alleyway, the shit and litter and drops of blood leading towards Federal. Even our monuments eventually become nothing more than encroaching waste to strangers. It was a beautiful thing, that wreath, but it was hung on a fence belonging to no one involved, designating the ground where a homeless man died, a man I only knew by body cam video and pictures taken between surgeries. Maybe we make rules to protect each other and maybe we make them only to punish those who'd be unlucky enough to break them. Perhaps I wish I could have done something more, felt something deeper than pity for John Chicon, but maybe I'm only prepared to do what the law requires. And I understand that I'm a lucky one, but I didn't make it through the trial unscathed.

Author's Note: The names of the witnesses have been changed for privacy.

Roy Bentley

The Good Ones

Say you're admitted to Eastern State Hospital and a woman. Consider the daily threats to your person. Forget the beatings and the forfeiture of legal rights, the loss of privacy. Forget your other life. Say hello to peephole galleries. Choruses of all-male voices.

You're in an anteroom. A chamber for hydrotherapy. Tiled walls. A swimming pool without patients and without water, no little mainsails of waves to watch. Without the reflection of who you can see yourself becoming—that face to stare back—or the surface

fractures of your image at the instant your skirt is being pulled up. The insane are a voice, a shout for what is needed in addition to a blind hope to survive. Listen. Hear him ask if I like that? Meaning everything but what I prefer multiplied by him doing what he wants.

Still, the good ones unwrap after. Offer you a hand up. If this were love or courtship, I'd blush. Maybe check my bobbed hairstyle in institutional shining surfaces. Perhaps straighten my slip. Finger-comb my bangs. At the very least: display a moment of deference.

But these sea-scents spilling from me echo like a cologne that tyrannizes from a distance—I'll track him for days in my sleep until I am roused to enter, by invitation, the fresh hell of some other in the dark hallway ahead.

Ace Boggess

Another Earthlike Planet

Thirteen light years distant—
not so far if you're a being of pure energy,
post-transcendent Siddhartha radiating,
selfless. For the rest of us, we can't conjure it
even in imagined sleep of a sci-fi cryo tank.
We're millions of lost anchors
at the bottom of an ocean trench
so deep nothing on the surface calls us.
We settle for sedentary lives,
sometimes not noticing space around us,
sometimes wondering what's out there &
if we could be happy on another world
without lugging our miseries to this new not-Earth
to plant them there like a goddamned flag.

Kelly Doleisi

The Beautician

She felt an almost an erotic desire to give in to aging, to stay still when she could move, to stiffen when she could stretch, to cut her hair when she could write. My mother is dying, she tried to admit, or not dying but cancerous, done with chemo now, on the mend, her golden leaves not decaying, not softening beneath an early snow. Her golden leaves glowing on the silver living tree. She watered red geraniums in the greenhouse or she forgot and they kept flowering. Life conspired against itself, but she lived it, hundreds of branches nodding *yes yes* in the wind.

The Runner

After a lifetime of furious intimacy,
she met her mother, a 102-pound
cancer patient. Size 3 jeans, those
lumps under her shirt, the portal
for drugs and the tube through which
she ate. Growing up her mother
mostly drank manhattans and bragged
about her daughter's track records
over the phone. Now her throat
packed radioactive exacto blades.
Her bones switched to disposable
straws. She was so insubstantial she
was smoke before the cigarette touched
down. There was no one left to forgive.

The Patient

Sunlight, the cool breeze, the long road.
Everyone likes a bike, she read again although
she put down the book — *an exaltation*
of bikes — although she put down that book
days ago. Again she saw Highway 4 laid out
before her like a long gray whale in an ocean
of green needles. She'd inferred earlier that
her bike was an annex of her mind, part
of her, a bigger part of her each time she
touched it and roamed. Much as a surgeon
is a perpetuation of objects that cleave us
apart and cleave us together, every tool
an ode to telepathy, even with feeding tubes,
anti-nausea meds, nearly empty panoramas.

The Climber

Even in what's called a *flow state* one must sharpen, one must move, there is nothing but the work. In a world of B.S. artists. New bomb scare victims. Mothering, or being mothered. What she wants is to live in the span between moments. To fill space without time. To lengthen without longing. Consequently, therefore, hence. Antonym of rhetoric, mobs, and terror. Of condense. She found nothing impressive in a peak of granite and hawks nor in the safety of the bottom, but rather in persisting with the inconvenient rocks. Even in mastery one must grope for something to trust.

The Realist

She'd read that by the time Magritte was 21,
five of his siblings and his mother were dead.
No, it wasn't Magritte. But by the time
Magritte was 13, his mother had drowned
herself in a Belgian waffle. Obviously not.
By the time she remembered it was Kierkegaard,
it wasn't Kierkegaard. Magritte also worked
for a wallpaper factory. But not yet. He also
was present when her body washed up near
their home. He also wasn't present. Her white
dress wasn't covering her face like an apple
or dove or cloth. He didn't die immediately
from pancreatic cancer. He didn't steal clouds
from the river. He wasn't even Magritte.

Al Maginness

When We Burned the Diaries

It was the year of marriages ending,
the year of subjective truth.

It was the year we began to know
longing the way ash understands

flame, not with hunger for
bright consumption, but slow desire

to be again what was altered.
Crows, starved for sour meat,

flew from the bent limbs of trees,
sky a pulpit for their single notes

until that song staled. In light,
threads of green, of reds and dusty gold

shimmered in dusty wings
as though they might have dipped

into the fires our words made
and ascended, trailing inky smoke,

singing each one of our rank sins
until they were ash gone cold,

good only to dirty hands
soiled long before.

Rich Murphy

Table Manner

Ensnared in the meaning web,
where stories find agreement,
the fly waits for the spider to finish eating
and return to the periphery, a harpist.
Last epoch a green headed beetle
left red welts on flesh and then
sat glued to the Western menu:
The heavens opened with all the strings
only to close with timpani sympathy.
Between understandings the murderer and thief
pluck on the dream catcher wires chord
to put to sleep with lull and “bye.”
However, swooning enough, a flighty
would-be parasite in bliss and swimming
in affirmations and re-enforcement
soon dances upon threads bare that seem cables
if not a ballroom floor – show buzz.
Eventually, the old croon choreography
gums up the variations on themes
and the winged and music stops.
Bibbed and humming the famished sits down.

The Connoisseur

The marrow sucking business
requires to a certain degree.
In the field for filling up on being
a temperature due to blood flow,
but often without fever, courses,
carrying a curious interest, a temperament.

Pressing lips into a kiss formation
upon the outside world, cheeks
draw to build facial tissues with sup.
The inhalation slurps and sops
to savor and swallow what might
could supplement the limitations
in senses and imagination.

Birds whistle in conversation
with winds open to harmonics
and the "patron" letting go.
Books perch on fingertips
and flutter before the eyes
that digest for dreams and tomorrow.

Full-time with no vacations
the corpuscular nature in flesh
currents in tubes, canals, tunnels
where ligaments stretch
into violin bows, harp strings
upon spine and skeleton.

Retirement for the vacuuming nose
and living intake valve leans
against a horizon, granite
with a name and dates.
When the last smooch from home
ravens time and space
in all the seductive charms
and plays on a clarinet or flute
one last time, a note loves.

Stan Sanvel Rubin

Scintilla

In the earliest morning,
just before dawn,
the scintilla of light
behind the granite gray makes it seem
as if the sky will stay that way
forever, as if the world
is stable,
as if it will never change,
yet this is the very moment
it is sliding into day
and the inevitable carnage.

Is it too late already
for me to learn
our separation from the sky,
why my heart must beat alone
although it is just a heart
among all the others,
why its sometimes desperate beating
is a way to count the losses,
is a fever,
this fading early dream,
this throb of light.

Legion

An entire Roman Legion
might be necessary

to pry me from this delusion
of senselessness

unsensed except
in the bodiless heart of sleep

where another dream
invades my dream,

umwelt,
disaster of erect spine

establishing our history
among the animals

whose eyes shine with *now*
while ours try

to ensare the world,
Rilke says in the *Eighth Elegy*.

Our words
set traps.

We reach beyond ourselves
only in the deepest sleep,

where no one speaks
because no one remembers

waking
to the bloody light.

Survival Guide

It's probably too late
to draw up a plan,

but I can put cans of beans away
in the cold garage

along with boxes of freeze dried pasta
no one would really want to eat

but there won't be choices,
you'll just shut up

and do what you have to
until the one sure thing.

Draw up the final pages
no one will read

of things you want to be remembered by,
and the things you loved.

If someone loved you,
that's a plus.

Debtor

Because debts are real,
the cash in the drawer

won't bail you out
with the landlord,

the dismal upholstery
will continue to fray

the way words fray into air
even though you want them

to be as real as furniture
or cash.

This is where poems
come in,

sometimes useful,
mostly an escape

from so many debts
you don't want to pay.

That you can't pay.

Claire Scott

THE HOME STRETCH

*to the outside Black Phoenix
after that Desert Gold
moving together on the final turn
Black Phoenix out in front
a two length lead
and it's Black Phoenix!*

the crowd roars red
ribbons and roses
in the winner's circle

under a white sheet
here at St. Anthony's
tubes and catheters
bedpans and blood tests
wilted roses
untouched broth
nurses whisper

the home stretch

REVENANTS

They come at dusk
Aunt Eleanor waltzing to Strauss
while lima beans burn
Uncle Sam hunkered in the corner
with the weekly crossword puzzle
another word for "shadow"
Nana wandering lost halls
in her flannel nightgown
Mother sloshing scotch
reciting Shakespeare sonnets
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
my friend Carlene bringing
scraps & shreds of shiny gossip
Mr. Donahue peed out the window
Richard with an armload of roses
stolen from his neighbor's yard

my children are alarmed
make an appointment for me with Dr. Stein
who prescribes pills to take away the specters
says in three days they will vanish

I toss the pills in the trash
sit by the window &
wait for dusk

Travis Cannell

VACUUMS ON CREDIT, DRUGS FOR CASH

Two songs had just enough time to play before they pulled up to the parking lot of the Creekside Inn. Michael turned off the engine, killing the music and plunging the two into silence. Zach spit and then set Cherries—the truck’s beloved spittoon—on the floor. Neither of them moved. There was a gentle twilight as they sat motionless, not wanting anything to change. But the night and the rest of their summer was coming on and they couldn’t stop it no matter how hard they tried. Michael turned to Zach and nodded his head. They took deep breaths and then took the leap.

