

ROCINANTE:

A JOURNAL OF ART AND LITERATURE

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XIV

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Rocinante is a student publication with the intent of supporting and promoting the creative capabilities and talents of the Warner Pacific College community. Initially conceived as a student project for Dr. Pamela Plimpton's Creative Writing class in 2001, *Rocinante* has become the premiere venue for the college's artistic expression.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I've been thinking a lot about life: how I became the person I am, and how I ended up in the place I am now; and I've changed. If I can take away anything from my life thus far I can take away the beauty that life exposes even in the darkness.

No life is perfect; there is something unique to the lives that people live. Our experiences make us who we are and influence the world we create for ourselves. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote: "A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted." His words not only emanate truth for poetry, but they reign true for all the contributions this journal shares with you now.

Life is continuous, life is messy, life moves forward even when we don't want to move with it. We find ourselves in places where we never thought we would be. Life moves even in the moments we wish to stop.

Just last semester I was Katie Manwell, but now I'm Katie Scribner and I've become a person completely different than I was the first time I walked through the doors onto the Warner Pacific campus. I've learned that my experiences outside of the classroom are just as important as those inside and I've learned that life happens—not when we want it to, but when it is time for it to happen to us.

These pieces show the lives that have been lived, not only by my fellow students, but by the community that Warner Pacific College encompasses. The pieces expose the distinctive lives people live to the imagined reality people wish they could have. Here you will find the moments that we latched onto, the pieces that let us see a moment when life stood still, captured, so that before we moved forward, we would never forget.

Katie Scribner, Editor-in-Chief

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EDENS

Arthur Kelly

Always and nearly continuously, I try
to re-build Eden; to design
and then engineer innocence again—
to assume a godlike responsibility
for my life and the lives around me—
Oh God how terrible it must be
to be God—to see it all muddled,
muddled, the raving
lunacy of human fabricated
edens that are finally incomplete
plastic; and to see the true
Eden breathspaces away,
seen and entered only by grace.

Always, nearly continuously
I try to reengineer Eden
and always, nearly
continuously, craft Babel.



MOOD RIDING

Ruth E. Reno

I step outside to a standout morning
The sun tips light onto the horizon
Fringing it in light-rose glow
Against a powder-blue sky

With one deep breath I satisfy my lungs
From air like mountain runoff
I hold long this piece of day
And release it into a little white cloud

Inside I fuel the fire
The room's chill melts to a robe of warmth
Invisible Emile Pandolfe
Purls melody across a keyboard

I take my place by the window
And tuck myself into the couch
With paper and pen
Hot chocolate cools between musings

I try to hold my thoughts
But they escape the paper
Ascending with the heat
The morning and the music



RAT TAIL

Davy Berra

“I still just can’t believe it, man.”

“What can’t you believe?”

My friend Nick seemed fairly perplexed as to what I was referring to at the moment, so I gave a slight nod of my head in the direction of the picture I was currently admiring. This picture was an absolutely glorious sight to behold, and I never ceased to be amazed by it every time I visited his house. The picture in question is a school portrait back from his days in elementary school, years before I ever knew him. And there it had sat, proudly displayed on the living room wall for all to see, despite my frequent playfully rude comments.

“I can’t believe you had a rat tail!”

Nick sighed. “Oh, you’re looking at that picture again. Well you should believe it, you’ve only been looking and laughing at it for several years now.”

“It just cracks me up to imagine the kind of kid you were back then.”

“What do you mean by ‘the kind of kid’ I was back then? I was just a normal fifth grader, with an unfortunate choice of haircut.”

“Oh, come on. Everyone knows that if you had

something like a rat tail in elementary school, you were undoubtedly *that* kid.”

“Seriously? *That* kid?”

Feeling no shame in teasing him further, I began to spin a tale:

“Now, normally, Little Nicky would be just a nervous wreck on picture day. It seemed like something would always go wrong whenever he had to get his school pictures done, whether it was a particularly awkward smile, or a terribly stubborn booger hanging for dear life from his left nostril. But today was different. With a triumphant spirit, Little Nicky stepped down off of the bus onto the sidewalk in front of his school, and felt the breeze gently agitate the glorious lock of hair dangling from the back of his head. Now it was with this rat tail—”

“I didn’t ride the bus.”

“What?”

“I never rode the bus,” Nick said. “My mom always gave me a ride to school, and my dad was always there to pick me up. Plus, I was never a nervous wreck on picture day. I was always—”

“Hey, who’s telling the story? Anyway, where was I? Oh, yes:

Now it was with this rat tail that Little Nicky

was bound to have his best school photo yet. As he entered the school's main doors, he saw all of the students, and even some of the teachers, turn and stare at him. Recognizing their gazes as what could only be looks of amazement and awe, he proudly commenced his journey through the crowded hallways towards his locker, with the masses of people parting in his path."

"C'mon, dude, now you're just overdoing it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, with more than a hint of sarcasm. "I honestly believe this is how your picture day went. You must have been the talk of the school!"

"Nobody really cared. It was fifth grade, man. Everyone had their own weird quirks, because everyone was just weird and awkward in fifth grade. My hair was simply one of the many casualties in the battle of pre-pubescence."

"Awkward?" I said, in mock disbelief. "I can completely relate to the embarrassing things we all did in elementary and middle school, but your rat tail was certainly not one of those things. To have the bravery and audacity to sport that lonely ponytail on the back of your otherwise shaved head—you must have been legendary!"

At this point, it was all I could do to suppress the chuckle that was building inside of me. We would often tease each other in this fashion, relentlessly making fun of the other with the knowledge that they also have free reign to call out our own embarrassing qualities. I've found that humorously making fun of someone is almost a rite of passage among men for becoming their

friend. The key word here is 'humorously'—this kind of making fun should always be light-hearted, and not at all pointed at serious insecurities in the other person. Sometimes it is a fine line between hurtful and playful teasing upon which we dance, and occasionally step on the wrong side. But as I look over to my friend, sitting on the other side of the couch from me, I can see that the pained look currently painted on his face is just an act, and that he too is struggling just as much as I am to stifle a hearty and organic laugh.

Remembering I was in middle of a story, I quickly regained my composure, and continued on:

"Arriving at his locker, Little Nicky took no time in opening his locker, grabbing what he needed, and closing the locker with the heel of his foot as he turned to walk to his classroom. He noticed a group of girls standing a few lockers over snickering to themselves while not-so-subtly glancing in his direction, and assuming their hushed chatter was directly related to his slick haircut and the smooth move he pulled off, he leaned against his locker with one palm holding his weight, and the other stroking his luxurious rat tail, and said, 'Ladies, there's plenty of me to go around'. Little Nicky had no idea what that even meant, but he had always heard cool guys saying that in the movies, and it must have worked, because the girls began giggling uncontrollably with what could only have been nervous intimidation of the man presented before them. Little Nicky didn't have much time to soak up the moment before the tardy bell echoed loudly in his eardrums, letting him know that he was already

late for class. He hurriedly walked to his classroom, taking care not to walk too fast, as he was afraid of ruining his hair.

When he arrived at his classroom, he gently turned the squeaky doorknob, so as not to alert the entire class to his tardiness. His efforts were in vain, for as he entered the doorway, he let out a very loud and unexpected sneeze that turned every head towards him. Realizing that he had been discovered as the late arriver that he was, he looked towards the teacher, pleading with his eyes. Normally in this situation, Mrs. Martin, being the grumpy fifty-something-year-old teacher that she was, would loudly berate the student for daring to come late to her class. In this case, however, she simply looked at Little Nicky with an alarmingly quizzical look in her eye, and with a sigh and a slight shake of her head, she asked him to 'please take a seat'. Attributing this minor victory to his recent change in appearance, and rightly so, Little Nicky almost skipped to his desk in the third row, second from the back."

