

Vol. 9 : Issue 3

ISSN: 2523-2126

# antae

A Journal of Creative Writing



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Cover: Gilbert Calleja, *untitled*. Fragments from the series *Bodies In-possibilities*. Mixed media on fabric, 2024-2026.

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# The Zoom of a Hornet: Writers in the Shadow of War

by Izabela Morska

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In *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid*, Virginia Woolf notes, without ornament, that German aircraft passed over her house ‘last night and the night before that’. This is her new reality, the reality of war: ‘Here they are again’. We once believed we had moved beyond such repetitions, that 1989 had delivered us into a different future, when Fukuyama announced the end of history—as if the only history worth mentioning was the history of wars. And yet the zoom of a hornet returns. Here we go again.

Doris Lessing, in *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, a series of lectures delivered for the Massey Series in 1985, reflects on the purposefulness of writers. She sees them as independent commentators and members of a kind of spiritual unity: ‘writers, generally, in every country’ are ‘almost like an organism, which has been evolved by society as a means of examining itself’. In this light, writers form a monkish, transnational order—one of the few forces that resists the gloss of neoliberal capitalism, which is forever trying to evict dissenting voices, deeming them failures or public menace.

The other side of the coin, Lessing notes, is that ‘a great many people enjoy war—not only the idea of it, but the fighting itself’. She recalls ‘many many hours’ spent listening to people discuss war, peace, and the prevention of war, without anyone acknowledging that ‘for large numbers of people war is exciting’. We can suppose it may even be intoxicating if some might, later, say it was the best time of their lives, including those whose lives were ruined by it. From here she moves to her most unsettling observation:

People who have lived through a war know that as it approaches, an at first secret, unacknowledged, elation begins, as if an almost inaudible drum is beating... an awful, illicit, violent excitement is abroad. Then the elation becomes too strong to be ignored or overlooked; then everyone is possessed by it.

For many years I wondered whether I would ever witness such a moment myself—that grim fascination, that collective quickening, the transformation of ordinary people into ecstatic warmongers, as though in a novel by Musil or Remarque.

It seems that while many in Europe have learnt the lesson, to those on other continents who have never witnessed war with their own eyes in their own hometowns, the idea that a city built over generations can be destroyed in seconds appears particularly appealing, since the technology offers the possibility to watch it in real time as a kind of spectacle. If a war can be ‘played’ elsewhere, if ‘the zoom of a hornet’ (in Woolf’s words) is unlikely to sting you to death in your own home, if it is not your child lying under the rubble of a bombarded school, then the destruction begins to resemble a video game—and soon turns into something even more ghastly in its appeal.

And so, in Tom Stevenson’s ‘Iran, Week One’ in the *London Review of Books*, I read his account of the opening days of the campaign: the first week marked by a disregard for civilian life, with medical facilities and a school among the early targets. Even the official nomenclature, he notes, ‘matched the sense of euphoric violence emanating from the war itself’—names such as Epic Fury, chosen as if centuries of warnings, from Tacitus’ *Historiae* to countless historical analyses, could simply be brushed aside. Stevenson observes that some outcomes are tragically predictable: there will be war crimes; people once described as awaiting liberation will instead become refugees; and those who initially welcome the attack may discover that external powers care no more about political freedom in Iran than they do in other authoritarian states.

The spectators who treat war as a form of entertainment—the video-game players promoted to armchair strategists—seem unaware that war is like grief: it takes a course of its own. That is not Woolf or Lessing; that is me.

We cannot write as if this weren’t happening. As if the pure gibberish of war announcements did not concern us simply because their intended audience thrives on language emptied of meaning, cherishes rhetoric that glamorises violence, and inhabits online ecosystems that metabolise that rhetoric into fantasy.

In the concluding lines of *Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid*, Woolf urges her readers—and herself, it seems—to be lifted out of despair and towards responsibility: ‘Unless we can think peace into existence we—not this one body in this one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born—will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead’. She reminds us that while one can fight for freedom with actual weapons or by ‘making arms, or clothes or food’, there is ‘another way of fighting for freedom without arms; we can fight with the mind’.

We cannot write as if this were happening elsewhere, to someone else, in a world adjacent to ours. Woolf's warning remains uncomfortably current: unless we learn 'to think peace into existence', millions yet to be born will inherit 'the same death rattle overhead'. If Lessing's belief that writers form a kind of global conscience holds up, then our task is not to echo the drumbeat of excitement but to expose it; not to aestheticise violence but to interrupt its seductions—especially when language emptied of meaning circulates widely, flattering its listeners with the promise of glory and reinforcing communities that treat violence as destiny.

The work of writing—slow, reflective, stubbornly humane—may seem small beside the machinery of war. But it is one of the few tools we have that does not require the destruction of another life. To write now is to refuse the euphoric lie. It is to insist that attention is a form of resistance, and that peace, if it is ever to exist, must be consistently re-imagined.

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# Bernabò Visconti to Two Delegates of Abbot Grimoard

*by Daniel Galef*

---

*When served his papers of excommunication, Visconti held the messengers hostage and forced them to eat the parchment, silk cord and all.*

Yes, every bite. Another glass of wine?  
I'm sure it's dry. So Latinate! So dense!  
Be glad your liege used silk, not wire or twine  
to wrap your meal. Do verbs' tastes change with tense?  
Are friendly words more toothsome than tough knavery  
(do mind that scrap; you wouldn't want to litter),  
subjunctives bittersweet (*O si!*) or savory?  
The red *damnātiōnis* must be bitter,  
those closing lies—*your servant*—surely sour,  
or souring on your tongue, like rancid curds.  
And spice! His signature must burn your nose:  
the steady hand of one who's tasted power  
and found it sweet, of one who, speaking, knows  
that someone else will have to eat his words.

# Meduna to Ezzelin

by Daniel Galef

---

*Meduna, the Countess of Ravenna, to Her Husband Ezzelin Surnamed Braccioferro, Who Is Absent in the Holy Land on the Second Crusade (after a painting by Fuseli)*

Faith!—on faith, I am full-up on that,  
both yours and mine, and bursting at my bond.  
(My will is iron, but the belt is groaning.)  
It's true that absence makes the mind grow fond,  
and overfond, and foolish. If, atoning,  
I sewed a scallop-shell upon my hat  
and came and found you on the field—dead, moaning,  
or lunching in your tent—could we abscond  
and toss your templars, termagants, and tat?  
Or maybe I might slip between the slat  
and fan the pyre with a martyr's frond  
or send the sinless soldiers in for stoning;  
but this cold bed's no altar, and the wine,  
if it should turn to blood, will just be mine.

# The Voice of Laodamia to Anticlus

*by Daniel Galef*

---

*(Helen in the Voices of the Wives of the Greek Soldiers Calling into the Trojan Horse)*

Are you not tired of tricks? Can you perceive  
what's true now if you tried? The form? The feel?  
The fear? The grinding grumble of the wheel  
from underneath? The cries of those who grieve  
men you have killed? Or better far to think  
it is all just an image. Shapes in clouds  
like shadows on a wall, woven like shrouds  
or threads of myth, or light-webs in a drink  
of sweet, eye-fooling wine. The fog of war!  
The mists of time! So many good excuses  
to shrug. (Is someone in there? Is he dead?)  
Such art! Such artifice! The muddling Muses  
made us so well I can't tell who's here, or  
in death, in Egypt, or my husband's bed.

# Antonio's Studio

*by Alex LeGrys*

---

The canvases are stained with gin so the  
women draped in black look as though  
they are standing among rain puddles  
and the constellations above them are  
swimming, or more likely drowning

the roses for his last still life are  
rotting on the window-sill and  
the red stains on his smock  
could be paint or blood or  
wine or a cocktail of all three

he once dropped a razor blade  
in the blue of his palette, and  
with a few flicks of the wrist  
purple streaks scurried down  
his arms – or so he alleges

at the open house, an oil  
painting hangs: a skeleton  
wearing a dunce cap sits in  
an electric chair, driving an  
ice pick into its eye socket

as his patrons sip champagne  
they ask him: Tony, what's  
the message with this one?

well, he shrugs, you kept  
asking for a self-portrait.