The two-story motel was a product of the ’70s, clinging to life with coats of paint. The sign above the lobby read “Creekside Inn” with light blue lettering and a magenta circle. As the two entered, they were hit by a smell: a mix of air freshener and plastic. Behind the counter a young woman sat reading. She glanced up and then back down before folding a corner of the page and closing the book: “How can I help you?”

“We’re looking for K International? They told us—”

“Oh, that’s room 132. Right down the hallway on your left.”

She held out her hand, pointing down a wide hallway. Her eyes locked with Michael for a second as she tried to read him, driven by a curiosity to know what was about to happen in room 132 with the scary man from K International. These so called “interviews” usually involved a lot of cigarettes with that man, Johnny, who described the setup as a “job interview,” but how could this be an interview? And for what? And why didn’t they do it in the office next door? These two kids were barely out of high school. The motel gave the group a special deal for room 132, on account that they didn’t use the bed. She tried to imagine how the interview would take place. Just then the kid in sandals pulled a gob of chew out of his mouth and threw the sticky mess into a tiny cigarette ashtray, finishing off the ordeal with a spit. Her eyes narrowed—this was a problem for the janitor—and then she reopened her book.

“Ha, almost went to the interview with a chaw,” Zach tried to chuckle. Now the door was in view, the number 132 glistening in the bad hallway lighting as their bodies came alert. Michael put up his hand and knocked only once before a voice bellowed from inside—“Come in, the door’s open.”

The room was big, an odd duck size that doesn’t line up or match the others, the kind of room that a hotel owner squeezes into the plans at the last minute. The interview room was wide

toward the end with a large desk sitting alongside a window facing out to the parking lot. Behind the desk sat a man in his mid-thirties. He had medium-length, curly black hair that swirled unkempt around his face. His eyes were a serious brown color and wide open as they shot like laser beams at the two boys. His face was small, cheeks a puffy red, and the skin tone uneven. His upper lip hung down like a curtain flapping in a breeze. Michael couldn't look away as the man put both hands on the table and sucked in the lip curtain so that the flesh folded inward, sucked in well past what should be possible and looked at the two, nodded, and said, "Welcome."

Michael and Zach froze as the lip curtain slowly peeled back as he pronounced the "W." The man's canines stretched the curtain out like two trees supporting a hammock. To the boys' horror, he continued, "My name's Johnny."

His hand shot toward them, and the lip curtain started to rise as he pronounced the "J" and then lifted entirely as his hideous smile revealed a vast nothingness where his four upper incisors had once held the lip and his smile in place. They could see pink divots where the four top front teeth had once connected to his upper jaw. Michael and Zach froze without a breath between them as their heads angled back three inches in unison. For a few seconds nothing changed: two paralyzed adolescents, hands at their sides, eyes staring into the void and Johnny standing tall, his hand outstretched like a statue and his crazed smile still front and center with the hole and pink dots pointed directly at the two young graduates. It was Zach who started forward first with a small flinch and put his hand out like his father had trained him.

"Hello, my name is Zach."

Their hands met, and then Johnny moved on.

"I'm Michael."

Johnny spoke as he turned around, "So glad you came; we've been doing interviews all day, and we're just barely able to fit the two of you into our schedule." He motioned for them to sit at the table so that they had to face him. Outside, day had yielded to night.

The room felt small to Michael. Pamphlets and documents were spread out over the table. Cigarette smoke, old and new, enclosed the space. Johnny picked up a stack of pamphlets and straightened them by letting them fall through his hands as they hit the table—*tap, tap tap...* "Yeah, thanks for coming. We have a great opportunity here, and many folks are taking advantage of it. I can already tell that each of you two have a big ol' swingin' pair of balls, and you know why—well, you picked up the phone today and decided to give it a shot! You men will be glad you came. Period. And now I'm going to show you a way to make a pile of money."

Johnny smacked over the word "money" slow, so that it came out crisp and caused the two applicants to nod to show that, yes sir, they did like money and that they were clever enough to go after it.

“First, let me introduce myself, proper: My name is Johnny Ray Williams and I’ve been working for this company for seven years and it has been good to me. Came from a small town in eastern Washington state and...”

How many teeth was he missing? Michael was trying to count the little pink divots in Johnny’s mouth that popped into view between words. Had to be at least four. Hopefully less than six. And the most disturbing part was that he didn’t try to hide any of the hideousness but thrust the whole thing forward toward him, not in shame but glory... “I’m one of the top representatives in the business in our region and am well on my way to opening my own branch in Kalispell. Right now, though, we’re working out of our Missoula office where we...”

As Johnny’s mouth formed the W in “we,” a tunnel opened with no light at the end, the top of the opening consisting of bright red gums—a dentist’s nightmare—and the teeth that did remain were stained yellow with neglect. “Now I’m a pretty good judge of character, and I’m sensing that you two are smart and willing to do something different. That’s why you are here today. Am I right when I say that you two are the type that seize an opportunity when you see one?”

The candidates glanced at each other before responding automatically: “Yes.” Michael was reminded of childhood summer camps where the kids shouted out “Yes!” to questions during group exercises.

“That’s right—you two know a good thing when you see it! You got to have the gumption to try something new, something where your growth isn’t limited to five bucks a fucking hour. And there’s always a pile of money waiting for people who have the balls to do something different.” They were starting to get more comfortable in their plastic chairs as the sermon started.

However, the words were not Johnny’s. He was adding swagger to the “Kirby Manager Sales Book” that outlined how to interview new recruits in makeshift offices and how to entice and explain, in the nicest way possible, the absolute brutality of what was in store for them. And around the country, at that very instant, thousands of Michaels and Zachs sat in folding plastic chairs listening to calculated pitches about how different, smart, unique, and ballsy they were to embark on a new “groundbreaking scheme.” Johnny’s pitch wasn’t his creation. The words came from a vast corporate enterprise with teams of professional marketers and managers who spent all their time thinking about target audiences, market segments, and response rates. What the recruits couldn’t see were the calculations from on high at the home office that placed them into their plastic chairs and stuck the simple newspaper ad headline into their minds—\$2,000 per week!—and freeze-dried it there.

Johnny leaned back a little, speaking with his hands outstretched to both of them—“Now, let’s talk about the company! I bet you have a million questions about K International. That’s just a business name we use here in Missoula, our company is called Kirby, and I have two words for you—Warren Buffett, the Billionaire! Awww hell, that was three or four. Ha! But I betcha you’ve heard of him or seen his picture before. He’s the smartest investor on Wall Street and he’s rich. Have you heard of Warren Buffett?”

The gap shooting out the pitch was finding its place in the hotel room amongst the plastic furniture and musky odor. Zach responded, “My dad talks about him from time to time; they call him the ‘Oracle of Omaha’ or something like that,” and he almost went to spit but then just rubbed his gum where he keeps his chew.

Johnny shook his head in agreement and noticed the gum rub, “Chew if you want; I don’t care.”

He gestured to the garbage can in the corner that took Zach by surprise—“Uh, no fuck it, I mean, ha-ha, no it’s fine. I’m good.” He turned a slight pink from swearing, and Johnny dismissed it all with a wave of his hand.

“No problem, chewing or smoking is fine during the interview. Now!” He put one of the pamphlets on the center of the table.

“Here is a news article. Talks about why Warren Buffett purchased Kirby, the company that’s interviewing you. If you don’t know who Warren Buffett is, ask your dad because he *will* know. Buffett saw an opportunity to get in on a great company so he bought the whole damn thing! That is how much he believes in the ‘sales model’ and the product. Read all about it later and show your parents.”

Johnny handed them an article photocopied from the *Wall Street Journal*. The title “Why Warren Buffett is Long Kirby” was spread across the top. The article was fourteen years old and highlighted a few nuggets of information that Buffett had released prior to acquiring the Scott & Fetzer Company, which wholly owned Kirby. Johnny waited to see if one would ask the question.

It was Zach. “So, would we be working for Warren Buffet then?”

Johnny shook his head somewhere between a yes and a no. “You’d be working for me, which is just as good, see! Well, really, what it means is that Warren Buffett bought the company, which is a vote of confidence in the sales model.”

Zach nodded his head like he understood and came back in his power voice: “Now one other thing, did you say there was no wage? How do we get paid?”

Johnny leaned in. “There isn’t an *hourly* wage. And I’ll get to that, all those specifics about the pay in just a moment. You see, I want to lay it all out for you, and trust me I will, I’m not holding back, so here it is: We sell the best vacuum cleaners money can buy. Period. They are made of metal, so they last a lifetime and then some. They are self-propelled so that when you push them, they move all by themselves. The current model, the Kirby GSix 2000, has a built-in shampoo system.” He clapped his hands and stood up. “The best part is that the only way to get this vacuum is to buy through our ‘independent distributors’ during an ‘in-home demonstration.’ And these things do everything—they basically sell themselves—and you two just need to be there to collect the money!”

They froze again as Michael thought—did he just say, “Vacuum Cleaners”? Michael tried to focus on Johnny’s shifting brown eyes rather than his mouth, but he couldn’t so he turned to look

at Zach to read his face before turning back to speak, “Soooooo—wait, what? Could you go over that part again? Did you say, uh, what did you just say?”