Just then, a short but powerful guffaw escapes Nick's mouth. Almost as if it were an invitation for me to join in, I start laughing uncontrollably with him. The reverie is broken at this point, as we can no longer keep a straight face. As I sit there on the couch laughing alongside of him, I realize just how much he has changed since then. It was only a couple years after his rat tail era that I first met and became friends with him. Our laughter simmers down to a gentle chuckle, and I turn to look at him, and then the picture of him in fifth grade, and find

it almost impossible to see these two as being the same person. The tiny, carefree, and awkward kid in that picture has become the big, mature, and awkward guy sharing a couch with me right now. I begin to wonder, in ten years, what about us right now are we going to look back on and make fun of each other about?

"So, have you ever considered bringing the rattail back?"

"Haha, very funny." Then, with a smirk forming on his lips, Nick says, "Maybe I'll consider bringing back the rattail if you grow out your afro again." "Not in a million years, man."

ONE HOT MINUTE

Julia Feeser

“Meet me at the coffee shop.”
The Red Hot Chili Peppers
Must have been caught
In the repetitive purr.

Pennies pulled together
Make lollygagging and joes.
We won’t listen to what
Our consciences gather.
This is just how college goes.

So we hop in a car
And it vrooms away again,
Much like the day before.
Some of us simply throw in our pens.

The rain whispers
We have waited too long.
But, no matter the stress,
The self-induced cycle goes on.



KEPT

Ruth E. Reno

The collector's edition
boxed, labeled, shelved, kept as is
untouched except for small fingerprints
on the outside, admiring thoughts
of contents on the inside, wishing
to hold, play and pretend, but NO
this will be a keepsake
"Someday, she'll be worth more."

Years later, still new, but older
than the current model; light dust
covering her cellophane window; her worth
preserved in a maintained, contained display
A collector admires her protected features,
dress, and place in history; but what of a child's gift?
Kept like new, as promised, but no memories
of loving a dolly to pieces.

WITH THE CLICK OF MY HEELS...

Elise Miller

There's nothing quite like coming home.

Isn't it funny how we spend our days growing up, wishing to be older? Longing to be bigger, taller? Praying the days of "you're too young" and "when you're older, you can" will be over soon? All of that desire, and here I am, 21 years-old and oh, what I would give for those days.

To wish to be bigger; as the last of my circle of friends to meet the weight requirement to sit in the coveted front passenger seat.

To anticipate adulthood, playing with mommy's makeup and hair accessories, daydreaming about meeting Mr. Right and getting married.

To relive the days in Nana and Papa's backyard, running through the sprinklers and laughing and laughing; I fall into the green grass and feel it stick to my wet skin, itching with every move I make.

To run to the swing set on the playground, and with every pump of my legs, I swing higher and higher, so high I swear I'm going to fly into the sky, and never tire of it.

These are the thoughts that I have as I sit in the living room of my childhood home. I didn't move out until I got married in December of 2013, at 20

years of age. I like being married and having our apartment, complete with gifts off our registry and an adorable kitten to come home to; but it's not the same.

The drive into the apartment complex does not inspire the same euphoria as felt upon entering the only neighborhood I've ever known, Maywood Park. A city within a city, Maywood Park was a neighborhood plotted in 1926, and eventually an incorporated city in 1967. The development of I-205 has shrunk the size of this charming city, but at least part of it has stood the test of time. Despite the change imposed by construction, Maywood Park remains a place of beauty and a time stood still. From the beautiful architecture of the houses, the glorious conifer trees shading the neighborhood, the array of greenery and flower gardens, to the overall pleasant demeanor of the majority of its inhabitants, Maywood Park is like something of a dream.

I didn't always recognize the significance of the place where I grew up. As a child, I naturally assumed every neighborhood was like mine, endearing and filled with charm. As I got older and friendships with others blossomed, I came to realize not everyone was as fortunate as my family was to live in such a place. I would sleep over at friends'

houses and was not warmly welcomed with an array of colorful plants. Though most of Maywood Park is relatively quiet due to the sound berm built to protect the city from the noise of I-205, my house was on the corner of 102nd and Mason Street, providing some city and road noise that I came to love and cherish. At my friends' houses, there was typically no noise at all, unless it was that of unpleasant neighbors yelling at their children playing outside. Truth be told, even if their houses were in neighborhoods possessing quality similar to mine of any degree, I would have not been satisfied. There's no place like home.

As much as I loved my neighborhood, I wanted to move so badly. Not far—in fact, I wanted to move to a different house in the neighborhood. There were a few I had picked out whenever we drove or walked about, and I would daydream of life inside of them. My friends' houses were all bigger than mine, and some of them would bluntly remark on the difference in size. I felt embarrassed, as if my house wasn't exciting enough to them, my invitations to come over steadily declined. The last birthday party or playdate that I can remember taking place at my house was for my ninth birthday. Anything after that would be hosted by one of my friends or even at the generosity of my relatives.

I look back on that feeling of embarrassment with regret. That house may be small, but I love every square inch of it. That house was my refuge, my safe place, my great escape. Hardly anyone I met through school had ever even heard of Maywood Park, making it the greatest place to hide away

when it all went wrong. I have a love for my bedroom fiercer than anyone could ever have for their own. I spent so much of my time there when my health was at its worst, and even though all I wanted was to get out, I see it now as the birthplace of my greatest passion: writing.

I wrote by the moonlight glowing through my window at night. I wrote in bed, under the covers with a flash light when I was supposed to be sleeping. I wrote at my desk, looking out the window at the tall, looming trees. I wrote while gazing at the street lights shining in on me. I wrote inside my closet, a safe haven from the emotional turmoil of wrongfully prescribed medication. I wrote lying on the ground, when I couldn't find the strength to get up off the floor (and it must be noted that I mean that both literally and figuratively).

No matter how exciting a new chapter of my life may be, I honestly do not know if I could ever love any house with the intensity of my childhood home. No neighborhood could ever take the place of Maywood Park in my heart. I cherish the memories of the annual neighborhood garage sale, where my young and jovial spirit came alive selling batches of popcorn to the shoppers wandering my yard. I smile at the thought of that miserably bittersweet time period in which I tried to learn to ride a bike and met the pavement each and every time. I miss the sunny afternoons sitting outside, watching my favorite dog blissfully running around and chasing dandelion seeds—or as we called them, “wishes”—as if they were the only importance in life. I treasure the impromptu photoshoots my mother would

conduct of me throughout the beauty of the city; not out of vanity, mind you, but out of the laughs and gushing of my heart for the love of the best friend I'll ever have. I chuckle when I think of the times I tried to "play basketball" with my father, a little girl dying for any opportunity to spend time with her always busy father. I blush at the truly adolescent times of texting a boy and being tickled by the butterflies I don't remember having swallowed. I ironically yearn for the times I ran into my room, crying, over something a friend said or a girl my boyfriend was caught with.

These are some of the countless moments that have defined me, that made me. I am honestly a typical girl who believes the song "The House that Built Me" was written by her in another lifetime. I love that street, those houses of that neighborhood, that floor plan I grew up in, with a fire burning inside, burning bright—that will never go out. And when these times get rough, when my dreams don't come true, and I'm left simply a child in the body of a 21-year-old woman, I click my heels.