# A Love Letter with an Expiration Date

*by Alex LeGrys*

---

A coffee-stained notebook, three razor blades,  
and a hair brush remain on the swivel chair while  
the desk is covered in dishes threatening mold at any  
moment along with empty cans of seltzer and cheap beer,  
a flannel shirt, and a stale loaf of Italian bread

the floor is littered with amateur sociological observations:  
bags of notes on the Combahee River Collective,  
some dam in Brazil that displaced vulnerable populations,  
and every sobering statistic you can find on union decline

unread newspapers blanket the bed, the pillows  
are books written by Howard Becker and James Joyce  
and Jean Paul Sartre: a half-read Ulysses props up the head  
quite well when the dust from the room gives me sinus issues

Morrissey wails and a plush purple cat stares  
at the wall with a stitched smile  
when suddenly there's a knock at the door

you set your glasses beside an unwashed  
wine glass, pick up my guitar and begin playing,  
never uttering a single complaint about  
the maze of inventory you had to navigate  
to make your way to my neglected instrument.

# The Wounded Thigh

*by Jazlen Chinnici*

---

From the sewn thigh came the maenads,  
Their quarrelsome spirit an irrefutable testament of their–  
Purblind pledge for uplifting the twice-born God  
It is you Brutus, the supreme being who finds–  
A second life from your wife's incision

Found just before the knee,  
The greatest victim of Procrustes' bed rest  
She swears her undying charity  
As the wound opens,  
She stitches her mouth shut

Caesar, the one you declare as your greatest friend,  
And your most heinous foe,  
Will never know of your betrayal until your own exposure  
For your demise, she'd swallow hot coals  
For your trust, she would pierce her thigh with your blade

Why must she?  
Why must she, like so many other women,  
Mutilate herself to earn your respect?  
Must a lover's unconditional devotion–  
Always lead to a thanatology?

It is the loss of sanity  
That fuels your reassurance  
It is the loss of her salvation  
That solidifies her  
Pain as fortitude

Brutus, must your secrets always be acquired by extremes?  
Must they always be at the disadvantage of your closest aid?  
You may kiss away her worries,  
However, your kiss carries less anguish  
Than the wounds she has inflicted for your favor

It is the inadequacy of partnership  
That is the true tragedy,  
She is your equal and your mule

# A Still Life of the Feather of Maat and an Arrhythmic Heart

*by Jazlen Chinnici*

---

Themis has arranged her vanity,  
With self-deprecation galore,  
She assembles her menagerie of remembrances,  
The iconography of her better years

Among the many loose Eve cigarettes  
And the half opened bottles of Brandy,  
Are her scales of justice and her hunting bow,  
Her Tchaikovsky skull, begrimed with the fingerprints of–  
The doe-eyed Sibyl Vanes that came before her

She bought it from the local auction house,  
The Royal Shakespeare Company  
Bought is a strong word, actually  
Lady Luck was with her as she brazenly made her bid  
Despite her twenty million preposition,

They, dumbfounded by the astonishment dressed–  
In Schiaparelli evening wear, had offered her an irresistible offer  
Rather than taking the risible bid,  
They gave her the skull for free  
She deemed they preferred George Frederick Cooke's

Occipital bone far more than her little composer's  
If you happen to encounter a tall gentleman  
By the name of Eugène-François Vidocq  
Asking for a woman by her description,  
Tell him she is a regular at the Tabard Inn

You can find her there every Tuesday night,  
Every fifteenth of the month,  
And every odd numbered feast day  
In the remainder of her time,  
You can follow her up a lonely, dimly lit street

Up the hill of a Florentine suburb,  
To the Library of Babel  
That's where she finds the newest taste of academia,  
A new addition to her growing tower of books  
Laid upon the far ends of her boudoir

Covered in dust, their fore edges yellowed  
They share her same listless suspension  
The pitiful purgatory of a restive goddess,  
It is an existence only a few can sustain  
Before Nembutal and Seconal lay their dismembered limbs–

Across her lipstick tubes and pancake makeup pans  
Another debilitating night, another manic morning–  
With the cold-watered wake up calls of her old friend,  
Benzedrine–the salacious provocateur  
With her clenching grip around her esophagus,

She has made our dear Themis an exhibitionist,  
Her masochistic rituals becoming more and more apparent  
To the pedestrians able to see her cyanotic arousal  
From the red telephone box  
To them, she is living up to her bohemian name

So, she continues her moans and groans  
The light in her eyes flaring a mortal incandescence  
As the parents cover their children's eyes  
Quickening their pace, sage advice on the tips of all their tongues  
C'est ce que c'est

She can always go home to her two-floor penthouse,  
Back to her mirror, lathered with a generous layer of  
Dorothy Gray's Satura moisture cream  
To ponder at every flyaway strand in her fishtail braid  
And to pour more trinkets onto the crowded surface before her

A Victorian gold horseshoe earring set with cabochon garnet  
A half-eaten apple,  
Its skin encrusted with the smallest smidgen of vomit  
A carnelian lover's eye pendant,  
With the teary stare of Catullus I printed it from memory

She will inspect all of her artifacts with the tender hand  
Of a butcher on his first trimming of the day  
This is the beauty Rembrandt had attempted to capture  
Once the bankruptcy announcement had become too uproarious,  
His efforts for religious consultation soiled

Upon his twelfth reading of the fatted calf, his appetency triggered  
The lion's roar of a restricted stomach a limiting inspiration  
For the middle-aged, contending master of light and shadows  
She has done what he could never do,  
Constructing a magnum opus of appalling inanity  
A memento mori of her eclectic past and present

She reaches for her pocket,  
Aware she is missing the greatest piece to fulfilling—  
Her rigorous conundrum, her sickly-sweet eyesore  
From the fur-lined overcoat,  
Comes a single ostrich feather

In view of her audience, she presents the terminating weapon  
From the Voigtländer lens,  
The hazy perfection of the plume is undeniable  
She awaits to hear the applause  
Once satisfied by their mirth,

She places the feather on the left side of her scale,  
It descends, to the audience's boisterous encouragement  
To the heart, beating erratically, on the right scale  
It has been put on record, she's a pure soul  
With a cavernous procurement left in her chest,

All Themis can do is laugh as their validation–  
Bombards her senses, an involuntary tear falling from her eye  
She has awaited this resolution  
All the critic's reviews, always the horseplay she pegged them to be  
Finally, she can rest–

Hunched over her vanity,  
Her face becoming one with the set display  
Her arms and legs, slackened to gravity  
The director calls for an immediate cut to advertisement,  
As her laugh continues to echo over the gasps

# Islanders

*by Richard Risemberg*

---

A golden haze lay over Hollywood, illuminated by the rising sun. From a high window, you would see buildings lifting through the mists: offices, expensive condominium towers: isolated in clusters among the older apartments of the side streets. But at ground level what you saw were the tent camps of the homeless: nylon islands in a sea of trash. Scattered here and there, around the new developments, were smaller sound stages, a lumberyard and nursery, two bigbox stores in a glittering complex, tiny storefronts housing everything from machine shops to ninety-nine seat theaters, that sort of thing. Of course there were taquerias, doughnut shops, and the occasional chef-led restaurant on a main street, safely ensconced in a strip mall by a dry cleaner and a florist. There was a post office, there was a graffiti-smeared recreation center with a pool and tennis courts, and there was a farmers' market on Sundays, held on a blocked-off street near a bookstore specializing in architecture. And there was murder.

Perhaps we are being unjust in calling it murder: disputes arose, tempers got the better of the disputants, and knives or guns appeared to mediate contention. When the inhabitants of the tent camps fought and died, the more elevated residents responded not with pity but outrage. And so it was when a tweaker met his end at the barrel of an ancient .38: Ilse Kovak shot him to protect the serenity of the six squares of sidewalk she called home and shared with her autistic boyfriend, Adam Roberts. The tweaker died, unmourned and nameless. He had, according to neighbors, repeatedly assaulted the couple, for reasons unknown perhaps even to himself. Ilse had warned him, had even shown him the gun. He had persisted. Ilse had grown up poor in eastern Europe and had suffered greatly in escaping to the fair shores of the land that calls itself America, where she eventually came to Hollywood; there, instead of comfort, she found the streets. And she found Adam, whose care became her life's purpose. She was, she later said, protecting him. But the police captured her, and left Adam on the street with his tattered blankets and his little battery-powered radio. And the neighbors scowled from their high windows overlooking it all.