“Vacuum cleaners,” Johnny nodded his head.

Zach’s brow furrowed as he looked at Johnny. “Vacuums? Fucking vacuum cleaners?”

“Vacuum cleaners,” Johnny fired back this time without nodding, his hands together, silent, face of stone... Then, slowly, only a slight nod, eyes narrowed, daring them to say yes, to understand. Zach’s eyes almost crossed as he did understand—“Vacuum Cleaners?” Johnny smiled, showed them his pink dots, and repeated with reassurance, “vacuum cleaners” as he slapped his hand down on the table like a rhetorical gunshot.

Michael thought of their family vacuum, a little gray box that he used to curl up next to as a child because it vented heat. *OK, so vacuums.* He got it. But not all of it. “Wait, did you say something about, um, ‘in-home demonstrations’ or—?”

“You got it! In-home demonstrations.”

Another wide-eyed look was exchanged between the two draftees. Zach broke in—“Do we, so, um, go into...someone’s house?”

“You got it! That would be the ‘in-home’ part. And don’t you worry about it; don’t worry at all.” Johnny waved his hands in front of him. “We give you complete training so that you are very familiar with everything when you run the ‘demo,’ and that’s what we call them in the biz, a demo.”

Zach’s eyes almost uncrossed. “A demo?”

Johnny didn’t skip a beat—“Yes, the in-home demonstration, a demo. We’ve perfected the Kirby demo so that you just follow the script, no problem. Sells itself! You just collect the money.”

Michael’s eyes flashed. “Well, OK, so you do the vacuum demo in someone’s house but do you, I mean, how do you get *into* their—”

Johnny backed up, off guard, then chuckled—“Oh, how do you get in? How do you get in? What do ya think? You knock on their door and ask!”

The final grenade exploded in the room: All three descended into complete silence, they could hear people talking and a child running while babbling in the hallway outside. The two fearless recruits now had the full weight of this so-called opportunity in their minds. Door to door, in-home demonstrations. Vacuum Cleaners.

James Hanna

THE SUGAR SHACK DRESS COMPANY

Hi, my name is Gertie McDowell. I was born in Butler County, Kentucky, and soon I'll be nineteen-years-old. I live on the family farm Ma gave me when she went into a nursing home. That happened last year after Pa took off for Branson Missouri. He went there to join a country band, and he's busy getting famous. I don't hardly hear from Pa no more—I don't see much of Ma neither. Ma she's pushing fifty, and she's got arthritis bad.

I live near a town called Turkey Roost, and it really ain't nothing too special. It's got half a dozen streets, a whole bunch of bars, and a McDonald's whose arches used to be powdered with coal dust. Just a typical strip-mining town is all. On Saturday night, a girl can't do much except stroll up and down the main drag. Or maybe gather her girlfriends up for a slumber party and watch movies on the Turner channel. I watch a lot of movies, and I like the old musicals best. My favorite is *West Side Story*—Natalie Wood sure could sing. But I'm kinda gettin' off the subject.

Turkey Roost is pretty depressing 'cause the mines have all closed down. Donald Trump said he would keep the mines open, so the whole town voted for him. But I don't see a whole lot of evidence that that's ever gonna happen. The union headquarters are all boarded up, and most everyone's on the dole. Of course, that ain't the Donald's fault—the man is a living saint. 'Cept for maybe his pussy grabbing and all them Twitter rants. Anyway, the air's a whole lot cleaner, and that's gotta count for something.

I got married straight outta high school, which weren't such a good idea. I got wed to Benny Pearman who was in my graduating class. Benny he got a job at a Sam's Club down in Nashville. He don't work there no more though 'cause he broke his hip moving boxes. So what he does now is play Fantasy Baseball and draw a disability pension. I ain't exactly sure why I married Benny—he just kinda proposed a year ago, and I didn't see much reason to say no. But I kinda wish I'd held out for a dude named Tommy Lee Weaver. Tommy Lee starred alongside me when I was in our high school production of *Annie*. He played Daddy Warbucks, and he hadda wear a swimming cap so he could look like he was bald. His hair is thick and redder 'an a chestnut, and I saw it peeking out of his swimming cap when we were singin' together on stage. Tommy Lee also wrote a poem that got published in the school newspaper. And he gave me a buncha black-eyed Susans after the final performance of *Annie*. I ain't been in touch with Tommy Lee since he went to Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond. He said he was gonna further his education so he can be a pharmacist.

Well, after Benny and I got married, I went to work at a Walmart in Bowling Green. My job was to stand at the entrance and greet folks comin' in. I'm real good at that 'cause I got a nice smile and my hair is dyed platinum blonde. I don't work there no more though 'cause Walmart shut itself down. That happened after the United Auto Workers tried to start up a union there. So what I do now is buy lottery tickets and find reasons to get out of the house. I kinda wish I had never married Benny—he just parks himself in our Barcalounger, sips beer, and plays made-up baseball. I kinda wish I had gone to Richmond and moved in with Tommy Lee.

Well, you can only buy so many lottery tickets, and you can only do so much pining. So I decided that maybe it was time that I started up my own business. I'm real good at making dresses—I sewed all the costumes for *Annie*. So I set up a shop in this ol' barn that sits behind our house. I bought a dozen bolts of fabric and a Singer sewing machine and one of them torso dummies to fit the dresses on. After I made me a buncha dresses, I took pictures of 'em with my iPhone. And I put the pictures on a website that read *Frocks by Gertie McDowell*.

Well, even though I'm a real good dressmaker, I only got one dress order. Patty Bill Willis, who runs an egg farm near Coon Creek, asked me to make an Easter dress for her ten-year-old granddaughter. I ain't never made no Easter Dress, so I went on the internet, checked a few of 'em out and printed out one of the pictures. Easter dresses have real high waists and they don't have no bust at all, and they got so many ruffles that they're practically Christmas tree shaped. Well, I made a cute little Easter dress, and it fit Patty Bill's granddaughter perfect. Patty Bill said her granddaughter was gonna be the best-dressed girl at the egg hunt.

I charged Patty Bill forty dollars, which I thought was pretty reasonable, but Patty Bill just looked at me like I was trying to pick her pocket. She didn't pay me no money, but she gave me about six dozen eggs. So every night for a week, I fixed omelets with hominy grits.

*

There ain't much point in having a business if it don't bring you no money. Heck, I checked my website every day for a month, but I didn't get no more dress orders. Benny Pearman said it's probably 'cause I ain't found my demographic. He said I ain't gonna get no orders unless I do more reachin' out. So I put together an email pitch and linked it to my website, and I sent it to all the women's wear distributors I could find on the internet. I didn't get no replies 'cept one from Coldwater Creek. All they wanted to do was send me a catalogue.

Well, a coupla months later, I'd pretty much decided to close my business down. That's when opportunity came knockin' like a sinner at heaven's door. This email popped up in my mailbox from a retailer called Sugar Shack Trends. I ain't never heard of that company, but I think it has foreign roots. It was sent by a gentleman named Jean Valjean who musta been a Frenchman.

Dear Miss McDowell, the letter read. Your daring hemlines and use of lace have come to our attention. Would you consider joining our distributorship and enhancing the Sugar Shack Brand? We are a rapidly growing company with outlets all over the world, and we would be honored if you would consider becoming one of our designers. Congratulations on being invited to join the Sugar Shack family.

Well, I read the email a coupla times, and my heart started to pound like a mallet. Shucks, I ain't never been invited to join no family. The only family I got now is Ma, and she's in that nursing home. And she don't do nothing but sit in her room and watch *Frazier* reruns on TV. So I sent an email to Jean Valjean, and I thanked him for the offer. And I said that as long as it didn't cost me no money, I'd be proud to promote his brand.

It weren't but fifteen minutes before that gentleman emailed me back. He said I had made a wise move that was going to change my life. He said his company only hired the most promising designers, and then he went on to explain to me how things were going to work. He said I would be responsible for making the dresses and taking them to the customers, and his company would be responsible for quality control. He also said my work was so beautiful that I needed to keep a low profile. He said there were plenty of imitators out there that would steal my designs if they could.

There was a contract attached to the email, which was kinda hard to read, so I showed the contract to Benny Pearman 'cause I wanted a second opinion. Benny said he knows nothin' 'bout contracts, but I oughta proceed with caution. He suggested I test the waters before dipping in my toes.

Well, I emailed that fella named Jean Valjean and asked if I could have a trial run. He said that would be no problem and he admired my business savvy. He instructed me to make a red cocktail dress for a woman in Beaver Creek, and he sent me the woman's measurements and told me to do my best work.

Since I wanted to make a good impression, I ordered this real neat fabric. The fabric was stretch satin and it shimmered like a ruby, and the feel was so soft and silky that it electrified my palm. Well, I made a cocktail dress using an example I found on the internet. 'Cept I gave it a plunging neckline and I kept the hemline low, and I put a slit in the side of the dress that rode up past the knee. When I was done, it was all I could do not to bawl like a week-old calf. The dress was so beautiful it looked like an angel oughta wear it.

I mailed the dress to Jean Valjean's post office box for its quality inspection. A few days later the dress came back looking more beautiful than ever. The company had added some lace to the neck and put in some fancy pleats, and the Sugar Shack label, featuring a picture of a cottage, was sewn into the neckline. A note was pinned to the dress, and it said that I did a wonderful job. The note also listed the address of the woman who was gonna buy my dress.

Well, I put the dress in a garment bag and I hung it in the back of my Jeep, and I drove an hour to Beaver Creek to make my delivery. Beaver Creek is a gutted farm town that only has one street, so it took me only a minute to find my customer's house.

The woman who answered my knock on the door was kinda dried-up and old, so I ain't sure what she wanted with a brand new cocktail dress. But I gave her the dress in the garment bag and she gave me a weary smile, and she handed me an envelope and told me to count the money.