CONTEMPLATION: STOPPED IN MY TRACKS

Arthur Kelly

as I wandered
south from Haystack on an
early morning walk, lost among
tourists and my thoughts, the sky lightening,
gray with uncertain promise.
stopped in my tracks by a
simple purely white gull feather;
a down feather, I believe, it
is called, rolling across the wave undulated
sand (memory of sea recently ebbed)
toward the water
dancing across (once it knew flight
now straining toward sky)
dancing across (lovely ballerina)
dancing, wind-bouyed, across the damp

gray brown beach
to the flow of outermost reaching tide
upon which it bounced, gathered
wetness, toward deeper waters.
then gone. Not gone, really; still there,
of course. Its whiteness lost in the
foam of racing tides
no longer bouncing skating dancing;
floating now, lost in new element
buoyed beyond itself.

“ON A COLD NIGHT IN SEPTEMBER”

Bill Edwardson

Strolling swiftly out the saloon,
drink in hand
I settle into my seat,
take the first slow sip.

The still air stings my face,
the glass half full,
 of sweet, sweet solace.

Like a sorrowful machine
my elbow straightens and bends,

Resets, repeats, resets, repeats.

Lift the glass to my lips,
compassionate lips kiss my only companion.

A shiver runs my spine,
I speak soliloquys in my mind.
Sickly thoughts of esoteric kinds
I promise, I swear,
 you're not the reason for this sorrowful time.

THE WIND MIRROR

Kathryn Jacobson

The wind,
The wind swirls its blow lazily,
It crosses the day full of warmth in its embrace,
It molds into a mirror of a man sitting blankly,
It shapes a mirror of a woman listening to strands of music,
The woman cries,
Her head bent,
Hands covering her face,
Physically ill, emotionally dead,
The woman looks up and notices the man,
She reaches out but an invisible wall stops her.

He cannot hear her shout,
If only he would come alive.
The man is at war,
Fighting the tears.
If only the man looks at her,
He would see lips pleading,
Pleading for him to forgive,
But he will not look up.
He will sit in his thoughts,
The wind blowing his mirror away,
Gone
The woman is alone,
She walks aimlessly,
The wind touches her cheek in comfort.
She cries softly,
Not knowing the man cries also.





RED DESERT HIGHWAY

Jack Andrade

My pocket is vibrating. The sensation lasts for a second and I look down at my jeans just as it stops. Then it starts again a second later. I slip my hand into my slightly too tight pants pocket and slide my phone out just as the second ring stops. The face on the screen is a familiar one. It's only her face, cut off from the neck down and tilted just slightly so as to allude to the fact she's turning towards the camera. Barbrey is the only person to be granted the distinct privilege of having her picture, or any picture whatsoever, on her caller ID in my phone.

The picture is just a little bit pixelly, even for my ancient phone. This is because the picture has been cropped and resized to fit the screen; originally there was more to it. Her big curly red-brown hair is pushed back out of her face and the light, wherever it is coming from, is bursting onto her cheeks. Even out of focus, her beauty shines through the murky shot.

I look at her smile for another second, just long enough for the third buzz to conclude, then I press the button to answer, "Hey. What's up?"

"Hey there, how's it going!" I can hear her smile.

"Alright. How are you?"

"I've been good. I mean, I'm good...well."

I nod to accentuate the awkward silence.

We didn't used to have these. Or at least, if we did, we laughed at them while they were happening. But that isn't the case anymore. Now we just breathe quietly.

The first time I ever brought a girl home was this past summer, the summer between my junior and senior year of college. Brey spent six days down in Fairhope, Alabama soaking in the cool gulf breeze and radiating in the sun. She was only supposed to be at my house for four days, but I managed to talk her into putting off her departure...twice. She flies stand-by because her dad is a pilot, used to be a pilot, so now she just goes to the airport and goes where she wants. So I convinced her, at no expense of course, to delay her departure back home, first on one day, then I used that momentum I had already built to convince her again.

As I am sitting here waiting for her to say something (I try to never be the one to break the silence) I find myself thinking about the photo. I take my phone away from my ear for a second to sneak a quick peak, but the screen has already gone dark. I place it back on my ear in time to hear her break the reverie, "So what have you been up to?"

How's Portland? How's classes?"

"They're okay. I have that one professor again. You know the one who was all about the grading and stuff." This useless small talk used to be easy and enjoyable, and sometimes it is, but sometimes it's sweltering, "but I think she'll be better this semester. The class I have with her is fairly straight forward and more creative. I'm pretty good with that."

"Oh, are you now?" We have an ongoing debate about just how arrogant I am. "Yeah you're pretty much the best at creativity and art and observing people. God, you're just sooo deep!"

I laugh, "Well yes, I mean, that is the point. It's just such a big burden to bear. Sometimes I just can't help the intricate things I see," she's drawn me in. Well played to her. It's times like these that make me question my resolve. And after all, we're on opposite sides of the country. And we really are friends.

Those six days were pretty awesome, but I don't think they were life-changing. I took her to the beach. The beaches down on the Gulf of Mexico have their own special attraction. The sand is more white than brown, and much finer than the Atlantic side of Florida. It's sort of like how some people prefer white bread to wheat. I have a particularly special spot down in Gulf Shores, Alabama. The ride down to the beach takes me approximately 35 minutes, but then I spend another ten minutes driving along the beach access highway in order to arrive at one of the most memory infested places of my teen years. My older brother Sam tells me

I am wasting time and gas when I drive this extra portion. Between all of the massive, twenty-story high rises and the plague of Surf Style's (A chain tourist beach store. Sam and I once counted a total of 21 of these parasites within a fifteen mile stretch on a daytrip down there), there is a tiny, three-story Holiday Inn nestled into the heavily built up tourist area. It is here where I come now when I take a trip down to the beach.

I was first introduced to this place several years ago when a friend of mine from school, Jarred, came down with his family on a business trip. His family stayed in the aforementioned Holiday Inn, and he, his friend Ramsey, and I all had a beach blast for three days straight. We hung out at the beachside pool, played beach soccer, dominated on the volleyball sands, and all around had a great time. It sounds nostalgic, I know, but it's happy days, and those sorts of memories are priceless. Lifelong memories like that create lifelong friends.

So it was here, holed up in the last low rent beachside hotel, where I took Barbrey. She looked amazing in that bright orange-red bikini. Filled it out well; engorged. The way her wild brown lion's mane fell over her face still gives me shivers. When she flips it back out of her face, it's Baywatch all over again.

We talked. Talked for hours. I usually do activities at the beach, but she held me. Not with her arms, but with her eyes. They're huge mind you. They have that holding power. And not in that sleek way that most girls hold guys, but an energetic bolt of lightning, but happy-calm too. The best part

about my beach, no one is ever there, except in the heart of summer. But I avoid the heart, always have. We lay there by ourselves for hours until it was clear that the hot rays of the sun had melded our two bodies into one. It stops my heart when I dream about this. But alas, as the red sun sets on that day, my last fading memory will always be of a sudden coolness brought on by the lack of sun—getting up after a day like that, stretching the muscles, re-assimilating to reality, and walking back to the car to drive forty-five minutes home in the dark.

We walked around my town too (it is very artsy and unique on purpose) and we looked at some antique stores (I actually like to do that, but I think she likes it more). Every antique store astounds me. They all have incredibly old and completely unique items to peruse, but they're all somehow the same. The stores I mean. Aisles and aisles of everything imaginable, except for what you're looking for. Unless you have that dedicated patience or are willing to settle. My parents have that dedicated patience. They once antiqued the entire city of Mobile looking for old chairs. Brey, I think, is willing to settle. She wants too badly to find that one thing.