Adam and Ilse were not young: certainly in their fifties if not older, though it was hard to tell. Life on the streets ages people considerably beyond their years. Adam's hair was white, although he somehow kept it trimmed short and almost stylish; Ilse's was gray, her face soft. Adam shaved once a week with a disposable razor, scraping his stubble without bothering to wet it. His face was burned and scabbed from the sun. His clothes were dirty but not torn; he exhibited a certain half-hearted fastidiousness, doing what he could to look neat and feel warm. His campsite, even after Ilse was taken away, was never surrounded by trash as so many others were. However, he had no apparent qualms about defecating in full view of the public on a busy street, an act for which he removed his trousers entirely, and carefully wiped himself, his skinny legs straddled apart, while pedestrians hurried past him with strained faces. In part this was the result of the local merchants refusing to let him use their restrooms—though they certainly took his money when he bought food or batteries. The other homeless folks of the neighborhood were more discreet as far as their bodily functions were concerned, though their campsites were slovenly compared to Adam's. When Ilse was with him, she slept in her car, where, she said, Adam resolutely refused to join her. No one in the neighborhood knows what happened to her car, her one valuable possession. But two or three neighbors have been following the progress of her court case and checking up on Adam.

Dorothy is one of those neighbors. She is a middle-aged woman, younger than Ilse, certainly, and probably younger than Adam. She happened to be coming out of the supermarket when Ilse finally lost patience, or was overcome by fear, and shot the tweaker. She saw it all in profile, as if it played out on a television screen, though the sound of the shot startled her, and she dropped her grocery bag. Gunfire is much louder in real life than it is onscreen. Dorothy did not fear for herself, although she should have, with Ilse still holding the .38 and quite obviously tense. As Dorothy approached Ilse, wanting to comfort her, she saw Ilse suddenly break out of her rigid pose and clamber into her car, which was of course cluttered with her worldly goods. Ilse drove off in a rush as Dorothy came upon the little encampment to find the tweaker writhing on the sidewalk, and Adam sitting cross-legged on his faded blanket and staring dully across the street. A bag of tortilla chips lay in his lap, and his tiny radio continued to play a tune popular in the 1960s, to which Dorothy silently sang along, unconscious of doing so. She was among the first on the scene, but a crowd soon gathered, cellphones came out, and several persons called the emergency services number at once, while others photographed the scene: Adam impassive on his blanket, the tweaker bleeding from his abdomen only two steps away, still twitching. Sirens sounded, an ambulance and several cop cars arrived, and black uniforms swarmed. Stern-faced men and women shouted orders at the passersby. One asked Dorothy if she had seen what happened. She answered Yes. The cop gestured her aside to a quieter spot and interviewed her. The ambulance attendants took away the tweaker, who died that night.

Adam sat impassively on his blanket while this was going on. The detective who arrived shortly afterwards attempted to interview him, but soon realized that he would not gain much from the effort. Dorothy did overhear Adam saying that Ilse was his girlfriend, and she suddenly realized that these were the first words she had heard him utter. With the tweaker gone, everyone was standing around Adam, who stared through the forest of restless legs with a sort of despairing expression on his face, or so Dorothy judged it to be. A television news crew arrived, and two persons advanced. They appeared to be from the newspaper, as one carried several still cameras and both had plastic badges hanging around their necks. The news crew left rather soon; with Ilse and the bleeding tweaker gone there was no spectacle to record. The newspaper reporter approached Dorothy, and she repeated what she had told the cop and the detective. More neighbors arrived, but others began to drift away. An old man Dorothy knew from her building approached her and announced that he had heard the shot but had not seen anything, and did she know what had happened? She repeated her story for the fourth time. By now everyone was ignoring Adam, except a woman that Dorothy had seen walking past her building almost every morning; she knelt by Adam to talk with him. Dorothy waited quietly, trading sentence fragments with the old man, who soon left, until the woman finished talking with Adam. Dorothy gestured to her. They knew each other by sight but had to introduce themselves. The woman who had spoken to Adam was called Marlene. She was young, or youngish: not yet thirty, by Dorothy's guess, tawny-skinned with wild dark hair and what Dorothy referred to in her mind as "an honest face." She asked Marlene: "Did he talk to you? He's never talked to me."

"Yes, he's talked with me. But only when Ilse was there. She could get him to loosen up a bit. Even smile. When all these cops clear out, let's try to talk with him. I found a social worker I can call in who can help him. Or so she said."

"But, won't they have a social worker here today? To help him?"

Marlene looked at her sidewise. "You expect a bit too much of this city, don't you?"

"But they always say—they have numbers—"

"Have you tried calling one?"

Dorothy drooped. "All I got was voicemail. Day after day."

Marlene smiled and hugged herself. "So we'll wait."

After the first fifteen minutes, no one official spoke with Adam. Adam stared across the street at nothing, waiting. The two women waited. Eventually the suits and uniforms cleared out, while word passed around the gathered neighbors that Ilse had been arrested a few miles down the boulevard. "And where would she go anyway," Marlene muttered. Finally only the two women and the manager of the market nearby were left. The manager said, "They always came in for food. Never bought booze that I saw. She was good for him. He was a getting little cleaner. The other manager wouldn't let him in before that girlfriend showed up, he smelled so bad. But everybody's gotta eat. I told him he could come in right after we opened, when there wasn't too many customers yet. The poor guy. And now that girlfriend's gonna be in jail." The manager excused himself and returned to the store. Only a couple of neighbors remained. Marlene led Dorothy to Adam's blanket. The little radio was still playing hits of the Sixties. Adam was slowly pulling tortilla chips from the bag on his lap, eating them one at a time.

Dorothy and Marlene approached him. He continued eating his tortilla chips while staring across the street at the blank wall of the drugstore opposite. Marlene crouched down by him, while Dorothy stood, unsure of herself. She heard Marlene murmur, "Adam, are you all right? Do you understand what just happened?"

Adam seemed to ignore her while she repeated the question, then finally murmured: "When will she come back?" He did not look Marlene in the eye. Dorothy felt a strange nervousness watching them. Marlene continued to repeat her question, in a softer voice each time; sometimes Adam would answer, again asking when Ilse would return, but usually he said nothing. Finally Marlene said, "We'll be back, Adam? Okay?" Adam did not answer. Marlene stood up with a mild groan. She gestured to Dorothy to follow her and led her across the street and into the drugstore. There, among the bottles and jars of cosmetics gleaming under strident lighting, she said, "I had to stop. I was feeling myself become impatient. We have to be gentle with him, or he clams up."

"He clammed up anyway, didn't he?"

Marlene grimaced. "Yes. Well, the situation, of course. Who wouldn't be distressed. We'll try again tomorrow. You'll help me, won't you? For as long as it takes?"

"Of course," Dorothy said. They exchanged phone numbers and agreed to meet at the corner near Adam's camp the next morning, which was a Saturday. Dorothy asked, "What if he's moved on?" But Marlene reminded her that he had been in the same two-block area for several years, including the time before Ilse. The two women hugged each other and went their ways. Both lived in small apartment buildings a block away from the scene, around the corner from each other.

The next morning they met as planned. When they arrived at Adam's camp, they felt a glimmer of hope, as several official-looking persons stood around him with clipboards, while one, a kindly-looking woman in her forties, knelt and spoke with him. Marlene took one of the clipboard-bearers aside and interrogated her. She then reported to Dorothy, who stood a few steps away. "He is refusing to go to a shelter with them. He has had bad experiences in shelters. At least that's how she said it sounded. They're from some private group, one of those nonprofits. Let's wait a bit."