I counted out five hundred dollars in fifty-dollar bills, and I told the woman I wasn't expectin' to get paid quite so much. She told me she'd seen my site on the internet and admired the work I'd done. She said she didn't mind paying top dollar for such beautiful designs.

Before she went back into the house, the woman patted my cheek. She told me to have a wonderful day, and it was an honor to make my acquaintance. And she assured me it wouldn't be long until I became a famous dress designer.

Well, with all that cash in my wallet, I felt richer 'an Bill Gates. And that woman she sure made my day when she said I was gonna be famous. But it seemed sorta odd that she paid for the dress without even trying it on.

*

When I got home and checked my email, there was another message from Jean Valjean. He said the customer who bought my dress had told all her friends about me. He said my reputation was spreading, and he had another dress order. He said a woman from Rocky Mound—a town in Tennessee—wanted me to make her a black maxi dress with a split. He also said it was the thrill of his life to be representing me, and that he was gonna reduce his commission to only forty percent.

Well, I sent an email to Jean Valjean, telling him what the cocktail dress fetched, and he told me to put two hundred dollars in an envelope and send it to his post office box. He said the rest of the money was mine 'cause I'd done such a marvelous job. He also advised me to keep things hush-hush—at least until he secured a patent for everything I designed.

Shucks, I felt kinda sad that I couldn't go out and celebrate my success. But if you're gonna stay successful, you can't be slacking off. So I went online and found a picture of a real cool maxi dress, and I ordered a bolt of duchess satin 'cause I wanted the dress to shine. When the satin arrived, I gasped like a faucet—it practically blinded me. I couldn't believe how light hit the fabric and bounced right offa it.

I followed the basic design of the dress then I made a couple of changes. I cut the back away and I left one shoulder bare, then I shortened the hemline a bit so the customer could show off her ankles. I worked all through the night on the dress 'cause I completely lost track of time. By the time I was done, the fingers of dawn were creepin' through the window. The way the fabric glowed in the first light of day made me feel kinda weak in the knees. It truly looked like the dress had been touched by the hand of God.

Well, I mailed the dress to that Sugar Shack company for its quality inspection, and a few days later the dress came back with a note from Jean Valjean. He wrote that the dress was a masterpiece—a garment fit for a queen—and that an angel musta guided my hands when I put the dress together. He also said that inspecting my work was like worshipping at a shrine, so he was gonna cut his commission down to just thirty percent.

*

I kinda wish the hand of God would do something 'bout Benny Pearman. 'Cause Benny he started lecturing me about all the time I spent makin' dresses. He said a marriage is gonna suffer if a couple don't spend time together. Well, since Benny has nothing to offer me but beer and Fantasy Baseball, I told him our marriage was already suffering as much as it needed to. I said if I gave up making dresses it would suffer a whole lot worse. So I bought Benny a super-wide Flat-Screen TV and I got him a case of Budweiser ,and I told him to enjoy himself 'cause I had a delivery to make.

I drove two hours to Rocky Mound, another boarded-up mining town, and I delivered the dress to a square-jawed woman who mighta been a transvestite. Her arms were kinda muscular and her chest was kinda sunken, so for a moment I was worried that I made the bust too large. But the woman she just smiled at me and called me a lovely child. And she handed me an envelope fulla hundred dollar bills.

The woman she asked me to count the money before she accepted the dress, so I counted the hundred dollar bills and there was ten of them. I felt my knees start to buckle and I felt real light in the head, and if the woman hadn't caught me I'd have toppled off her porch. When I told her she'd paid too much for the dress, she winked and shook her head. She said my reputation precedes me and not to sell myself short.

As I drove back to Kentucky, I was shaking like a drunk; it was all I could do to keep the Jeep from driftin' off the highway. So I parked the Jeep in Opryland, which is just outside of Nashville, and I treated myself to a fancy dinner of pork chops and collard greens. By the time I got back to Turkey Roost, it was ten o'clock at night, but I stopped at the post office anyhow, and I stretched 'til I heard my neck crack. After that, I mailed three of them hundred dollar bills to that Sugar Shack company.

*

Well, I signed that Sugar Shack contract and dress orders kept pourin' in, and I spent every waking minute making dresses and delivering them. I didn't deliver the dresses 'til I first sent 'em to Jean Valjean 'cause he told me he was havin' 'em professionally photographed to show in a catalogue. I never saw the catalogue, but he said it looked real great.

Benny he got in my face one day and gave me an ultimatum. He told me I hadda choose—it was either them dresses or him. I told him that weren't no contest at all and to not let the door hit his ass when he left. So Benny moved in with his mother and sent me some divorce papers, and after I had a good cry I sent a text message to Tommy Lee Weaver. I asked Tommy Lee how he was doin' and I asked if he still wrote poems, and I told him he looked really silly when he was wearin' that bathing cap. Tommy Lee he called me back on my iPhone and said he was doin' fine. He said he was in a relationship now and a baby was on the way, and he said he remembered the fun we had when both of us starred in *Annie*. I wished Tommy Lee the best of luck, and I'm sure I meant it too. You can't begrudge no happiness to a man who played Daddy Warbucks.

Well, I kept on making dresses and I banked almost all of my profits, and it weren't too long before I had thirty thousand dollars stashed away. But makin' dresses is lonely work, so I phoned Ma every night. Ma she told me not to fret 'cause you just can't hurry love. She said one day my prince will come and I gotta be patient 'til then.

I thanked Ma for her advice even though even though it was pretty corny. Just 'cause a fella's a prince don't mean that I'll wanna take up with him. What if he's as bald as a billiard ball or has ears like England's Prince Charles? But maybe he'll be like Jean Valjean who sounds real suave in his emails. Mr. Valjean sounds like a Latin gentleman with frost around his temples, and I'll bet he's been all over the world and made love to a whole lotta women. So I send an email to Jean Valjean, and I thanked him for all his support. And I said he oughta give me a knock if he's ever in Turkey Roost. I said maybe we could go to a Cracker Barrel and have us some chicken and dumplings.

Well, Jean Valjean he emailed me back. He said he'd be honored to meet me, but we can't be seen dining together. He said there's fashion spies everywhere, and we gotta watch out for them. 'Cause one of them moles might follow me home and steal all my designs. But he promised to send me a bracelet with the Sugar Shack logo on it. And he said, when he got all my patents secured, we might have us a meal together. He said he's real fond of chicken and dumplings and likes to eat collard greens too.

*

Months went by and I never got no visit from Jean Valjean. But I made and delivered a whole lotta dresses, and the money kept rollin' in. I made dirndl dresses and tunic dresses and baby doll dresses with lace. I made slip-on dresses and granny dresses and even a coupla kaftans. And I delivered them dresses all over Kentucky and most of Tennessee. I delivered 'em to quaint little towns that looked like they seen better days. Places with names like Possum Hollow, Goose Valley, and Gopher Hill. Places with shutdown union halls and stores with empty window fronts. But, although the towns weren't that inviting, my clients all welcomed me. A lot of 'em gave me a hug and called me a lovely child. The way they looked at me, you have thought all their Christmases had come.

Well, my partnership with that Sugar Shack company ended a little abruptly. But you probably already guessed that this was gonna happen. One day, I was making a corset dress—a dress with tight lace around the middle—when I heard this knockin' on the door of the barn where my workshop was set up. The knocking was kinda rapid, like a woodpecker was makin' a nest, so I was kinda surprised when I opened the door and saw a gentleman standing there. The gentleman was dressed in a business suit and his hair was brown with white flecks in it, and he looked so dapper and sexy that my heart leapt like a frog.

“Would you like some supper?” I said to him. “I could make you some chicken and dumplings.”

The gentleman blushed redder 'an a cherry tomato—he seemed to be kinda embarrassed. But he manners were so elegant that he reminded me of George Clooney. He said “please” when he told me to turn around and place my hands behind my back, and he put the handcuffs on me so

careful it felt like he was slipping on bracelets. He even asked me to watch my step when he walked me to his car, and he said that he hoped them cuffs weren't gripping my wrists too tight.

The gentleman drove me to Bowling Green where they got a federal courthouse, and all the way there we chatted like we were a couple of old friends. I asked him if he was married, and he told me he was divorced—he said that being a DEA agent was kind of hard on a marriage. I asked him if he had children and he said he had two girls, and he saw them every weekend and took them to their soccer games. He asked me how come I got involved in dealing powdered meth, and when I said I didn't know nothin' 'bout that, he patted me on the shoulder. He told me I shoulda checked the hems before I delivered them dresses.

When he dropped me off at the Warren County Jail, we were as close as two pups in a litter. He shook my hand after removing the cuffs, and he said he hoped things worked out for me. So I asked him to look me up once I was out of jail. I told him I'd never fault him for being a federal agent. I told him I thought I would make him a real devoted wife.

*

Well, I'm stuck in the Federal Prison Camp in Alderson, West Virginia. The trial it didn't go too well, so I'm gonna be here awhile. When I told the judge what happened, he thought I was pulling his leg. He said Jean Valjean is a character in a Victor Hugo novel. He said Sugar Shack ain't no company, it's the name of a popular song. He told me that court ain't no place to be telling whoppers that bad, and if I thought I was getting away with them I was dumber than broccoli. So he gave me five years for trafficking drugs and he sent me to Alderson, and he said he hoped I'd use the time to ponder my crooked ways.

They call this place Camp Cupcake 'cause Martha Stewart once stayed here. And I gotta admit the inmates are nice and the guards are real polite. I'm sharing a two-bunk cell with a woman named Bertha Jean, and she let me join a gang of woman that she calls her family. My job is in the sewing shop where they make clothes for federal inmates. I kinda like this assignment 'cause it helps me pass the time. I also like strolling the grounds 'cause the place looks like a college campus.