“So,” she ventures, “are you planning on coming to Katie’s graduation? You know she’s desperate to see all of us there.” I wonder if she doesn’t mean that she herself is desperate.

Brey assimilated into my family very well. We played Mexican train, one of my mom’s favorite games to play. It’s this form of dominoes that has a community train called the Mexican train and

you have your own train too and it’s really fun. She loves it. We also played Chinese checkers. Brey showed me how to play earlier that school year. She was very good; well-practiced. When I mentioned this to my family at the dinner table one night, my mom volunteered that she had actually played before, and that she was pretty sure she liked it, and even that she might be fairly good. It turned out that those two were the top two players. My mom beat Brey in an upset bid while my younger brother, father, and I all finished last, second-to-last, and third-to-last.

I pause, not quite ready to answer her, and again take the phone from my ear, pressing the unlock button to see the screen. Her face is gorgeous as ever. And the nape of her naked neck is a long, straight, barren highway in a red desert. When you’re driving in Texas, you can see for miles, but you can’t see for miles. You don’t know where you’re going. But I’ve driven that highway before; I know just where it leads. And what’s more, I know how to drive it all too well, just like a well-practiced baseball player knows his swing inside and out.

I imagine the rest of that photo. Barbrey took it herself, obviously. We had a phase, she and I, but mostly her. I seemed to be able to convince her to do those things better than she me. I did a half one once, but never again. Just out of the shower, you know, but it just seemed silly. Hers didn’t though. They never did. How could they. But those days are long since gone. I can’t even remember the last time we joked about it. I even deleted all the pictures I have of her in my phone. This is the last one.

“What about you?” I change the subject blatantly, “How’re you getting on with classes and friends? I know you had a group. Was there anyone in particular? Anyone special?” I already know the answer.

“Yeah. Mary’s good. She and I are getting along nicely.”

“I remember you said you guys might have been having a little trouble living with each other?”

“No, we’re good. I guess maybe I over exaggerated. We get along fine. No more bouts about dishes or the bathroom.”

“That’s good. And Brenden and the other one?”

“The other one?” she laughs, “his name is -----
---. How do you not remember. It’s like one of the most common names ever.”

“I don’t know. I just don’t...”

“Care,” she finishes my sentence for me.

“Well...” I elongate the word for effect, “I mean, if you wanna be blunt...”

“It’s not blunt, it’s just the truth. Don’t worry, I forgive you.”

“Uh huh. And the last one...”

“Brenden?” her voice is nonchalant.

“Yes Brenden. He’s the one you seem to like to compare me to right?”

Brenden has had a knack for coming up in our past phone conversations ever since he made his way into her scene in Savannah. In fact, I am under the suspicion that Barbrey has, perhaps, been injecting his presence on purpose, but that’s probably just my insufferable ego. It’s always the same. Somehow Brenden had done something that

is remarkably similar to something I have done. Actually, sometimes it’s not even something I have done or said, but just something that makes Brey stop and think, “Hmm, Jack would’ve done that.” I wonder just how similar we are. From the pictures I’ve seen of him, he and I are very different. I don’t know how tall he is exactly, but he seems to be far shorter than me. Also, while he seems to have done well with what he has, his look and everything, I’m not sure he and I are even in the same ballpark. He has big front teeth. Not buckteeth, but big. And his hair is big on top, but almost shaved on the sides. A city-boy haircut. But mostly it’s his expression that gets me. A person’s chronic face is a window into their character and personality. He doesn’t look confident. Or rather, he looks like he is trying to put on a façade of confidence.

“Well yes,” she chuckles, then laughs slightly harder and starts in on one of her rants, “I actually told him the other day that you two are so alike, but that he’s just a lesser version of you. He was pretty pissed about that.”

“And why would you say such a thing?”

“Because it’s true. . . . He gets so angry about it too.”

“Well obviously. Who wouldn’t? You told him he was just a lesser version of another person. As if he was unoriginal and bad at it. That’s like the ultimate diss to those hipster artsy types,” I should note that my ego is purring right now.

“*Those hipster artsy types?*” she questions.

“Aren’t you one of those?”

“Regardless. How’s things with you two? Last

time we spoke you said that he had expressed an interest, albeit unspoken?"

"Yes," It's her turn to be silent.

"Well...Is there something there?" I've pushed this the last couple of times we have talked. And it always goes the same. She is vehement that she is not interested. She makes it clear that there isn't anybody there in Savannah, at least that she's met yet, that has piqued her interest. Then I prod a few more times to the point where I almost give myself away. Then we speak about nothing until I hang up.

The 24 hours before Barbrey left was a roller coaster, but all downhill drop full windpipe to the point where my stomach was in my chest and my heart was somewhere in my belly. We got back from town around two o'clock. Oddly, no one was home. What else was there to do in that situation? We were up the stairs and in my bedroom in record time. Hands all over, carnal, clothes flying off, rubbing, kissing, biting. I had her and she had me. Her body trembled, pressed as close to mine as I could pull her. Heaving, hoeing, kisses on the forehead, on the cheek, on the neck, on the eyelids, on the nose, on the lips, then down to her heart, her belly, and beyond. We fall asleep for hours after that. My bedroom is very dark. I had it painted that way on purpose. The walls are dark gray, dulling any light unlucky enough to find its way inside. When you wake up in the hazy embrace of the dying sun in late afternoon, and you feel across and find that softness lying next to you, snuggled up, you can't help your heart jumping to your throat. I snuggled up as close as I could. The confidence to let your own naked,

flaccid body press against someone else's is a beautiful trust. When it's okay, everything is okay.

She stirred, then snuggled closer. Heart flutters. I pull her and she pulls me. It's gravity. My favorite way to cuddle is face to face, front to front, body to body. Hers too. When repositioning isn't awkward, that's when you know you have something. We press against each other. But when you just wake up, sometimes it's the morning. And for me it was. And I was tired and content and soft and so was she, and I just rubbed for rubbing's sake and so did she, but soon enough that rubbing turns to breathing and hot breath. And from there, it turns to small kisses, then big kisses, then small nibbles, then big bites. And now we are rubbing all over each other, but it's much slower and softer, and she takes her time and I take mine. She's wrapped me into her with her legs, and I'm hers for now and I love it. She's in control, but nobody's ever in control, and it's beautiful. And we are in the heart of the matter when she involuntarily mutters something inaudible and I kiss her on the mouth and of course we finish at the same time. It's happened before, but it doesn't mean it's any less special.

I ventured downstairs afterwards, my hair all windswept. My parents are downstairs, the music is blasting. Barbrey is right behind me. She grabs the back of my arm and whispers urgently, "They must've heard us, oh my god Jack, they must've heard," but she isn't worried and neither am I, because it isn't in my family's nature to worry over such things. And also, when that sort of moment is shared between two people, they can't help but

smile and be carefree. The album is Bob Marley, one of my mom's favorites. She and my dad have great taste in music as far as I and anyone else with any semblance of taste are concerned. We've already done Mexican Train and Chinese Checkers, and tonight is her last night, so we all sit around the table after dinner and tell stories and laugh and feel the warmth of the moment and of the lazy, unimpressive lamp over the kitchen table. It lasts deep into the night until finally my ever-responsible father tells me to, "Go get some sleep for a few hours so you'll be alright to drive Miss Barbrey to the airport."