They waited several bits, while the clipboard-bearers and the kindly woman conferred. The kindly woman spoke to Adam again, and they all crowded into a small white car with a logo on the door and went away. Marlene signaled to Dorothy, and they approached Adam. "I'm sorry to bother you again so soon after those others, but I want to see how you feel."

Adam spoke past them: "Where is Ilse? They didn't know. Do you know?"

"I don't know, Adam. But I will try to find out. I'll come back with news. I hope."

Adam only repeated, "Where is Ilse?" He looked past them at the blank side of the drugstore. Dorothy noted that he had apparently relieved himself against a wall nearby; a puddle flowed slowly towards the gutter. Marlene reported her conversation to Dorothy and said, "We'd better try later. That crew kind of wore him out, I think. I'll call the police and the courts on Monday and try to find out about Ilse. It won't be easy. I've been through that before, when my brother was doing drugs. Can you meet me here Tuesday morning? Are you free?"

"I can make time. I'll be here. Does he need anything? Food? Water?"

"That, he's been getting with no trouble. I'm not sure he wants what he needs. But we gotta try."

Dorothy agreed, and they parted. It was certain that Adam would be in his spot on Tuesday. He was reliable that way.

He was indeed reliable that way. He was also reliable in his unwillingness, or inability, to help Marlene and Dorothy help him. Though for a while, under Ilse's influence, he would engage in small talk for brief moments, and even smile, now he was able only to ask when Ilse would return. The two women followed him into the market once, and observed him interacting verbally with the cashier, who evidently knew him or was at least familiar with his presence.

He did not smile during the interaction. He returned to his camp, the six squares of sidewalk in the afternoon shade of the market's blank east wall, where he turned on his radio and began to eat from a bag of cut broccoli, ignoring, or seeming to ignore, Dorothy and Marlene. This pattern continued for several weeks, with Dorothy also attempting to engage the city bureaucracy purportedly established to help persons such as Adam. The bureaucracy, however, was overwhelmed, and devoted its time, she was told at last, to more cooperative individuals. She was referred to the same nonprofit which she had encountered with Marlene on the day after the shooting. Adam retreated more and more from contact with others. He began to smell worse as well, even though a trailer with showers and a washer and dryer appeared only a block away every Friday. Then Marlene's job necessitated that she spend three weeks in another city on a project. Dorothy had come to depend on her assertiveness in their quest to help Adam, and now felt lost herself. She visited Adam every three or four days during that time, but he would not speak with her. She waited anxiously for Marlene to return. But Marlene did not call her for a week after her expected return date, and then told her that she would have to leave town again, as her mother was dying. They did not see each other during Marlene's brief return to the neighborhood.

By the time Marlene returned again, saddened and a little heavier, she had to devote more time to work than before, to cement her position in her own bureaucracy, a private one that looked askance at extended leaves for whatever reason. When she and Dorothy met, it was to share coffee or a light dinner and talk about distracting but not involving subjects. Dorothy felt that she was now helping Marlene "process," as the popular magazines put it, her mother's death and the meaninglessness of the work that kept her fed. Of course they spoke of Adam and his situation—they could see him from the window of the café where they habitually met. Marlene had found a phone number where she could occasionally, with great patience, receive an update on Ilse's case. Ilse, it seemed, was accepting of her place in jail, but worried over Adam. The two women began to plan a visit to her, but they never quite settled on a date and time acceptable to both of them and to the bureaucracies of justice as well. However, they came to enjoy their coffee meetings quite a bit, and that became a new routine for the two.

Dorothy often felt a quiet bass line of despair, throbbing below the surface noise of their chat and the sounds of the city around them. When Marlene would go to the counter to order more coffee, or repair to the restroom, Dorothy would stare out the window at Adam sitting cross-legged at his tidy camp on the opposite sidewalk, listening to his radio as the traffic raged between them.

With his short hair and his impassive face, he looked to Dorothy like a monk who had created an island of quiet amid the frenzies that surrounded him. She wondered what being him was like, and whether he might be unhappy. When Marlene returned to the table she attended to her friend and her current sorrows. She never forgot about Adam, but she forgot to worry about him after a few weeks of her new routine.

# Further On

*by Yuna Kang*

---

Scrub me past guilt, past daddy-boy music, that nonsense noise  
which is dedicated to street after street, East Roseville Parkway to I-80  
high! Hi, the freeway signs say, hellow-hello-hello-  
Don't forget that I am here — graffiti and murals overlap, living  
beating thing — if we live in art, and are art, then maybe the cash grasses  
will cease to flow. And we will no longer need to pitch a tent under  
raccoon-centered overpasses, or save our urine in ziploc bags purloined

from park trash cans. I'm more upstanding than you, (know),  
thoughtful enough to not piss on the bare sidewalks, where we all stand;  
even though I am killing the roses, or oak planted trees, I made a choice,  
and I picked You, anonymous passerby, relegated citizen; a hard choice, in the  
middle of San Francisco night. The place I was pushed towards. From Oakland  
to Sacramento, from Roseville to unhallowed lands. San Pablo. San Jose. I'm  
not welcome anywhere, but still I try to make things neat for you. I  
create. I have two jobs. I decorate the cement with watercolor-chalk hybrids. I  
shovel shit off the asphalt, sometimes with my two bare hands. I have no  
shoes. I have no socks, no hands, no hybridizations of tea-rose varieties, iris  
hibiscus in mug cup. People spit on me, poison me with grocery sandwiches.  
I don't even sleep anymore.

# Holocene

*by Yuna Kang*

---

Two people who mourn the crows differently; one in face paint and  
red white keffiyeh, a slight recrimination in their stance- and we knew,  
  
all these things were different and the same; resounding traumas vibrating,  
worlds away- the same world. Crows swarmed their figure, trespasser, stranger-  
  
moving the body of the deceased away from its fall. Swaddling it, as if it were  
precious baby- don't hold it, I said rudely, habitual pistons firing- and  
  
they shrugged me off. I had placed swarms of nasturtiums around the  
dead, orange and yellow clutter, and these the stranger held in their  
  
scarf, with the bird, reminiscent of a graveyard bouquet. "I  
  
was wondering about that," they told me briefly, high  
  
above, I can hear the sharp wail of alarm, too similar to a mother-  
I resent anthropomorphizing- but the sound instigated ice currents in  
  
my bones, birds of the dead, screaming a lonely, final song. I  
knew this bird, trickster bird, as I have known the others- I  
  
talk to them, accept their gifts. Feed them peanuts. Leave  
them alone, I want to beg the keffiyeh bearer, leave them to grieve-  
  
and maybe I was right. Or maybe it was our lawn, our sun, our  
world we shared- inhabitants in possession of the same goal, to thrive, with  
  
bated breath running through this trap we call a body, boned bodice leaking  
in, keeping in those precious fluids and vitalities that surround by which we know

is a soul, and I know that the crows have a soul- and I have a soul, and  
so did the grieving stranger, and Gaza is re-meeting its nascent terrain, and

the ozone layer is done healing, and the sun is developing a new bite. Bees by  
the thousands crawl into traffic, mite-addled and old. In North Richmond, someone

is sniping away at local birds with a pellet gun. A man discreetly pees on the road-

there are no public restrooms anymore. No bathrooms, no guns, no history, no  
laws, the things that govern us- unmistakable- contradictory- is

it a violation to hold a dead bird, to divorce it from the mourning land? Is  
it unsacred to decorate its body with invasive blooms, let it to rot in dry apple  
sun? Some of us knew, once.

# Wonder

*by DS Maolalai*

---

a bastard world. a five-eyed,  
a many-legged, wet-feathered  
thing. I step in my yard  
full of cracking cement above sewerlines,  
stare at the dirt caked  
at the base of the bulb  
of the streetlight like burned  
scrambled egg. walls sweat  
their gutterways. crisp packets:  
scuttling rats. they hunch and they move  
with breezes too weak to raise flags  
in the weight of the rain –  
bust teabags on the side of a cup.  
a rotten gut hangs from a coatrack, my rib-  
bones, like a bag full of water, coffeegrounds  
generating gas.