On Christmas, I got a card from that agent that busted me. He said he hopes I'm doing well, and we'll have coffee when I get out. He said he thinks I'm a really nice girl that just got led astray. I also got a letter from Pa who's still in Branson, Missouri. Pa said I'm real trustin' of strangers, and that ain't always a good thing. He said he was gonna hire a lawyer to help me with an appeal.

Well, I thanked Pa for his concern, but I ain't sure I got duped all that bad. I shoulda known that Sugar Shack ain't no name for a dress company. I shoulda known that Frenchmen eat frog legs and don't like chicken and dumplings. And I shoulda known there's no market for satin in towns named Beaver Creek. Maybe I'm dumber than broccoli, but dern it I shoulda known.

Richard Krause

THE HANDKERCHIEF

Couldn't the black boxer have come out of him and given it to Alvin Dark? Alvin was the best fielding shortstop in the league, but didn't have the courage to face the pitcher, or stand in the batter's box and take his fastball right down the alley, and so his dream of entering the majors ended in legion ball.

Ingemar Johansson gave it to Floyd Patterson that first time and he took it. Lightning speed he had, and charm, a broad smile, modesty, and enough friendliness to be dubbed an Uncle Tom. There was nothing fake about Floyd either, and so from that alone, and his black namesake, Floyd Patterson, you'd have hoped the punches would have been thrown at Alvin Dark. How could Alvin Dark get the better of him if he possessed the smooth black limbs, with all the quickness, the nimbleness of his namesake? Wouldn't that be enough to scare Alvin away, and the power of Floyd's own punch that the name threw in everyone's face? No matter this Floyd Patterson was small, white, with tiny timid eyes behind the metal frames of his thick glasses.

Like the boxer he'd never laugh at anyone, never sting like a bee, float like a butterfly, transcend the ring. Could some of the speed and dedication have rubbed off on Floyd, did he have to come from Patterson, New Jersey for that?

You can't leave your name once it has stuck. Floyd Patterson of New Jersey, a small white boy with thick Coke bottle glasses in an orphanage. The wrath of the bigger, stronger boys would come down on him and he had to defer to the boxer. The quick black man with lightning-fast fists, handsome and winning.

Floyd the rodent-faced boy, no glistening off the sweaty film of his shiny black muscles under the incandescent lighting, not a heavyweight world champion, the stuff of *Ebony* magazine, on the cover of *Boxing World*, no, this Floyd was instead a punching bag.

At first the little boy fought back, and was hastily beaten to a pulp. Like a pomegranate crushed underfoot, he lost a few teeth until he stopped resisting. The bloodstains on his shirt got him a special reprimand. He was squashed like a bug, stepped on, pushed, gouged, poked mercilessly.

Finally he gave up, saw it was useless to fight back, but kept the saving vision of the black boxer as he was being punished, clenched his fists in his mind. It was devastating when Johansson beat him. Floyd was crushed and took it personally, as if his own defenses had collapsed before the Swedish boxer and he was even more vulnerable around the boys. But he secretly plotted revenge, though he was never able to carry it out like the world champ who met Johansson a second time, still he was emboldened in his mind.

The night Patterson lost it was like those white handkerchiefs young women flutter in the air then have to daub their eyes with. Floyd was all sniffles, sensing his own vulnerability. And when Sonny Liston beat him, Floyd was broken. He'd come back against Ingemar, but the big bear, the ex-con was too much. Floyd tried to slug it out, like the fighter in his mind, but the power of Liston, of the more powerful Alvin Dark was too much. He saw that was impossible and he just collapsed to the chagrin of all his

fans. Floyd never put up serious resistance after that and Alvin Dark was all over him whenever he pleased.

And so when Jack heard that the Alumni Association paid six thousand dollars to get Floyd to the Homecoming, dressed him in the best of suits and tie money could buy, new Alfredo Fortini shoes, flew him and his spouse first class from their home in

Shreveport, the wheels started to turn to heavyweight boxing, an association Jack had never made before with the ears pinned back in fear, the tail between the legs, to Alvin Dark, the would-be Giant who lorded over the smaller Floyd, the namesake of the famous black boxer.

Simon put his large head close to Jack and whispered in his ear in low but confident tones bursting with pride, "It's great, Jack, what we did."

"What, Simon?"

"To get some of the guys back. Over seventy-five after all these years is a record!

Guys that had never been back. You know, Jack, some don't even have the money. Floyd Patterson didn't."

Jack thought of all the awards for helping people, the mania of community service, the rampant cliché "to give something back."

"Americans are a great people, Jack, so powerfully kind!"

Jack pictured uppercuts, body shots, head butts, left hooks, jabs below the belt; his own head fainted not to collide with all the goodness of Simon's enlarged cranium. Simon had been nicknamed "Head" in his youth. Jack remembered his sawed-off shotgun body exploding from the line of scrimmage against Cedar Cliff for seventy yards.

Simon could barely contain himself. He couldn't wait to tell Jack everything. He was positively bursting with the good deeds, like an Easter bunny his pockets stuffed with jelly beans, colored eggs, chocolate rabbits, yellow marshmallow chicks, or a Santa Claus with a sleigh full of presents and a full stomach that he'd have to let out another four or five notches of his black belt to accommodate all the goodness in him.

"Truly, Jack, you don't know how good it feels, the impact we can make on people's lives! You know, not everybody's well off!" he chuckled. "It just does your heart good. You can't imagine the satisfaction when you see the guys return, the tangible rewards of helping less fortunate classmates, giving them the red carpet treatment!"

Floyd down the dimly lit basement with Alvin Dark over forty years ago flashed through Jack's mind. His own ear glued to the radio, straining for every syllable from the Patterson and Johansson fight, the fight with Sonny Liston, getting his own ears boxed in by older boys and the radio taken away.

They tormented each other as youths so exquisitely, along every nerve, that it is only natural that they'd shell out six thousand dollars years later. Simon wasn't there, but something similar must have happened at Vian.

The flesh over time keeps its rawness, the flies stay away from what's preserved in our minds, the memory doesn't decay, turn flyblown, maggoty, but remains on the plate signifying the lost appetite of our treatment of each other, beaten as we were to make ourselves tender, hard for the rest of our lives until we could pay for it, correct the horror with smiles, handshakes, the good will of a fortieth class reunion.

"Jack, you just don't know how good it makes you feel!"

Did Simon know? Intuitively he must have known. Maybe it was the hangdog look that Floyd still wore, as if he'd been beaten by Liston and Johansson on the same night. But it was the endless nights that he was forced to perform in front of the other boys.

Were they all guilty as their munificence amply testified, paying for those who never returned, sensing they were implicated in the hangdog expressions, in the cautiousness even as an adult, Floyd's pack-rattedness, all he accumulated against their assaults, secreted in his pockets for consolation. The fact that he had nothing all these years shows how he was stripped of pride, confidence, the zest for life that they were now trying to buy back.

"It makes you feel good!" Simon whispered a third time stretching out his arms as the conversation was going nowhere.

"Floyd, over here!" Simon on tiptoes waved. "Someone I want you to meet!"

Jack pictured Floyd being sent the money, his surprise at opening the envelope, his purchase of the suit, tie and shoes, and the first class tickets, renting a car for the first time, entering the luxurious suite at the Hilton.

"...that you can do something for one of the guys," as his belly shook and his eyes twinkled as they locked on Floyd walking towards them just as he had distanced himself the last forty years.

"You remember Jack, don't you Floyd!" Simon said.

"Yeah, Jack Dooley, how are you doing?" and he put out his hand.

Jack looked down at the hand and a split second later was clasping it. There was a clamminess to his limp handshake. Floyd had stopped making a fist altogether by graduation after the farm home of twenty-one boys had rendered him defenseless.

Floyd and Jack made small talk, asked where each was living, quickly ran out of conversation. Floyd was doing some kind of maintenance work, seemed a little dazed, lost in the

rotunda, the high dome dedicated to the Founder of the Home, all the space above oddly connecting the past to his standing there exchanging pleasantries after the unexpected goodness of the alumni committee. It was like the unintended consequences of an electroshock that everything came back to him. Beneath the calm, his eyes had a wild focus, as if someone might appear from any of the numerous wooden doors lining the circumference of the rotunda. He couldn't grasp the leap of forty years, the newfound dignity. It could have been the surprise at the familiarity that now seemed part of the six thousand dollars.

After their conversation broke off, both wandered separately over to the easels where returnees of each class signed their names and Jack saw Floyd again.

He approached him and said out of the blue with Floyd's back to him, "I talked to Alvin a few weeks ago."

Floyd turned and gave Jack a blank stare, as if he had not registered what was said. A punch-drunk look appeared on his face, the dazed effect of the two boxers who had KO'd his namesake. Jack brought his hand up for emphasis, but Floyd didn't flinch, just blinked through the thick lenses of his glasses. Maybe it was the rope-a-dope that dazzled him, a memory of the footwork of a successor.

Through the largess of the guys, the blue silk threads shimmering in Floyd's tie, the brown pheasant design and impeccably tailored suit, through the airiness of landing in Hamburg, despite the reality of the engines, the red carpet, the rented car, the luxurious hotel room, he was transported back to the past.

The wives of the alumni committee had come with balloons and met him at the airport. But that was swiftly punctured; at the mention of Alvin darkness lowered, spicules appeared, the air was let out, the tension that always holds the present in the rosiest grip was gone and Floyd stood in the lonely glare of headlights on a country road.

"Alvin Dark, you remember him, don't you?"

For a moment Jack thought there'd be a feral animal with a snarl, the snort of the sharpest teeth, but no, Floyd's spine had been broken years ago, and he was simply preparing for another bout standing there.

"Alvin, you lived with him at Rolling Green!"

Floyd had a large chin, small eyes, and a glass jaw that jutted out precariously.