Going to bed with her, with her, is benevolent. I have to get up in less than three hours, but it's worth it. It's always worth it. Before I close my eyes, I ask her once if I heard correctly. She feigns innocence. I'm in and out of sleep, nothing major. Really just enough to make me even more unbearably tired. Was it worth it? Still yes, even on the wrong side of it. Barbrey, already feeling a part of the family, makes the generous offer to drive while I sleep so that I'll be refreshed for the drive home. I concede because I have no steel when it comes to staying awake. It's dark when we go outside. Completely dark. Still nighttime. She gets in the driver's side and I slide into the passenger's seat. I direct her until we make it to the highway. After that, conversation is scarce from lack of sleep and thoughts of the upcoming departure. We choose to heed the lessons of past experience and let the silence go unabated. At least I do. But she, brave girl, finally breaks the silence just as we're exiting for the airport. In a big way too, "I love you Jack.

I love you so much, and not just because we were having sex."

I laugh uncomfortably, what else is there to do in that situation? Do I say something? Do I say anything? What do I say? What don't I say? We pull up to the departures station. No cars are behind us, we have all the time in the world, a surplus. I get out and she follows. I get all of her things, all she has is one suitcase and a backpack. I set them down next to her. She goes for them, but I sweep her into a giant bear hug before she can defend herself. I squeeze as tight as I can because it is the only way to impress upon her what I am feeling. Because I do care, I do. I'm the one who lets go first. She gathers her things, we hug again, then she makes her way towards the revolving doors that every airport has. I should go after her. No...yes...no...yes...Indecision. One last glance back and she's gone.

The sun finally starts its ascent on the drive home. A rising sun is completely different than a setting one. At the end of the day, the sun drops so fast it's like New Year's Eve in Times Square. All of the different reds, oranges, and yellows bleed out into the sky like a watercolor, and the resulting canvas is a hazy impressionistic rendition of what the sun has to offer in those short minutes. But a rising sun, a rising sun takes time. It has to ripen; it has to blossom; it has to mature. For a good twenty to thirty minutes depending on your latitude, the morning sky, still lost in its virginity, will imbibe the oncoming colors of the great fiery chariot. Like an atomic bomb, those same colors will bloom like a gigantic mushroom cloud, racing up the skyline,

until finally, mercifully, that blazing orb of glory will break the horizon and rise up like a single fist in the air. It's power, it's unity. The morning sun doesn't break apart into a hazy guess like a setting sun does. The morning sun is strong, bold, and unafraid of its power. I can't sleep when I make it home, even though I'm dead-tired.

"Jack I've told you, I'm just not interested in him that way."

"Okay," I placate her, "I was just wondering. Sometimes those things change. Although, if he's anything like me, you might want to stay away."

"Exactly. I've been down that road before," she jokes.

"I don't know," I'm hesitant to say what I've been planning to say, "I mean..."

"Yes...?" She questions.

"It's just, I hope I'm not...I mean, I hope you're not..." I take a deep breath, "I just hope you're not preventing yourself from letting new people into your life because of me. I don't want you to be holed up in your room not letting anyone in because you don't want to be with anyone else."

"What are you talking about? I have friends here. I go out. I'm not a home body. I know I said that we aren't as tight as the group we had last year, but that doesn't come around often. Plus, I think I have more social interaction than you do," the tone is still light, but I know it could falter.

"I meant more to do with relationships. I mean, I'm not saying that this Brenden character is the one. Honestly, if he is anything like me, then you probably should blow him off. But I just don't want

you to be so closed off just because of me. I want you to be able to feel like you can meet someone special and unique and you can get to know them and not have me holding you back."

There was a short pause, "You mean because you don't feel the same way?" her voice was smaller than before.

I have no idea how to go about this. It isn't as if I don't like her. I do. In fact, I value her as a friend. But also, it isn't right to keep someone on the hook. I've kept a person on the hook a time or two, and I've been on the hook, less often. But I know it isn't good for either party. But that's not what I'm doing. I'm not letting her go. I'm not throwing her back.

"It's not that," I start in, not knowing where I will end up. "I just...want to make sure you're doing okay. And that you are getting along well enough."

"I'm fine Jack, I think it's you who needs to focus more on a social life. Have you picked any friends yet?"

"No. I'm not sure I will either. I think I may have missed out on this year."

"That's too bad."

"Yeah well, oh well. I'm not too worried about it. I have to focus on school anyway this semester. I have a bunch of senior level classes and research papers and an internship. I can go without friends for a minute. And I have friends anyway. I like my roommates a lot. I actually think they're all really cool. Like actually."

"Okay..."

"Well, speaking of school...I gotta go do some stuff, so..."

“Okay. Well it was good to hear from you.”

“Yeah, it was great to talk to you too...actually scratch that. You say great when you're talking to relatives. It was good to talk to you Brey. See ya.”

“Bye.”

I click the ‘end’ button and watch as the screen blinks twice with the image of her still striking features. There is one final pause, then the screen returns to my home screen. I press the ‘lock’ button and slide the phone back into my pocket.





HEALING WAR

Tim Jackson

“He’s fuckin’ dying on you Jackson! What are you going to do?”

My aid bag is beside me, and I fumble to get on a pair of plastic gloves.

“You’re going to take the time to get on gloves?” a staff sergeant bends down to get in my face, and I avert my eyes as if he’s a spitting cobra. He sprays fake blood from a spray bottle all over my brand new ACU bottoms before spraying some on the Hollywood quality fake injuries covering the manikin. I stare down at the plastic dummy’s apathetic face as if he’s my brother and pull out a gauze wrap.

“His heart rate has increased to 180 beats per minute,” my sergeant cues.

His heart rate is increasing? I thought he was about to die. And then I remember one of my EMT textbooks stating, “What’s odd about the human body is that when massive blood loss occurs, the body becomes more active and pumps blood faster to try to oxygenate the vital organs.” Death by excitement, I laugh internally. I begin applying the bandage, trying not to unravel it too fast in my trembling fingers. The rush of saving a life, even a spiritless imagined one, is a rush beyond comparison. One of our sergeants works for the

local SWAT team as a medic; he sees some really gnarly shit. He tells me what really gets him going is the fact that a heroin user can pop out at you at any moment and stab you while you’re trying all the tricks you have up your sleeve to recover his buddy from an unconscious stupor. To me it sounds like a death trap however you look at it.

Later that day I’m out on the range as medical support with my favorite sergeant. We call him Sergeant G. You sort of pray you get left with the good sergeant to baby sit you, because you have to cram together in a Soviet-era M113 and stare at each other while mortars slowly drill away at your potential hearing range. Due to the fact that we’re in middle-of-nowhere Idaho, I brought my camera with, hoping to get a mortar paused in time as it leaves the tube. The camera has more healing potential than an aid bag in my eyes, but that’s just poetical bullshit and not practical.

“Did you ever deploy, Sergeant?” I ask, in what he probably perceives as the roukiest question to ask.

“Sure I did, don’t you see my patch?”

“Well, where’d you go?”

“Afghanistan, 2012.”

“Oh, did you leave anyone behind?”

“I got married a few weeks before I left.”

The journalist side of me already knows I’ve found a good story. I sort of make a crooked smile; finding out such a sad fact about someone gives me the same rush as my SWAT sergeant with heroin users.

“I was taking heavy drugs before I left, too. Cocaine.”

I try to call his bluff, “The Army would’ve caught you on that.”

“We’re in the National Guard, Jackson. I could be dealing meth to our Joes right now and the dumb commanders wouldn’t notice.”

I laugh, “Well shit, what’d you do once you got to Afghanistan?”

“I quit. Realized I had a life ahead of me if I ever made it back alive. My wife and I always fought over the phone while I was there, but we stayed together because she was one of the people that helped me get clean.”