# An Undersea Jellyfish

*by DS Maolalai*

---

outside the porthole,  
when they turn down the cabin  
to footpath emergency  
lights, then – there is dublin,  
a smear on the landscape,  
spread out and glistening  
like a sample of microbial  
cultures. it lies on the world,  
extruding its thick threads  
of motorway, joining as liquid  
these isolate dismal  
commuter-filled towns  
with the centre, an undersea jelly-  
fish's poisonous light. it's a clear 10pm –  
we'll touch down in an hour  
in london. I move my legs gently  
and open my book,  
feel the clay of portmarnock  
full of living life under my cushion.

# Almost went back to Ibiza

*by Allan Lake*

---

Balearic Islands only a short flight or  
ferry ride from Barcelona and I am here  
to walk along The Ramblas, to visit Gaudi  
and, if time permits, Miro. In Ibiza I'd visit  
Kirby and Jane and Mary and Dieter, despite  
them, like Gaudi and Miro, being dead.

The kids I taught way back are now  
middle-aged and sensibly fled that much-  
altered island. Who is there? What is there,  
besides the locals who wonder what in hell  
happened to their island world?

Mass tourism, that bonanza if a bar/hotel  
is your business. Wrecked foreign marauders  
need morning coffee and ensaimada to aid  
recovery after drugs and sweat, lost euros,  
lost shoes, lost innocence. But perhaps

I could blind myself to all that and,  
after paying the toll, stroll up to medieval  
old town where once upon a time a young  
woman first took my arm, then my heart.

No, no need to jeopardise treasured  
impressions of that other Ibiza which  
can still exist for me unless memory  
is updated with worse. So I shall  
remain in Barcelona  
and Miro, it is.

# The Sizzle of Moving Day

*by Harrison Fisher*

---

A television station signing off  
becomes very friendly about its power  
as if to say, “All joyful day  
we have been destroying  
air around us.”

Home, friend, mind, gut—  
every noun finds “-lessness”  
clinging to its rear  
in the back-door erasure  
of moving to a new place.

Depending on your century,  
all or any part of those megahertz  
can be focused

right at the viewer  
and come sizzling  
out of the picture tube  
to kill him where he sits.

(I had been mulling over  
a clod’s choice of chest hair:  
evolution that is Boy < Man < Ape.)

I could hear  
the sea robins chirp,  
sea scorpions click  
in the branches outside,  
the cheep cheep  
pcheek

and click click

I’d have to live with—

(Moderate,  
be moderate  
in your chest hair.)

# Finding New Invective to Inhabit

*by Harrison Fisher*

---

Ugh, these inexhaustibly  
sunny days—  
the brain inside the skull  
the final thing,  
unapprisable marrow in bone.  
I suppose I should be happy  
but I'm  
monumentally sad,  
the very mannered root  
of disaffection,  
and I speak  
orbi contumely.  
Inseparable from self-containment,  
the deadening of two coastlines  
to achieve homeostasis;  
after such dislocation,  
empty relief: the prairies.  
Excessive fears  
lead to deviant burials,  
and unrecognizable people—  
Capgras? Fregoli?—  
turn without focus,  
“physics stark mad  
in metaphysics,”  
the heart of the body  
impounded,  
hard like a skull.  
In the pharmakon,  
the poison is the cure.



Gilbert Calleja, *untitled*. Fragment from the series *Bodies In-possibilities*. Mixed media on fabric, 2024-2026.

# Showers

by Fabiana Elisa Martínez

---

The clinking of the cheap saucer on the marble brought Alberto back to the serene pace of the old café, the aroma of ground beans, and the patina of time over the immutable surfaces. His tired eyes had been fixed on the entrance of the school building across the street through the slightly wavy glass and the filigree backward letters that still read, as they had five decades ago, *Café Sol de Lima*. Only the natives know that the sun is a miracle in Lima. Sky of Lead would have been a more accurate name.

“We don’t have any cognac, *Señor*.” The aged waiter paused respectfully until Alberto’s blue irises met his own. “May I offer you a glass of our best pisco?” After some hesitation, he added, “To tell you the truth, we have a vintage bottle of a local brandy, but I imagine that Peruvian cognac was not exactly what you had in mind.”

“Yes,” Alberto’s voice stumbled without reason. “Pisco will be fine. Thank you for your... perspicacity.” The server nodded and turned away promptly with an enigmatic grin.

Alberto’s look returned to the window, his eyelids narrowing over some sudden drops of silent rain, straining for the detection of a known face among the various figures of respectful men entering the school chapel through a smaller lateral door. Most of the men were old, enveloped in expensive black suits that echoed the ironed uniforms of their childhood. Some walked alone and regal, some tugged brillantine-combed grandchildren by the hand, others towed rounded wives by the elbows, perfumed religious women who looked much older than their decently erect husbands. Alberto touched the cold marble of his table and let his reminiscences drown in the well of black coffee in front of him. His former classmates would be there. The surviving ones. Would Amílcar attend the funeral? Would it be possible to recognize him among the sea of mourners? The frantic modernities of the present (because all presents are frantic when we are old) offered many ways to be reunited with ghosts from the past. But Alberto considered those shortcuts immoral,

deprived of decorum, vulgar. He was convinced he could always recognize Amílcar even in the remains of a decrepit crowd.

“Here, *Señor*. A Capurro Moscatel.”

Alberto touched the short crystal stem of the glass with two fingers and looked back at the old waiter with gratitude and curiosity. This bold, gaunt man shared with the *Sol de Lima* the same coat of derelict sadness, the undecipherable paradox of the places and bodies that add so many layers of time to their skin that they aged without changing. Perhaps this man had always been ancient, bald, arthritic. Perhaps his dark eyes had eternally shown the same aqueous, muddy weakness. Sad, like the old walls of Lima, licked by the same persistent rain, that had paraded in front of Alberto as his taxi took him from the airport to the hotel the night before.

Alberto sipped the liquor with candor. He had stopped drinking alcohol some years ago. It’s difficult when you live in the country of wine, champagne, and cognac, and your life companion specializes in tasting the libations of the Rhine. But doctors in Strasbourg are not only attractive and good-mannered but also strict and sometimes even morbid in their predictions. So, he abandoned the pleasures of spirits and younger sommeliers only to return to the other side of the world and break the rules across from his old school, still alive and disobedient, ready for Father Evaristo’s funeral.

He elegantly proceeded to alternate the fire of the pisco with the bitterness of the coffee in a dance far from French manners and close to Peruvian ceremonies. More men approached the school and the chapel from different angles. Their accelerated gait was not only a response to punctuality but to the perfunctory showers from the gray sky of Lima. Alberto kissed the rim of his glass, sipped the amber liquid with devotion, and recreated in his mind the rushed daily walks of all those boys in the school, regimented by the pious Fathers, corralled by bitter educators, tamed by military coaches. Alberto had sat many times at this same table fifty years in the past, waiting for his father’s chauffeur to pick him up, swallowing his hot chocolate with salty tears of shame for being too shy, too blond, and too rich. Little Alberto, the silent, chubby high schooler, appalled by terror and confusion. If only he could see Amílcar today. If only he could shake the hand of the man that boy had become. Amílcar, the dark-haired, brave, and strong soccer champion, whose muscles, chiseled with artistry in the rough streets of poor Lima neighborhoods, had protected Alberto after the incident. Alberto raised his glass toward the school. Even if he didn’t see Amílcar today, even if Amílcar had preceded Father Evaristo on the path to the tomb, Alberto was happy he had come back. This same undulated

window in front of his old self had been the perfect parapet to cry on rainy days. Nobody could see the saddest student crying from outside a window polluted with rain.

“Are you out of your mind!” A young man yelled at the waiter. The poor old man was trying to wipe the man’s trousers and shoes with a white cloth. A tilted coffee cup was lying dangerously on the edge of the table.

“I apologize, *Señor*,” stuttered the server as a litany repeated too many times among the wooden walls of the café. The handsome patron looked at Alberto and combined a frustrated frown with a silly smile that Alberto admired but didn’t encourage. Peruvian teeth, he thought, too many and too appealing, illuminating the chocolate features of a local businessman. Like the white, cruel teeth of all those boys at school, running rowdy to the showers after an extended soccer match. Cruel teeth and laughter in the lockers, cruel hands and fingers under the hot water of a common space shared by brutal projects of decent men in black suits. Fingers and nails and arms and legs on young Alberto’s skin. In the showers. Behind the chapel across the street. Five decades ago. Until Amílcar showed up and turned off the showers and the mocking from hell.