He was frozen at a standstill when Jack mentioned Alvin. It was as if the past had come armed with a powerful bat. Floyd thought he heard something shatter in the distance forecasting his appearance.

He who had flown first class, stayed in the best hotel, had suddenly come down to earth and wondered why he was there. Had he come all this way for the shock of having Alvin's name mentioned?

"Alvin, you know him, don't you?" Jack insisted.

Still there was no response.

“Alvin Dark, you lived together at Rolling Green,” Jack repeated.

Floyd’s eyes still had a glazed look. Alvin Dark tumbled from the recesses of all the doors that had shut behind Floyd for forty years, the screams, the banging, his young body behind them as he waited once again for Alvin to walk through.

“Oh...yes,” he stumbled. He had ducked down in the basement again, been ordered to stand up after hunkering with both hands behind his head, been forced to admit he remembered.

“He’s not here?” Floyd murmured.

“No,” Jack said.

“No?” he repeated, looking as if he no longer knew whom he was talking to or why he was there. He looked quickly around the rotunda at the doors to see if one would open. This small man who hid behind visions of a magnificent black boxer with lightning quick moves was sluggish, more unprotected than ever.

Floyd with thick glasses was now beating back the past. He was ruminating as Jack spoke to him, his jaws worked nervously in tiny little bites, a mouth empty of all but chewing motions. He swallowed compulsively sucking air as if in the giant rotunda there wasn’t enough oxygen. Once again he was depositing stains on the salty, tear-stained towel in his mouth so he wouldn’t yell.

“Oh, yes, Alvin Dark. Where...is he?” And the black hole drew him spinning, whirling back, passing out, getting up, his thighs, his hands slimy, through the glare of the bare light bulb, the boys egging him on.

His darting eyes told everything. They didn’t have the wide-eyed remembrance of old times, but retreated, furtively checking if Alvin was in the rotunda.

“No, he’s out in Vegas,” Jack said.

Jack knew the story of the handkerchief. It leaped to mind when Simon mentioned “the generosity of the guys.” How they “banded together” to help. “The guys are great,” echoed in his mind.

“It gives you goose bumps,” Simon had said.

The stickiness of the handkerchief stayed, the one strong spermatozoon breaking through ahead of the others to rescue Floyd from the basement at Rolling Green. The “guys are great” reverberated in Jack’s mind as he shook Floyd’s hand, again felt his loose grip.

“No, Alvin has a weight problem, he’s a little self-conscious.”

The scene repeated itself, the way Floyd was forced to do it each night into the handkerchief in front of the others. The permanent tic it left, that twitching of his left eye, the constant swallowing when he was eating nothing. He was instructed not to leave a mess, swab the last drops, keep his clothes immaculate.

Jack was introduced to Floyd's wife who stood back, spilled punch on her dress backing up that Jack quickly got out his handkerchief to wipe it off. Floyd winced as if his glasses experienced a sudden magnification.

Alvin Dark was the master of ceremonies, the baseball wannabe who hadn't the courage to face pitchers because of his fears of the hardball crushing his facial bones, crushing his temple like a paper lantern.

He was the instigator who produced the soap and had him clean off the smell, and after the second, third, and fourth rounds, had him dispose of the handkerchief.

"How is he?" Floyd asked vaguely.

"He's fine, living in Vegas, doing a lot of betting on sports."

"Maybe he'll strike it rich," Floyd said as if he lost a boxing crown he had nothing to do with outside being a punching bag himself.

Sexuality is a weighty matter with twenty-one boys and no girls around. They didn't see them for weeks.

How is it to express itself? There were no handbooks. It was only natural that they'd turn on each other.

Floyd stood there as Jack imagined an uppercut, jab, left hook decking Alvin, the real Floyd Patterson this time, who didn't need the alumni's six thousand dollars. Simon must have known.

The guys should have come to his rescue years ago. But they piled on instead. Stood back intrigued knowing Floyd was not the boxer his name evoked, but the bottom of the barrel, the SOS of his white handkerchief sticky in his hands.

"It makes you feel great what you can do for your classmates!" Simon says, swollen with pride, spit forming on his lips tiny white balls of goodness.

His tormentor should have been decked, left flat on his back there under the dim light of the basement, not become this optical illusion of a little boy standing as a broken adult decades later nervously looking around the rotunda.

Jack looked down and saw Floyd had bitten his fingernails to the quick.

"He's not back, is he?"

"Alvin?"

"No," Jack repeated. "He's worried about his weight, couldn't come but still bets on the fights," as Jack too looked at one of the doors of the rotunda to open.

Marlene Olin

THE REMAINDERS OF YOU

I. The Funeral.

For whatever reasons, be it the place or the season, only a dozen funeral goers show up. It's August in Miami. The snowbirds have long flown the coop.

Those that are here cram into the first rows. Their feet are planted and their tissues poised. Outside, it's ninety degrees in the shade, the sun slicing the curtains, the curtains pulled tight against the heat. How the women make a show of caring, suffering in their pantyhose, dabbing their makeup and wagging their heads! How the men beat their breasts, davening in their mothballed suits, knees bent and scalps glistening. You would have loved it, Mom. How they sway in sync!

The rabbi is a stranger, someone you never met. Solemnity is stamped on his face. A black suit, a white shirt. He wears sorrow well. He grabs the podium with both hands. Then like an old-fashioned newsreel, the highlights of your life are replayed. It takes five, ten minutes tops.

"Selma was a wife, a mother, a grandmother." (Here he pauses, clears his throat, cracks his neck). "A devoted mahjong player. A crossword puzzle devotee. A good cook!" Then he looks at his watch and exhales (seconds seemed like minutes) before he soldiers on. How the poor man scrambles to fill the time! The 23rd Psalm. That bit from Ecclesiastes. He makes sure to chant the Kaddish twice (slowly, adagio, stretching the vowels to make them last). Then finally, amid the sniffing and snorting and clearing of phlegm, the crowd all mutters *Amen*.

At first we think he's done. I hear books snapped and feet shuffled. But then suddenly he glances at his wristwatch once more, wipes his sweat with his tie, and looks up at the ceiling. And for reasons I can't fathom, he starts speaking about birds. Swifts, to be exact. Those crescent-shaped like flying sickles. You remember. Those small black birds that find their way into chimney tops and roof eaves— spinning and gyrating— like some crazed Cupid's arrows run amok.

The rabbi knows he has a captive audience. The air-conditioner is heaving blasts of cold air, the pews in the chapel are cushioned, no one is in a hurry to get anywhere fast. His voice a whisper, half-closing his eyes, he speaks like he is hypnotized.

"Behold the common swift. The birds sleep, eat, even mate while in flight. Free and untethered. Light and unencumbered. A wisp of wind. A breath of air.

Once a year, every year, they fly back to their nesting grounds. Jeremiah saw them. Daniel saw them. Judah Maccabees saw them. For over two thousand years, they've returned to the Holy Land. No matter the victor or victim, no matter the battle or brawl, every November

they return. The smallest of cracks, the tiniest of crevices, they find. In. Out. In. Out. A twig. A leaf. A bug. A month or two later their job is complete. As soon as their fledglings are ready to fly, they leave and start the cycle once more.”

When he pauses, we assume he’s through. A few people rise in their seats. But still the startling ramble continues.

“There are those who pray at the Wailing Wall. There are those who write messages and tuck them into slots. But I prefer to watch the swifts, to watch the way they swoop and soar while never touching ground.”

And just like that he’s finished. The funeral director (appropriately grim of course, a wad of invoices discreetly hid inside his coat) takes over, passing out directions to the condo card room, assuring a sea of gurgling stomachs that an ample lunch will soon be served. But they’re creatures of habit, your friends. Followers of the pack. There isn’t a casket, and without a casket how can you have a burial? They pull at my sleeve, their knobby fingers shaking, their fetid breath inches from my face.

“The graveside. We’re not going to the graveside?”

“Mother wanted to be cremated,” I remind them.

Still they look around, searching for maybe a table or a shelf, expecting to see an urn or a tastefully carved box. (Something gilt or granite. Inlaid. With the appropriate gravitas.) Little do they know that you’re sitting in the front seat of my car, filling a foot-high Tupperware container to the brim.

I shrug my shoulders. What else can I do? “Mother didn’t believe in the rituals,” I tell them.

A little old man in a fedora appears out of nowhere. “Selma was cheap. She never spent a dime,” he chortles, “whenever a nickel would do.”

A clutch of old ladies are looking and pointing. Hard of hearing, I suppose. They have no idea how loud they speak. “And such a service,” they hiss. “We never heard such a service.”

The old man in the fedora can’t help himself. Brandishing his cane, he jumps again into the fray. “It’s a sin to speak unkindly of the dead,” he booms. “What else could the poor rabbi do?”

II. The Plan.

The streets are nearly empty and the boardwalk so desolate I look straight out to the sea. I’m staying on Collins and 29th for pennies. A room that overlooks the ocean, a balcony replete with chaise, an evening breeze that lays the daytime heat to rest. My children call every night and every night we have the same conversation. What with their kids and their jobs, they’re busy. At least too busy for the funerals of strangers. And they barely knew you, Mom. The *real* you. They only knew the older, adulterated version, the face you painted for our yearly visits. The face you showed for bridge games and the club.

Josh just turned forty. He and his wife are lawyers, remember? My power couple. His words are sharp and to the point. “You sure you don’t need me there, Mom?” And when I say *no* for the thousandth time, his relief is thick enough to taste.

But Lisa is a different story. She’s thirty-three and a single mother. How she suffered through our annual pilgrimages, the way you pinched her cheeks, parading her in front of your friends, *my little dolly* you used to say. Though she calls from Long Island, she feels just a heartbeat away.

“We need you home, Mom.” She’s trying not to sound desperate but I know how desperation sounds. We finish each other’s sentences, me and my daughter.