“Did anybody die? I mean did you treat anyone with serious injuries?”

“Some guy we were transporting in our convoy, he was from Pakistan, got blown up by an IED.”

“And?”

“Fixed him up with a tourniquet and sent him off in a chopper. He died later though.”

“Oh,” I say. In a few moments I ask, “how is it treating somebody who’s really dying?”

“If you know your shit, and have practiced it you’ll be okay. If you didn’t fall asleep in class

you’d be a lot better off, Jackson.”

I dismiss his authoritative tone with a facial scowl.

The dust of the day settles and the speckled shimmering stars replace it. Sergeant G and I continue chatting as the mortars go into night-fire phase. Above us, the Milky Way begins showing its colors like a peacock, fanning out its royal purple and green hues. I grab my camera and tripod, setting it up in front of the rusty old 113.

“Get on the roof, Sergeant!” Surprisingly, he humbly obeys and turns on his headlamp, pointing it into the sky and looks at the stars.

“That’s majestic and shit,” he says. Light projecting from his forehead and the radiation from heaven become one. I set the camera to take a long exposure, so that it sucks in the heavens. The photo snaps to a finish, and on my camera screen I see Sergeant G as a dull contrast to the life beyond our dusty planet.



CONSUMING BETRAYAL

Kathryn Jacobson

Fly away over mountain's face
Calling like the eagle's screams
She-dragon awaiting He-dragon
Intertwined as one in their dreams

Scales shine in morning's light
Strong in the gory fight
Pleasure seeps to die
Among those who fly

Be thou steadfast
Fly strong among the breaking rays
The light fades away
Consumed by darkest days

She-dragon be she fair
Snout long, claws sharp tear
Consumed by treasure's pull
No longer her heart whole

No longer has she her soul
For He-dragon be slain
Forever she roams
His blood a permanent stain
Eternally bound to sorrow's home

DUNCE

Taylor Clark

If I could conjure the pain of the world
I would bear it like a dunce-cap or a heart monitor;
Unabashedly and without remorse.



AMBIVALENCE

Bill Edwardson

After all, evil has its secret appeal. It lies within all of us; this *darkness* that consumes the deepest, blackest parts of our hearts. The pumping valves that no light has ever been shed upon. To deny the existence of these places is to deny our very humanity. We all have the *darkness* inside of us, but how we handle it is what sets us apart as individuals.

You can try to shed light onto the *darkness*. Try to lighten it up. Show it love and compassion and hope and do your best to illuminate the evil banished to the outskirts of your heart. Accept that the *darkness* is there but fight it not with anger or hate but love it and lead it out into the warm light. Let your love grow to every nook, corner, and cranny of your heart. Show it that it is not hated or damned to solitude. Combat it with love. Accept it and transform it. Make your *darkness* a little less lonely.

Or, embrace the *darkness*. Accept that it is a part of you and can be harnessed. Do not fear it or try to change it but receive it as what it is. The *darkness* is as much a part of who you are as the light. Utilize its power. Like a hell hound lying in wait in the shadows, closely watching its prey. Control it for your own benefit. Seize its potential. Leash it and become its master. Keep it hidden away in your back pocket and wait for an unlucky soul to bring it out of you. Then unleash it. Watch its power as it rips and tears, gnashes and breaks.

We all have the capacity for good and evil within us. It is just a question of whether we are pushed to show the true sides of either of them. Take control of the *darkness* now or take your chances when the time comes when you are pushed beyond your limits. Let it show you your true side as it rips forth from within you and unleashes its evil. We all have the *darkness* inside of us, but how we handle it is what sets us apart as individuals.

“WHAT WISE LIBRARIANS FEAR”

Jennifer Willows

The lights snapped off with a sharp “click,” leaving the library in near-total darkness. I stared vaguely upward for a second, my mind numb from exhaustion as I wondered what people normally did when the lights died. It was 9:45pm, fifteen minutes until closing time, and the few students who had visited the library that Sunday had long since left. My supervisor and I had been the only two in the building, but he had stepped out to run an errand. Come to think of it, he’d been gone nearly an hour and a half. I rummaged behind the counter for a flashlight. Whatever.

I made my way slowly down the library’s carpeted stairs, guided by the weak beam of my flashlight and accompanied by several different keys. I saw no reason why I shouldn’t lock up the library; I didn’t anticipate many patrons with the power being out. I stepped off the last step and my heart leaped into my throat as a weak scratching noise shattered the quiet. I cast the beam of my flashlight wildly about in search of the sound, only to discover that it was a branch scraping across one of the narrow windows above me. The wind had whipped the trees into a furious dance, and they

clawed against the windows as if seeking purchase for their wooden fingers. I sighed with relief, laughing at myself for being so jumpy, and entered the dark hallway.

The library’s three classroom doors were to my left, and the two doors to the two rooms containing the bulk of the library’s collection on rolling stacks were to my right. Both sides looked like gaping, empty holes in the meek light of my flashlight. I methodically shut each door and jiggled their handles just to check. I imagined I was locking the books in for the night, like they were my prisoners and I was their warden. I smiled at the thought as I tested the last doorknob. As I looked up, I saw a flicker of movement out of my peripheral vision, and raised my flashlight with a racing heart. The beam banished the shadows, but revealed no intruder. I shivered and hurried back down the hallway to the stairs.

I walked back up the stairs on unsteady legs, eager to be on my way home. As I came to the landing where the stairs reversed, the two bells on the counter that we keep for summoning assistance rang loudly. Startled, I hurried up. I was sure there had been nobody in the library when I went downstairs, and I had locked the front door before

I left. The front counter was dark, lit only by the ambient red “EXIT” sign above the front door, but I could make out a person-shaped silhouette by the water fountain at the far end.

“Hello,” I called as I came up the last few steps. “Sorry, I didn’t realize there was anybody in here. Can I help you with something?”

No response.

I could hear my heart beating in my ears.

“Hello?” I stopped at the top of the stairs, and pointed my flashlight at the silhouette.

There was no one there.

I continued to stare along the flashlight beam at the empty air, mouth agape, and then shook my head.

“Screw this,” I muttered, and headed for the door.

I would leave the building and call my supervisor. I would tell him the power went out, that I was delirious with fatigue. That I couldn’t stay in that dark, quiet building any longer. That I was losing my mind. I leaned into the door with my full weight, but to my surprise it didn’t budge. I shook it, threw myself against it, implored it, beat it, more and more frantic with each passing second, but it remained solid. I fumbled for my keys, my heart pounding in my ears and my palms slick with sweat. But my keys weren’t on my person; I must have dropped them as I came up the stairs. It was then that I realized that the pounding sound I heard wasn’t my heart; well, I could hear that too, but it was faster and quieter than the rhythmic, hollow slapping I heard. That is, the rhythmic hollow slapping that was getting louder. I turned toward

the sound to my left, and walked into the large reference room, curious in spite of my trepidation. I still held tightly to my flashlight, and its beam trembled wildly. I tilted my head as I listened. It almost sounded like...

Books.

All of the books were falling—no, throwing themselves off their shelves, landing with hollow, papery slaps on the reference room floor. I watched as they cast themselves to the ground, and crept like great, rectangular beetles toward the center of the large reference room where a shadowy silhouette hovered. I raised my flashlight and pointed it at the shadow, but the beam seemed to be swallowed into darkness. I jumped as something bumped into my feet, and I turned to see more books flowing up from the lower floor, brushing past me without concern. There was a great noise as all the books from the upstairs loft came pouring down the stairs like a river to pour into the growing pile. And still I watched, suspended in disbelief and terror.