Alberto turned his eyes from the young, offended customer and drank the dregs of his coffee, wondering if Father Evaristo had known it all along. He had been the only clergyman with a soul in that school, the only man in Alberto’s adolescence who had touched his shoulder with compassion and firmness, with support and permission. Father Evaristo had seen Alberto crying at the café once. He needed to exchange some petty money for bigger bills. A convenient transaction for a cafe that always needed small change and for a school church that received too many alms in coins. But the priest had never mentioned Alberto’s tears nor his dubious smiles of gratitude.

A rectangular strip of paper with the *Sol de Lima* logo and some handwritten numbers landed on Alberto’s table. “Would that be all, *Señor*?” Alberto noticed the yellowish fingernails of the waiter’s shaky hand in perfect accordance with his tobacco-stained mustache.

“Yes, yes. I need to go.”

“Are you attending the funeral, *Señor*?”

“I am. I used to be a student of the Father.”

“I know. I will be there in a minute, too. We can share my umbrella if you want.”

Alberto stood up, threw a couple of extra coins into the silver tray with the bill, and looked at the waiter with curious eyes, like an archaeologist presented with an ancient map. The lines deformed, the topography familiar.

“I am glad you came back, Alberto. It seems life has treated you well. Come close, my friend! You will get soaked.”

It is easier to cry in the rain. Not even Amílcar could notice that he was once more protecting Alberto. From the old showers and the new, under the leaded Lima sky.

# Mon Ami

*by Jonathan Chibuiké Ukah*

---

For the first time since I married you,  
I want to speak the language of the spirit;  
I want to say the things I had swallowed  
that made my body lifeless and still,  
higher than the sky, yet so small  
that time seems not to hold it down  
and let you hear with your eyes;  
what has beauty got to do with us?  
I was never born a creator of words;  
but to use their richness to nuzzle the air  
into listening to my yearnings,  
to curve time and space into your eyes,  
coil the thread through your heart,  
connecting your soul with mine.  
But since I married you,  
I have become a creator of words,  
the originator of the language of the spirit,  
by which your body and my heart  
commune without speech to be one,  
both of bones, flesh and blood,  
our bodies merge like two rivers  
ending in the same salted ocean.  
I have not learned the art of flowers  
reaching the sky to cuddle their petals,  
or bowing to you with a bouquet of roses,  
because my maternal great-grandfather,  
whose inheritance I carry in my veins,  
was not a farmer of roses and hibiscus,  
nor lilies, dandelions and amaryllis,

but a man boned to cracking hearts  
into a foliage of survival in every war.  
I must assure you that every tip of our hair  
will grow and blossom to the linnet sky,  
where they will woo the sun with song,  
melt into one another with a flutter;  
a rose garden, a lawn of lavender,  
a field of chrysanthemums and begonia,  
whose petals streak with our blood,  
will outgrow the masts of the stars  
for us to climb and live forever.  
Or if you insist, I will pluck out your hair,  
dress it in crimson florals and garlands  
and stack it in a golden bouquet,  
as how my devotion stretches towards you  
like the inseparable green tendrils of yam.  
I could go on and on to count my words  
but see how the bullets of our time  
whizz through our deafened ears.

# The Debate

*by Mike Ferguson*

---

*Unveiling of the Samuel Taylor Coleridge Memorial Statue vs The Accompanying Sermon,  
Ottery St Mary Parish Church ~ 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022*

**i**

The rain came and the wind blew  
and an indigo drape fell to  
unveil its bronze

**ii**

In that moment of celebration  
all was as one within us *all*  
which echoed from a past  
aeolian prayer of pure  
coalescence

**iii**

But what does not change  
is how a lecture can alter reality  
in the deception of its interpreting

**iv**

We hear it in The Sermon

*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with  
the glory which shall be revealed in us  
~ Romans 8: 18-28*

and we consider: his rheumatism / his boils / his despair / his fevers / his  
melancholia / his treacherous bowels / his neuralgia / his creative drought / (his  
kidney stones, bladder cancer, hypochondria) / his constipation / his misery / his  
gloom / his addiction / his penury –

“O God save me from myself”

Coleridge unaware he was to be  
doctrinally saved

*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why  
doth he yet hope for?*

v

More from The Sermon

*faith tempered in the crucible of suffering*

and elsewhere

*A great **poet**\* must have the ear of a wild Arab listening in the silent desert...*

~ from Goodreads re. STC; (\*substitute **theologian** – an imperative from The Sermon)

We see the orthodoxy / we see the symbol / we see the imagination / we see the link /  
we see the Anglicanism / we see the resource / we see the appropriation

We should see the mutuality / we should see the spirit / we should see the poet / we  
should hear the poet

Let us worship the poet

Worship the aeolian harp / worship the young hope / worship the strength / worship  
the precocity

Worship this reading / worship *this* interpretation

vi

Standing on his stone  
beneath the church tower's bells  
it can be *only* music  
and poetry he hears

as for all of us to bear witness

# A Day in the Life

*by Chris Morey*

---

It's nice meeting new people every day.

A girl – her name's Dolores, they all have name badges, and my eyesight isn't bad for eighty-eight – brings me in a cup of tea – milk, one sugar – and places it on the night table. It looks a bit weak this morning, but you can't have everything.

We make eye contact. “How are we today, Emily?” she asks.

They often say that, and I always feel like answering, “*I'm* fine, but I don't know about you.” It's too much trouble, though, and maybe they'd misunderstand, so I content myself with a smile. She smiles back and goes out.

The tea *is* weak, but at least it's hot. I finish it without spilling any in the saucer.

A bit later, someone else – or it might be the same one, I've forgotten her name – comes to get me up. To be honest, most of the carers in their pale blue smocks are hard for me to tell apart, with their olive skin and black hair. Once, one told me she was from the Philippines. It's a long way to come, and I'm grateful they've taken the trouble.

She helps me wash and dress, which is convenient when you're a bit stiff in the joints, then puts me in my wheelchair. I can walk after a fashion, with two sticks, but I have trouble getting up from chairs, so it's a good solution: a pushchair for the elderly, really.

She's picked one of my dresses at random. The clothes I brought in with me have all fallen apart by now, but a kind middle-aged lady occasionally brings around replacements.

“Do you think Emily'd like this?” she asked the carer last time, holding up a dress. “It's about her size.”

Mauve isn't my colour at all, but if I'd said that, I might have got something worse, so I kept quiet. Beggars can't be choosers. Cicero, or was it Mahatma Gandhi, said that if what you plan to say doesn't improve on silence, it's best not to say it – or words to that effect. Profound advice: more people should follow it.

The dress must have been second hand: no price tag or label. I expect I look a fright in it, not that I ever meet anyone I need to impress.

Breakfast, delivered to our rooms, is cereal, an egg, and toast. I eat a little, but it's hard to get excited about food when you're my age. Then, when the girl's collected the tray, I have time to think.

Mornings are my quality time. The carers' rounds have finished, and I can gaze undisturbed from my French windows at the strip of garden outside. But what really interests me is closer and more personal.

Could anyone count the number of people they meet in their life? Yet they're all there somewhere in memory, and all in their prime. Many of them had intelligent things to say, a lot more entertaining than the platitudes of my carers and the maunderings of my fellow-residents. That's why I close my eyes and pretend to be asleep when they take me to the lounge. The TV's always on, but the programmes are, frankly, rubbish. Occasionally, there's a film with someone I recognize. They'd be much older now, maybe dead. I don't pay much attention to the news, it's too depressing.

I suppose you could say I've had an eventful life, not that it would make a memoir. I did well at school, but in those days, university was for the upper classes, and I worked in an office like most girls with some education.