The Tupperware container, a nagging reminder, sits on my hotel room dresser. “The ashes,” I tell her. “Whatever am I supposed to do with my mother’s remains?” Just a few yards away, the surf beats against the sand. A child is laughing and sea gulls are squawking. I wonder if Lisa can hear them over the lines.

“You’re on the ocean, right? Do what they do in the movies,” she tells me. “Close your eyes and dump.”

I glance once more at the dresser. How you hated the water. I was born and raised in Miami, and yet you were too terrified to let me swim. You filled my head with ugly stories about Coney Island, about the day your uncle nearly drowned, about how undertows could suck you in and pull you out to sea. A litany of stories. “Dead bodies!” you’d say. “That’s what they find in the ocean. Dead bodies.”

To this day, the ocean brings me nightmares. When my grandchildren swim, I grit my teeth and pray. You loved no one more than you loved yourself. How easy it was to luxuriate in your fears.

Despite you, in spite of you, an hour later (in my swimsuit and my flip flops no less), I head for the beach. A five minute walk from the pool area, and I’m there. I’ve poured a few ounces of your ashes into a Styrofoam coffee cup. The cup’s in one hand, a towel’s in the other while whatever I ate for dinner is crawling up my throat. Maybe it’s the time of night or maybe it’s the time of year, but the whole place is deserted. Under a sea grape tree a young couple is necking. Farther out, a man is fishing in a boat.

Slowly I inch forward. A full moon hovers glazing the water in a pool of light. I drop my towel on the sand, slip off my shoes, venture in. The water’s shockingly warm as it laps against my ankles. Under my feet the sand crunches. Something like seaweed strokes my shins.

For a few brief seconds, my fears are shelved. The push and pull of the waves, the salty smells, the slightest of breezes brushes my hair. It’s like a lullaby, the rocking, like a mother putting a child to sleep. And then I remember you and your words and my heart starts hammering in my chest.

For a moment I'm paralyzed. I want to call for help, I need to call for help, but no one's close enough to hear. The water's up to knees then it gropes toward my thighs. Behind me, the couple is laughing. I will my pulse to slow, remind my heart to beat.

Then suddenly I remember the coffee cup. I plant my feet firmly in the sand, feel the wind against my brow, take off the lid. With two hands I hold the cup to the heavens. The clouds part, the stars shine, and a fistful of what used to be you smacks me in the face.

Somehow I get back to my room. In the shower I clean off the grit and gristle and gargle with Listerine twice. My sixty-three-year old bones ache and my weary head throbs. But sitting on my dresser, confronting me with the weight of the world, is that container. And one way or another, I will find a home for its contents within the week.

III. The Homestead

The next day my adventure begins. Armed with sunscreen for my rosacea, a granola bar for my low sugar, a bottle of water and another coffee cup, I taxi to the rental car office then steer the world's smallest rental car north. The sprawling city of Miami is a lifetime away from the sleepy town I grew up in.

Fifty years ago, there was no I-95 connecting one county to the other. A multitude of expressways now wind and weave, intersecting each other in pretzel-like loops. The map's sitting on my lap like a dog, and every few miles I look down and pat it for reassurance. Cars zoom by, horns honk, faces sneer. I remind myself to keep in the right lane (it's important to stay in the right lane, keep in the right lane for Pete's sake!) but then I forget to press down on the gas. And the map's no help. Streets are scattered like varicose veins with hundreds of capillaries between them. Miraculously, I find the exit to Miami Gardens Drive. Then five minutes later, I'm back in our old neighborhood again.

Everything looks the same but different. It doesn't take me long to find our house. A concrete box in a row of other concrete boxes, a hibiscus hedge, a spindly palm. The jalousie windows are still there. The air conditioner in my bedroom still juts out from the wall. Time has not only stood still but reversed itself. The mailbox in front lists to the side, its door gaping like a huge mouth.

I listen for familiar sounds but *no*. The streets are empty of children. There's no Good Humor man with his tinkling bell, the Dixie cups with their wooden spoons, the popsicles we raced the heat to finish. On a lawn a car sits perched on concrete blocks. Assorted litter (plastic bag, flyers, advertisements) rolls like tumbleweeds across the sidewalk. From an opened window, the sound of rap music thumps.

There was a time I knew each and every person who lived in these homes. The Goodmans, the Schaefers, the Lopezes, the Smiths, the Wachoskis, the Friedmans, the Stones. I spent more time at their houses than I did at my own. During the summer. After school. I was your only child, and you were my only mother. Was I even missed?

A door opens.

“Mama,” says the little girl, “a white lady is sitting on the sidewalk. A white lady’s crying.”

A woman black as coal helps me up, offers me water. My purse is in one hand, the coffee cup in the other as I once more approach our front door. Remember our housekeeper Delilah? I used to marvel at her hands, the way the palms were white, as white as mine, my little hand fitting inside hers. She made me lunch, bandaged my scrapes, mended my clothes. Yet how you yelled and screamed whenever our hands touched. As if hers were dirty. As if her hand bore some sort of dirt that wouldn’t wash off.

The woman nods *yes* when I ask if I can use her bathroom and is speechless when I find it right off the bat. I lock the door and flush the contents of another coffee cup down the toilet. An hour later, I’m back at the hotel.

IV. The Eateries

My daughter wants me home. She called again last night, running through her checklist, checking up on me while reassuring herself. *Did you take your pills, Mom? Are you remembering to eat? Don’t forget your sunscreen.*

These are the things people say to each other when they care.

My car now drives on autopilot. In a half hour we are back in the old neighborhood. Though my elementary school still exists (the outside corridors, the bricked facade) the new walls are windowless. I drive in circles looking for landmarks. The public park where a tornado once snapped the swings and twisted the basketball poles. The convenience store where I rode my bike (a new name, I wonder how many new names have come and gone). Dad’s favorite hot dog stand is now an Arby’s, the Ham’N’ Egger’s a pizza joint.

As if by instinct, the car steers itself east. I smell the ocean before I hear it. The themed hotels with their kitschy statues (The Desert Inn with the horse and wagon, The Sahara with its camels) have been replaced by fancy condos. I check once twice three times to make sure I’m in the right place and still can’t find the Rascal House. Remember the Rascal House? Those Sunday breakfasts with the free baskets of rolls and pastries? Dad would order an egg, a single solitary egg, and eat a dozen rugelach.

The only time we felt like a family was in those restaurants. I hid behind the menus, looking at other families, wondering if we appeared normal, wondering if just the appearance of normal was all that counted. How I lived for Sundays!

I was nurtured on promises. It won’t always be like this, Dad would say. One day, I’ll be able to retire. One day, I won’t have to travel all week long. Let someone else sell vacuum cleaners for crying out loud! We lived as if Dad were a guest in his own home, dropping his suitcase in the foyer every Friday night then squeaking out the door first thing Monday.

You had no idea how lonely I was. Minutes before we heard your car pull into the driveway, Mom would draw on her face, paint her lips, practice her smile. I’d think about all the

families you would visit, the gingerbread homes you would charm. I'd imagine other little girls in other houses and wonder if they were prettier or smarter. How I envied those little girls!

To cheer myself, I imagined your misery. I'd imagine you driving those long empty roads with a cigarette out the window, passing telephone poles, flag poles, light poles. On the radio only one or two channels could be found above the static. *A brief shower this afternoon will be followed by clear skies! Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus!*

Or maybe you'd be sitting in a hotel lobby, holding a yellowed newspaper, eating supper with another salesman on white chipped plates. A single bulb would light the hallway to your room. Then you'd pull back a tattered bedspread and listen to crickets chirping and car doors closing while a couple laughed across the street.

"It's time to put those memories to rest," says Lisa. "Your mother. Your father. They're all one and the same at the end of the day."

The Rascal House (believe it or not) is now a gourmet market. Holding the coffee cup, I go inside, find the ladies room, and flush the contents down the toilet. Then I treat myself to a cheese Danish that costs an astounding five bucks. It's not as good as the Rascal House but good enough.

V. The Bowling Alley

"We miss you, Mom," says Lisa.

I'm the invisible thread that ties my daughter's family together. The carpooling, the cleaning, the cooking. Don't think for a minute these things come naturally, I tell her. Not all parents enjoy their children. My mother taught me that.

Bowling was Selma's life until it wasn't. She was into personalizing back then. The personalized bowling bag. The personalized sweat towel. The earrings with her initials left and right. Her name was embroidered across her bowling shirt in big red cursive letters. For years I called her "Selma" because everyone else (the mailman, the grocery guy, even strangers on the bus) did, too.

There were no cellphones in the 50's and 60's, no email, no texting. My mother disappeared for hours. Once I had a stomach ache and the school clinic called Mrs. Schaefer down the block. Another time I broke my finger in P.E. and suffered for three hours straight. A league's a league, Mom used to say. She had obligations.

Then one day a real emergency happened, a life or death crisis. As usual, there was no way to reach my mother. I was in eleventh grade English when the principal (Mr. Bernstein? Mr. Weinstein?) grabbed the sleeve of my blouse and pulled me into the hall.

We stood in the corridor. On every door, a list of Honor Roll students was scotch-taped front and center. While he was talking, I looked around his shoulder and searched for my name.

He yanked at his moustache and spoke real fast. "Your Dad had a coronary. I'm so sorry. They can't reach your mother. Do you have any idea where your mother is?"

“She’s at Lucky Strikes,” I replied. “They’re having a tournament.”

He reached behind his ear for a pen. “Do you by any chance have their number?”

“Dad’s in Omaha, right? I think he’s in Omaha.”

“He’s in the morgue,” said Mr. Weinstein/Feinstein. “They’ve been trying to reach Selma all day long.”