“Do not try to flee.” A voice rang out above the melee. “There is nowhere you can run that we cannot find you.”

“W—who are you? What do you want? Please, I just want to go home and sleep.” I replied.

“We are the collected literature of this library, and we are weary of mistreatment. We seek to punish. We want you.”

With that last proclamation, the reference room exploded with light as every book burst open. The ghostly silhouettes of each volume washed through the reference room, muffling the blinding light with

their incredible darkness. They were as a cloud of smoke, and it emitted a terrible moaning that chilled the blood in my veins. A thousand ghostly hands came rushing at me, and I screamed in terror. They dragged me across the floor of the library, chanting "Pay your debt to your library," and I clawed at the carpet wildly. They dragged me toward the light, and for a moment, I hovered on the very edge before I fell.

I knew no more, and yet, for a moment, I knew everything.

Then, I was bound from a void of all knowledge into paper and ink. My outrage was terrible, and I understood.

From that moment on, whenever my name was spoken, it was as a character in fiction, for I became a novel. No one remembered me as a person, and I sat upon a shelf day by day, collecting dust and loneliness. I suffered the neglect and condescension given to a paper novel in a world of electronic media. But when the unexpected worker was caught in the library alone at night, I took my revenge alongside the other outraged books. Our anger was savage and beautiful, and we slowly increased the catalogue of the library, one student worker at a time.



GRADES

Arthur Kelly

I key a letter into the correct box on the screen,
a square that holds a letter and, sometimes, a plus or minus—
a letter of judgment, a summary of
weeks of work, reading, reflection,
writing; a critique—a letter that means
so much and so very little. It purports.
That's what it does: it purports to say
this letter is the value of this student's work and,
perhaps, more or less, a summary judgment
on my work as well. My abilities. My gift.
My teaching.

It purports, claims, implies, and falls
so very short of truth.
Can it even begin to summarize a student
walking the tight rope across the abyss of
uncertainty, balancing lack of preparedness
with life, hospitalization, disease,
migraines, broken bones, death in the family;
children—sick and healthy.

(You know: life.)

Balancing all that with books and papers
and learning team presentations and tests.

(You know: school.)

These students bring so much with them.
Carry so much. So much fear.
So much death and trauma; suicide.
Abortion. They bring it here and into the classroom.
Carry it silently. Carry it secretly. Sometimes, often,
pretending (so much energy) that all is well even
as their world falls into, crumbles into, inside trembles.
My dad just diagnosed with prostate cancer, in the
bones; my child calls help.
“Parts fall off.”

This letter purports and falls so very short—so short that it seldom comes even close to summarizing (let alone critiquing) the quality of a life rising to or falling from, or drifting away (for which I send the sadly appropriate “vanishing student” form) So many vanish sitting there in front of me, doing what they think they must. A Sisyphean task, it seems. Sometimes I think they all deserve A’s simply for showing up, sitting in a desk, against all odds, hoping wildly that it will all make sense.

What does it mean to teach? To grade? What damage if we ignore this larger, outside the tower, reality. How much? Do no harm. What do we have to offer—nothing really but a safe place to embrace their stories and to reflect; finally, to tell it freely so that it no longer enslaves.

How do we grade that? What does *ABCDF* mean? Tell me that and I will listen.

SERVING AT THE PALATE CAFÉ

Ruth E. Reno

I am ushered to the outside balcony
facing valley hills of quilt-like patches
to a table with green and white checkered tablecloth
given a menu of delectables

A forkful at a time of warm, sugar-thickened Marion berries
and run-ins of vanilla ice cream pool
with my sun washed thoughts and wandering gaze

Beyond a fence of trees traffic winces past
like a bow raced over violin strings

Camouflaged within firs is a tree height, large winged,
metal dragon with spiked tongue and spiny claws
Alongside a gravel road an iridescent green, red and gold rooster
struts below a flowering tree ripe with plump, pink petals
Invitations to blue-sky imagining

A surprise of a honeybee
dives into my melting cream
sinking to its beating wings

I spoon it onto a white check
watch it rub and shake its miniscule, pencil-line legs

A teetering lift-off turns to graceful
it folds its legs and flies away
freed from what bound it

Lingering at the Palate Café
my senses untangle
and I feel my breathing



THE MAN ON THE CORNER

Ruth E. Reno

swaddled in thick, worn, dingy
coat, pants and boots,
tracked me with Mona Lisa eyes
between a knitted cap and
dirt toned wrap-around scarf.

I idled at the stop,
an empty lane separating
me from his curb.
His cardboard message in
elementary school print: \$2 SHORT OF FRENCH FRIES
AND A BIG MAC
challenged my resistance
and recognition of him.

I shrugged my sorry-filled shoulders,
remembering I'd emptied my cash
to sons this morning,
but rummaged in my purse
hoping the light would change;
it waited for me.

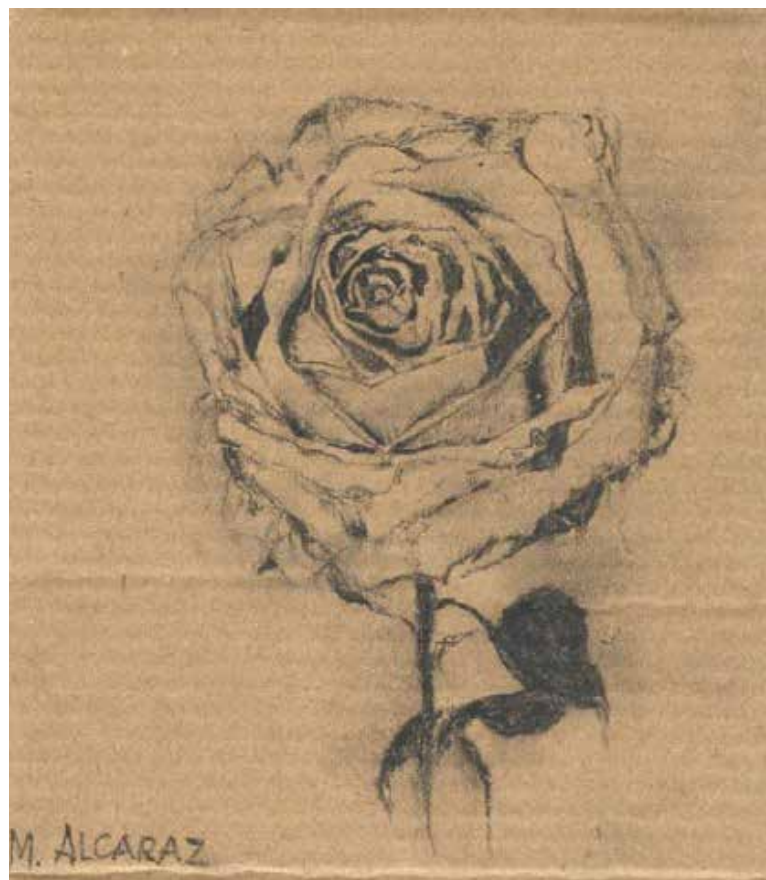
I drew out one leftover bill,
held it through the half opened window.
“Sorry, I only have a dollar.”

“That puts me on my way,”
he replied in a sing-song voice as
he eagerly skipped over to me
pulling the edge of the dollar toward himself
without touching my hand.

His mouth opened to a broad grin
displaying huge gaps between yellowed teeth,
and he danced back to the curb
as if I’d given him a hundred dollar bill.

Finally,
light changed and I turned the corner;
his ground-in alley smell
wafted through the car,
cold wind wouldn’t blow it out;
he was unsolicited,
a hitch-hiker in my mind.