That was how I met Roger, and wasn't I pleased with my catch! The boss's son and heir, ex-RAF and extraordinarily good-looking. We married in haste (not that we had to), and you know what that means. It was too bad when I found out about his drink and gambling problems, but you'd be surprised how many men do, and how carefully they cover their tracks. His father put him on a strict allowance – effectively disinherited him – and he took it badly, and...

But what on Earth is the point of raking over old troubles? We had wonderful times going to first nights and to Glyndebourne and things, dressed to the nines and mixing with the best people. Every girl should have the chance to put on a bit of a show sometime in her life. I know I loved it. *That's* the kind of thing you want to remember.

My second husband was Charles, who hated to be called Charlie, and I don't blame him. Not the flamboyant type, quite the reverse – an insurance actuary, to be precise.

I know we had children, though this is where things start to get hazy for me. I think I had two sons, but as for grandchildren – well, ask me another! It's a pity the tradition of the family Bible, with its register of births and deaths, died out, or I could check.

A highlight was Charles' posting to Hong Kong, before we started our family. F.I.L.T.H., as the saying goes – Failed In London, Try Hongkong – which is unkind, though certainly true as regards some of the expats we met. That's where I learned to get along with servants, and people of other races. All you have to do is treat them as human beings. It certainly works with the carers here.

I lost Charles early, to cancer. I don't want to dwell on that, or on the trials of bringing up a family alone, but on the bright side, once you've been through something like that, you can handle anything the world throws at you. And we'll meet again, they say.

It's strange when you think of it, but my parents are crystal clear in my memory. Mother would have been a hundred and twelve this year. I recall holidays by the sea with my brothers, or was that later, with my sons? But it really doesn't matter; whoever I'm thinking of, I'm sure they grew up to be fine young men.

A tap on the door, and visitors are announced: an overdressed woman in her forties and a teenage boy. She calls me 'Aunt Emily' and talks to me about people, most of whose names don't conjure up any associations. I nod and smile in what I hope are the right places. The boy sits hunched over, staring at his smartphone. Then they go, and I relax and let memories of the good times wash over me again.

The time must have got away on me, as they say: I'm being wheeled to the dining room for lunch. Parked at my usual table, I exchange nods with my companions. It's peculiar how you can share a table with the same three people every day and know so little of their lives. But perhaps it doesn't matter: we all have our memories.

The menu card is handwritten. Today it's vegetable soup (rather watery, as it turns out), then beef casserole with mashed potatoes, the diet of the old and infirm. It comes to all of us.

The stew's palatable but under-seasoned. I ask the waitress for some salt. An officious young woman in a dark blue uniform (it doesn't suit her colouring, poor girl) notices.

"That's not good for your blood pressure, Emily," she scolds.

As if I care, at my age. I smile sweetly, and sprinkle the salt generously on my meal. She tosses her head, but what can she do? My annuity pays my bills; I'm a valued customer, and I'm always right.

Lunch over, I'm moved to the lounge, facing the big TV. I close my eyes, tune out the sound, and return to the remembrance of things past. Not that I ever read the book: far too much effort. One thing I have learned, however, is that the memory of pain is transient, but the memory of pleasure endures. Wouldn't it be awful if it was the other way around!

A rattle of crockery heralds the afternoon tea trolley, but I don't look up.

A voice says, "Emily?"

Another: "She's right out of it, isn't she?"

Cheeky monkey! I half-open my eyes: a white girl, typical. I say nothing, however; let her think what she likes.

"Would you like a chocolate biscuit, Emily?" the polite one (Margarita, her label says) asks.

Wouldn't I just? Now I'm on the home stretch, I can afford to pamper myself a little. I take three. Miss Dietician from lunch (I remember that, now) would disapprove, but so what?

I drink the tea and nibble the biscuits, savouring each one. Then I let my mind roam again over my long life. Everyone I've known and loved is around me, everyone whose company I've enjoyed. Life is wonderful when you're living it inside your head.

# At the Risk of Causing an Earthquake in the Status Quo

*by Tinamarie Cox*

---

Use your inside voice  
We don't shout down these hallways  
Take off your shoes and tip-toe  
Whisper or don't say anything at all  
Silence keeps the guilt asleep  
A soft snore humming in our bones  
Bitterness lingering on our tongues  
Quiet  
Quiet  
Quiet  
We can't risk an earthquake  
Waves powerful enough to create a natural disaster  
We wouldn't recognize ourselves in the wreckage

# I'm here (2)

*by B. Anne Adriaens*

---

The four billion of my childhood have nearly doubled and I'm one of them—me, who was not meant to be. Only chance and a chain of circumstances, time and place, are responsible for my breathing the air of others. Alter any of these and the very thought of my existence would be erased.

Four billion I could not imagine have nearly doubled and I'm one of them, excreting my own stain of pollution, knowing that, had medicine not been what it was in 1973, I would've been nothing but a wish in the mind of a widower. Today, at seven point six billion, I want fresh soil to fill my mouth, instead of an apology for being here.

# in this world (10)

*by B. Anne Adriaens*

---

The Cotentin geology reflects that of Cornwall, except for the sand planted with slanting pillboxes — leftovers no one's bothered with: even the sea only has the occasional nibble. This French land is like a dream under a heavy sky; tonguing the surf, it shoves nuclear waste down the seabed.

I'd like to give you a beach from the past, so that what's predicted remains in its realm of speculation. You see,

bush fires will singe your hair as the surf pelts you with fragments of reef bones and coral, now hard to distinguish from weathered plastic. The iniquity of it all, that imbalance left in our wake, will make you weep and there won't be a kind hand to wipe your snot as all deities will have shifted to the Church of Corporate Power.

# We Who Learned the Language of Tides

*by Khayelihle Benghu*

---

We were born in crossings.  
In the dark hold of a history  
that refuses to stay buried,  
our forbears learned  
how to breathe between waves.  
The sea remembers everything.  
Salt is an archive.  
Each tear tastes of someone  
who survived before us.  
They thought the ocean was a grave.  
They did not know  
water does not only swallow:  
it carries.  
It carried names in its undercurrent,  
carried songs pressed into wet tongues,  
carried the rhythm of drums  
beating against the ribs of ships.  
History does not move in straight lines.  
It circles like tide.  
What was taken returns in another form:  
a protest chant,  
a grandmother's proverb,  
a child standing unafraid before riot shields.  
We gather like waves do  
one crest following another,  
separate but inseparable.  
The state calls it unrest.  
We call it rising.  
When we march,

we are not walking.  
We are remembering  
how to be ocean.  
And oceans cannot be fenced.

# Ant-hill lessons

*by Jack Love*

---

Crawling things flee before the towering  
Toddler with curious hands.  
He digs through dirt without fear, even  
When pain sears his fingers  
By the bites from a few score ants.  
Dirt grains subsumed by small  
Red bodies scurrying about the grass leaves,  
Up small arms where they plant  
An unkind kiss before suffering  
A warrior's death.  
They, too, suffer an unknown pain,  
For their world, too, has come down  
Above their antennaed crowns  
By an unbidden child curious  
To play within the earth's ground.  
But the ground and dirt and grass leaves  
Are their home, and we must learn that,  
While their bites hurt, they fight for  
Their right to live in their homes—  
The hill beneath your young feet is  
Well-trodden by life.  
Count these bites as a rite of knowledge:  
The world is full of curious, crawling things  
All just fighting to live another spring.

# She wanted to sleep head to foot

*by Jeff Miller*

---

She wanted to sleep head to foot. Instead you showed her how you could build a big, white wall of hotel pillows. In the night she wanted to know who put them there and who you were. She needed help six times to get to the bathroom. She coughed and moaned and groaned each time she got in and out of bed. She wept. In the morning, when you asked her how she slept, she said—what she always said—“Like a log. I didn’t hear a thing.” In contrast, none of us slept at all. When we got home we knew that just as God had numbered her days, we also would number them. When we pulled into our neighborhood, the snow that had covered everything only a week earlier fusing its crystals into a hard glaze had shrunk and withered and what was left as we pulled in coming back from that overnight in Milwaukee where there were so many revelations—how dense and clunky Evita really was, how puckered the salmon at Bel Lux, how grating the muffled cars zipping along the Milwaukee River all night—pulling into our neighborhood what was left of the snow were the scattered, white, lumpy, twisted bodies, like the ones found at Pompeii, snuggling to themselves for all they were worth.