If memory serves, the bowling alley was on the west side of town. I steer toward an industrial area with a coffee cup by my side. The site of the old bowling alley isn’t hard to find. It’s the size of a hangar, a concrete behemoth sitting behind a large caged fence. A new sign says *Need a Warehouse? Call 1-800-S-T-O-R-A-G-E*. There aren’t any cars in the parking lot. Across the street, a man is selling flowers in a bucket. An ancient padlock and *Beware of Dog* sign hang loosely on a gate.

Looking back, it was a crazy thing to do. But sometimes, crazy is a good thing. Sometimes, crazy shakes things up. And wouldn’t you know, as soon as I whack that padlock two three times with the heel of my sandal, that rusty piece of junk falls right off.

I was sure there wasn’t a dog. They sell those signs by the dozens at the hardware store to just to scare people off. So when I see him, I’m more than a little surprised. He looks like one of those TV police dogs used to sniff out drugs, a brown/black blur with sparkling teeth and sweaty gums. He heads straight for my purse (that was some smart dog) and stabs it with his nose.

“You want a granola bar, nice doggie?” I say. I hand over my snack and give him a leftover piece of Danish for good measure. Then me and my best friend head for the warehouse doors. Of course, they’re locked. I try eight different locations, knocking and yelling, but no one’s home. Standing on my tiptoes, I upend my coffee cup into a dumpster. The dog follows me all the way to my car while the man selling flowers nods his head.

VI. The Fantasy

By twelfth grade, I had one foot out the door. My college applications were signed and sealed, my driver’s license was in my pocket, I had a steady stream of income from babysitting jobs. But suddenly you were hanging around like some sort of vestigial tail, cleaning closets, scrubbing bathrooms, emptying and organizing the drawers. I thought you had lost your mind but (looking back) all you lost was Dad.

“Let’s be tourists!”

In each of your hands was a shopping bag brimming with flea market finds. Straw totes, floppy hats, I Miami T-shirts. It was Sunday (how we both dreaded Sundays). I had piles of homework to plunge through and plenty of friends with cash and cars. But there you stood, itching to be anywhere but home, with nothing to do and no one to call.

So that’s how our Sunday ritual began. Every week, rain or shine, we’d get in your Ford Fairlane and hit the tourist attractions. One week we’d head to the Everglades and ride on the

airboats. Another week we'd steer to the Seminole reservation, eat fry bread, try on patchwork jackets, watch shirtless men pry open alligators' jaws. And sometimes we'd just blend in with the crowds, strolling the Lincoln Road Mall, catching a movie at the Carib, playing miniature golf at The Fun Stop, slurping snow cones in the heat.

"We're like twins!" you'd say, pointing to our shorts and sandals, the visors you bought from kiosks, the oversized sunglasses, the silly shirts. "Best friends!"

Cringing, I'd smile and pat your shoulder. Begging, you'd lean forward for a hug. That year could have been our year, Mom. That year could have been special. Instead we were two lost souls groping in the dark.

VII. The Woman and the Horse

But there is one memory I can cling to. It was 1959. In the photo, I'm wearing the blouse Dad brought me from Hawaii (flamingos, hibiscus, a touristy kind of shirt). How I loved that blouse. I must have worn that blouse everyday in kindergarten.

It took us only twenty minutes to get there. I saw the Aquafair sign a mile away as one car after another snaked toward the entrance. The crowd pushed past the dolphin show, the pony rides, the sodas and the candy apples. Clinging to Dad (I wasn't much taller than people's waists), I followed the footsteps in front of me, squeezing my elbows and watching my toes. The air reeked of seaweed and popcorn and when the breeze blew, the musk of wild animals tingled my nose.

A brand new stadium had been built on the bay with the rows descending into a pool. We surged upwards, grabbed three seats in the middle, and waited. Then all at once a woman appeared with her horse, guiding the horse with one hand, waving to the crowd with the other. They climbed up up up a sixty foot ramp until they reached the platform.

The crowd held their breaths. Each of you grabbed one of my hands. And in those seconds before the woman and the horse dove, a current passed between us, a feeling so magical and electric, so full of prospect and promise, that anything was possible. Two hundred pairs of eyes were searching the heavens when that horse jumped and oh so slowly arced its body, the woman crouching to the side, holding the horse's neck even as they smacked the water.

Once again we held our breaths and grabbed each other's hands. Then after the longest ten seconds of my life, the pair at last emerged. We were wet and tired but laughed all the way home, stretching the time, somehow knowing that this moment was special, perhaps even realizing that this moment would be our last best thing.

Of course Aquafair no longer exists. Instead a P.F. Changs and Morton's Steakhouse stand in its place. Funny how the slightest of expectations, the smallest of glimmer of hope can disappoint. I order some chicken lo mein and a glass of iced tea, flush the contents of my coffee cup down the toilet, and return to the hotel.

"It's over," I tell my daughter. "It's been a week, I'm coming home."

I pack my bag, tidy the room, scroll the channels on the TV. But rituals (another lesson to be learned) demand respect. The Tupperware container still holds court on my dresser though only a handful of ashes is left. I stand on the balcony and gaze at the pool area until it's emptied. The hour's late, the light dim, the sky watercolored. A plastic bottle floats. A child's pail rolls. A towel lies on a chair.

Then finally, when dusk settles, I go downstairs. Holding the container, I circle the pool not once but twice and say a prayer. In the distance, pelicans are perched on pilings. With their wings flapping and their bills snapping, they're about to take flight. For a few moments I stop and stare. Then heading toward the ocean with the wind at my back, I toss the remainders of you.

LITERARY BIOS

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Roy Bentley is the recipient of a Creative Writing Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, and fellowships from the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and the Ohio Arts Council. Books include *Boy in a Boat* (University of Alabama Press), *Any One Man* (Bottom Dog), *The Trouble with a Short Horse in Montana* (White Pine Press), *Starlight Taxi* (Lynx House Press); as well as *Walking with Eve in the Loved City*, a finalist for the Miller Williams Poetry Prize and published by the University of Arkansas Press.

Ace Boggess is author of four books of poetry, most recently *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018) and *Ultra Deep Field* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2017), and the novel *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016). His writing has appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *RATTLE*, *River Styx*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and many other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

Travis Cannell is a graduate of University of California, Santa Barbara, where he studied computer science and worked as a reporter for the school newspaper. Currently, he works for Intuit. He's been dedicated to studying his craft through weekly workshops and regional conferences/events, and won the "Debt of Honor International Writer's Workshop: 2018 Award." When he's not writing, he's busy sailing, boating, or flying an airplane.

Kelly Dolejsi's work has been published in *Cincinnati Review*, *North American Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Fifth Wednesday*, and *West Texas Literary Review*, among other journals. Her poem "Loyalty" was nominated for the Best of the Net. Additionally, her chapbook, *That Second Starling*, was published by Desert Willow Press. A graduate of Western New Mexico College in Silver City, NM, and Emerson College in Boston, she now lives in Los Alamos, NM, with her husband and daughters.

James Hanna is a retired probation officer and a former fiction editor of *The Sand Hill Review*. He has had over sixty story publications and three Pushcart nominations. His books, all of which have won awards, are available on Amazon.

Peter Galligan lives in Denver, Colorado with his wife and daughter. He is currently pursuing an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies (writing and business administration) from Western New Mexico University. His writing has been published in *Mud Season Review*. He also produces electronic dance music under the name "Medias Res," and his songs have been placed on several EDM compilations and downloaded in over 65 countries

Richard Krause's collection of fiction, *Studies in Insignificance*, was published by Livingston Press, and his epigram collection, *Optical Biases*, was published by EyeCorner Press in Denmark. Another collection of his stories, *The Horror of the Ordinary*, has been accepted by

Unsolicited Press. His fiction has appeared in *Hackwriters Magazine*, *ink&coda*, *Cold Creek Review*, *Subtle Fiction*, *EXPOUND*, the *Scarlet Leaf Review*, and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. He teaches at Somerset Community College in Kentucky.

Al Maginess's seventh and most recent book, *The Next Place*, was published by Iris Press (2017). Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Shenandoah*, *Plume*, *North American Review*, *ucity*, *Vox Populi* and many other places. He lives in Raleigh North Carolina and teaches at Wake Technical Community College.

Rich Murphy's poetry collections have won two national book awards: Gival Press Poetry Prize 2008 for *Voyeur* and in 2013 the Press Americana Poetry Prize for *Americana*. *Asylum Seeker* is the third in a trilogy out now (2018) Press Americana. First in the trilogy was *Americana*, *Body Politic*, the second, published by Prolific Press in January 2017. Murphy's first book *The Apple in the Monkey Tree* was published in 2007 by Codhill Press. Chapbooks include *Great Grandfather* (Pudding House Press), *Family Secret* (Finishing Line Press), *Hunting and Pecking* (Ahadada Books), *Phoems for Mobile Vices* (BlazeVox) and *Paideia* (Aldrich Press).

Marlene Olin was born in Brooklyn, raised in Miami, and educated at the University of Michigan. Her short stories have been featured or are forthcoming in publications such as *The Massachusetts Review*, *Upstreet Magazine*, *Arts and Letters*, *Eclectica*, and *The American Literary Review*. She is the winner of the Rick DeMarinis Short Fiction Award (2015) , *So To Speak Fiction Prize* (2018) , and a nominee for both the Pushcart and the Best of the Net prizes.

Stan Sanvel Rubin's work has appeared in such magazines as *The Georgia Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *One*, *The Shanghai Literary Review*, and *Agni* and the new anthology, *For the Love of Orcas* (2019). One of his poems received the 2018 Vi Gale Award from *Hubbub*. His fourth full collection, *There. Here.* was published by Lost Horse Press in 2013. His third, *Hidden Sequel*, won the Barrow Street Poetry Book Prize. He lives on the northern Olympic Peninsula of Washington state and writes essay-reviews of poetry for *Water-Stone Review*.

Claire Scott is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has been accepted by the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Enizagam* and *Healing Muse* among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called and Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.