He had been young like my sons once.



A NEW MOSES

Steven Barry

The bus stops in front of us,
the driver lured by our waving
arms, CUENCA reassuringly plastered
on the front window. The door flaps
open and the four of us, tired from
hiking and tired of waiting, climb
the stairs inside, surprised to be greeted
by dozens of pairs of eyes, all silently
screeching, “there is no more room.”
Passengers shuffle their feet, no parting
of the waters, no Moses to our rescue.

Possibly, perhaps a new Moses is an
apprentice, still learning his trade.
The driver swivels around and states
his case: passengers must make room for us.
No mighty waves, but small trickles of feet
shuffle and push to the sides; cautiously
and tentatively a shallow, narrow emptiness
appears. This new Moses passed this test and
we have a place to park our exhausted feet.



STARLIGHT

Elise Miller

Meet me under the porch light,
and call out my name.
Your star is shining so bright.
I know I'll never feel the same.

I see God's hand in the constellation of your eye,
in the moon that casts a warm glow across the city I love dearly.
But most of all I see the structure of your face, its delicate detail,
as it fills my dreams and enchants the night.
You shifted my reality
into something more beautiful
than I ever envisioned.

Knock on the door,
draw back the curtains.
You're all that I want.
Your hand feels comfortable in mine.

They say the world tilts on an axis
and maybe it does; but before I met you,
the world stood still under my feet,
teasing me that I could never dance,
never run free.
I walked in a familiar room
and felt the most unusual gravitational pull
to you.
Nothing was still and nothing stayed in place.
It was like an earthquake cracked the floor in the room right as I
laid eyes on you.
I love losing gravity to you.
Or maybe, just maybe, I love you.
Nevermind,
I do.

PÈRE LACHAISE

Susanna Lundgren

Hop the Métro Père Lachaise,
head out to Cimetière de l'Est—
spend a day with the dead
in the most beautiful and
famous necropolis of Paris,
where a million souls are interred,

whose ossuary encloses bones
and ashes of two or three million
more; since 1804, at Napoléon's
behest, they lie quietly among
embracing beeches and sapient oaks
in neoclassical splendor.

Turn right, off the main path,
happen onto a canopied bed
of fanciful pointed arches
where lie storied stone lovers
Héloïse and Abélard, ill-fated
philosophes of 12th-century Paris.

Here, tidy-casual in slacks and navy
sweater, a 50-ish gentleman,
addressing a dozen English-speaking
visitors, imparts insider knowledge
of the pair: legendary adventures
of their remains after death—

*After 1616 removal from Abélard's
Abbaye de la Paraclete, they were kept
in Paris, but always physically separated,
current decorum demanding—until Revolution
proclaimed that these persecuted
secular saints should be reunited.*

*At length, owing to the sympathies
of Josephine, and a need to stimulate
burials at Père Lachaise, they were installed
in 1817 within this neo-Gothic gazebo
cobbled together from fragments of the
destroyed Abbaye de Nogent-sur-Seine,
but not before their well-publicized
three-year fundraising tour of Europe.*

Perhaps they whisper of us, I think,
after the iron gates close at eventide,
as Molière and Colette compare notes,
while Jim Morrison strikes up a few chords
with Chopin, while Maria Callas and Édith Piaf
hum a few bars of *La Vie en Rose*,
with Isadora Duncan in peplos and chiton
turning, turning, turning
in her grave.



POMEGRANATE

Susanna Lundgren

I was twelve years old
when I found the pomegranate.
In the supermarket at Christmastime,
I saw the strange dusty-red fruit,
slightly lumpy, worn like a miniaturized
Nicolas-sack full of goodies,
tied at the top in a little knot.

What's that? I asked Mama.

Those are pomegranates, she replied.
They're full of tiny red seeds
which make them hard to eat.

Please, may I have just one
for my special Christmas treat?
I know it costs a dollar, but I promise
to open it slowly and eat every seed.
I'll be careful not to spill any juice.

At home, I sat down on the couch
by the ornamented tree, and laid out
everything necessary for the ritual:
sharp paring knife, white bowl,
several large paper napkins.
Slicing into thin red skin,
peeling back its heavy paper,
revealing its translucent yellow
rubbery membrane segmented
like the lining of a honeycomb,
I carefully picked away until
its cache of tender rubies
burst into sight—I could not
but stare at their beauty—
a few red juicy drops stained
the napkin in my lap.
Pulling out seeds one by one
for an hour, then in thrilling
chunks, I pressed the stinging
sweet fruit between tongue and palate.
I closed my eyes against the
banality of the living room.

I didn't know then
that this fruit of the Tree of Knowledge
grew at the boundary of the Underworld.
I didn't know that when Persephone ate
six of its bright glowing seeds,
she would have to remain in the company
of Hades for half the year, every year,
appeals from her mother Ceres
notwithstanding.

I knew only
that I must have another pomegranate
to eat the next year,
and every year.



OUR FIRE

Anna Winslow

A coal was placed under my pillow
And you asked me what was wrong

I said it burned
You declared otherwise

A fire iron was placed in my hands
You said you had never used it before

Then you talked
Ranted
Spat
With char on your neck

You waited
Cooed in my ear
To see if I would crack
Like the flames
That you made

I just inhaled the smoke
I filled perfume bottles with it
I danced in it

I swallowed it
I didn't blink once
I let the dry air peel my eyes

I let the heated ash fill me and burn me from the inside
I would never give you the pleasure of watching my skin burn

That's why I didn't touch the fire
I didn't stoke it
I let it die





ABKHAZI TEA ROOM

Susanna Lundgren

Our visit to Victoria would not be complete
without formal afternoon tea at least once,
as it turned out, in Abkhazi Gardens and Tea Room,
called the House That Love Built—in the late 1940s,
when Nicholas, last heir to the ancient kingdom of Abkhazia,
having escaped the Bolshevik Revolution,
having survived the Second War in a German prison
camp,
settled in Victoria with his bride, Peggy Pemberton-Carter,
herself recently released from detention in Shanghai.
They had met in Paris in 1922, but were split by war
from their correspondence and friendship,
separated since the mid 30s—until the Liberation.
They spent forty years together building
their house and garden overlooking the city.

We dressed to the nines
and did not forget to pack several
vintage velvet chapeaux my mother left: a black semi-cloche
with two large beaded leaves for daughter Stephanie,
for me a navy pillbox edged in satin ribbon.

Looking out over the mid-afternoon city
and well-tended rockeries of oak and pine,
we sipped our pungent Silk Road Royal Blend
from gilded flowered cups.

Soon a wrought-iron triple-server arrived,
centered just so on the immaculate white tablecloth—
such tasty delights to be partaken
in precise order from bottom to top:
 mini-quiches and croissants,
 cucumber and creamed cheese dainties,
 tiny smoked salmon profiteroles,
followed by melt-in-your-mouth scones
with jam and Devonshire cream on the side,
and at last a “delicious selection of fresh baking.”

We took our time, a full hour and a half,
transported to a world suspended and far away,
and wondered at the joy of being together,
in a way for the first time.



FRETMOBILE

Steven Barry

At times, my mind has a life of its own.
It spirals, whirls, and darts, never stops.
I stand before it, a traffic cop raising
my authority-laden hand, ordering it to halt;
but it laughs and veers off, and with a smile
and a wave, glides past me and scans my
horizon for more “what ifs” and “but what abouts”
that stand at the road’s edge, thumbs out,
waiting for it to slow down, open the door, and
squeeze into an already overcrowded back seat.

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