# Disappearing into Blue

*by Mark Katrinak*

---

My being born is troubling. Leave well  
enough alone, I've often thought, discern  
the wave dares not repeat itself, it leaves  
its word upon the shore, its autograph  
on rocks, the idle rocks who brood, brush off  
wave's rush and pause, the moodiness of moon.  
My mood like moodiness of moon but sun's  
the one who brings it on, the splurge of light,  
the shadows crawling back at noon, white sails'  
transparent turn as light is easing through,  
a flock of birds in flight, indifferent,  
the almost always elsewhere they achieve,  
that something better's out of human view,  
a sailboat disappearing into blue.

# In Places Where There Isn't

*by Mark Katrinak*

---

In places where there's not a buzzing bee,  
that houses artificial sweeteners tweaked,  
I leave immediately, head to lavender,  
rosemary bushes blooming, wooing wings,  
bees coming out in droves, not where it's ice  
cold, plastic-packaged meat is left to freeze.  
Amusing, blooming isn't posting notices,  
that "Here's my nectar, first come, foremost serve,  
thy will be done, to work yourselves to sweet."  
The bees, their honeyed penitentiary,  
whose sweetness isn't cryptic, nowhere near  
corrupted, corporate economy.  
In places where the picket fences need  
going over, another generation has  
unpacked their stuff, some pointing fingers, some  
ready to repair, whether weathered wood,  
or marriages whose rent's way-overdue.  
White painted pickets leaning over left  
or leaning right in random patterns much  
like rain on windowpanes that dry to streaks  
working couples have little time to wipe.  
Perhaps they'll start from scratch and pull  
every stake out, erect a wire meshing lined  
with rows of barbwire, keeping wired brains  
from even contemplating entering.

# Aspic

by Aistė Budėnaitė

---

Rue was slicing cheese for a sandwich when Mother came into the kitchen. Rue had never wanted anything more than to take the knife, not how you take it to slice cheese, but how you take it to properly gut a person, really grip it, and take it to Mother. That would have been fairly easy to do with Mother turned away, looking for Father. Rue did not want to gut Father. She was, however, unsure of his reaction if this occurrence was to take place. Would he take the blame, would he help her dispose of this situation? No, that only happens in movies, and not even in all movies. Real people rat on each other the first chance they get. But at that moment, she was willing to try and find out.

So that is what she did – she stuck that knife into Mother’s back. It was nothing like she imagined, or saw in the movies, she hated the sound, and the feeling of it scraping against the bone before landing where it was supposed to. And she was embarrassed, of herself, in front of herself, to have done it in the back. No guts. But also, Rue felt as if she had been holding her breath for years. But at that moment, her lungs filled up with something much better than air itself. She felt she could have finally fallen asleep, and that hundred-year-old cracked linoleum, drenched in blood, would have felt like one of those human-sized dog beds, made of clouds. And the silence was nice, of course.

And then she opened her eyes to the feeling of that knife slicing into her finger, which is what happens when you try and explore dreamland while slicing cheese, god damn it. *Enjoy that sandwich, Rue.*

\*\*\*

Rue is quite happy to live without Mother. Even if her basement floods, or she loses her wallet, or it starts raining fire and she is being tortured by demons and their

pets, the need to stab people escapes her. She often reflects on her past, wondering if she was crazy. She always comes to the same conclusion – she was, perhaps, made so, but now everything is okay. She has a job, at the hospital, in fact. She has hobbies, and she even has friends. She is normal. More than normal. *Yes, you are.*

Today, Rue is ordering food at a restaurant with a new Friend from work. That is, until she gets a call from Father.

“Call her. Text her. I don’t know. She locked me out. Won’t let me in. I *bang...* I *bang...* I’m cold...” he muttered.

Rue drops the call without saying a word. The protocol for this situation is to drop the call and wait until the “we’re okay, sorry” call the following day. Rue can estimate he has had around two 50oz plastic bottles of cheap beer.

“Everything okay?” asked Friend.

“Yeah, you know, parents. One of those days that they get drunk, and someone ends up with a black eye. Then they call me to complain. I just ignore it. Let them fight it out, like dogs. They get tired and go to sleep, eventually,” says Rue, casually, even letting out a tiny laugh here and there.

“Oh...” exhales Friend, turning her eyes to the empty table, uncomfortable, then thinks for a second, as if debating which face to put on next. “Well, are they okay? Your mom, especially? Should you help?”

Great, she chose that concerned look of pity, thinks Rue. Rue hates that look, and as soon as she sees it, she knows she is talking to someone over-serious and over-pretentious. Someone who has had a childhood filled with rainbows and butterflies and waterparks and spring breaks in Italy. Someone who thinks everyone can be straightened out by a therapy session in a big white building with big windows. It is quite an enormous conclusion to draw from one look. But her best friends do not have that look. Her friends would say “okay, makes sense”, maybe accompanied by an expressive grimace, and the conversation would move on. But now Rue must make it move on, and she has no idea how. She knows she cannot make another joke. She knows there is no point in explaining herself to this golden child and inevitably getting frustrated. *Just go home and take a nap, Rue.*

“Yeah, right.” scoffs Rue, and stops looking for words. Fortunately, or unfortunately,

her companion doesn't add a single word. The food arrives, but this does not break the silence. The ringing of the phone does. Just when Rue is about to take the first bite of her sandwich. *You can do this, Rue.*

"What?!"

"She stabbed me."

Rue has heard this line before. One summer, after a day of day-drinking in the backyard, Father came into the kitchen through the back door, bleeding, and said "she stabbed me, this is it". As it turned out, there had been a slight misunderstanding concerning a bottle of beer. So, Mother took a pair of small gardening shears that have never ever been used for gardening and poked at his neck a little, just a little, because Rue was able to clean and bandage it all by herself. This is when Rue really became a professional at providing first aid, as he told her he did not want or need an ambulance. *But this is not the time to go down memory lane, Rue.*

"I called the... the ambulance. I don't think I can wait, I..." he went on.

"Wait, what? Where? Doesn't matter where, just put something on it, and hold, hold it the best you can..." finally goes off Rue, as she drops her food and dashes outside to the patio, then to the street, stopping only at the sight of cars driving right in front of her.

"Stomach. There's... it's too late... I... I love you, Rue. I think this is... this is it..." he is hyperventilating, and breaking off, but not because of bad phone signal.

"Stop! Just do what I say and wait! The ambulance is coming, you'll be okay," she says.

She is, in a way, annoyed. This is not the first time something like that happened. Usually "this is it" means he needs a band-aid. *But Rue, you're getting drenched, and you do not seem to see or feel it.*

"She finally... did it... They won't believe it. Tell them... I just... want to see you a..." he starts coughing, but not like he coughs every time he gets drunk and chokes on his beer.

"I will! I will! And you will! Just hang on, I'm coming! You hear me!?" she is yelling in the street.

Silence follows. Rue is finally able to hear and see the rain, which prompts her to run to her car, parked beside the building. *Too late now, you're all wet, Rue.*

"Hello?! I'm coming, I'll sort this out! Hello?! Answer me!" she is yelling while getting into her car and strapping herself in with her one free hand.

But he is not answering, or breathing, or hyperventilating, or coughing now.

\*\*\*

Rue turns the key. With the rumbling engine, the rain pecking at the car, and the daunting silence at the other end of the line, the noise becomes unbearable. Suddenly, a greater part of Rue's mind is back in that kitchen. Mother is yelling. She turns and confronts Rue with those blue, bloodshot, murderous eyes. Rue always knew that look was neither normal nor natural. Maybe for rabid dogs, but not humans. "Sinister" does not begin to describe it. And it used to send a million tiny needles down her spine, each more paralyzing than the last.

And in the last five years, she had only seen it in her nightmares, and in some photographs of Aileen Wuornos. But this time she does not freeze, because she already knows what it means. Her focus is on the mouth. Mother is yelling. Right in her face, ready to smack her, and yet, Rue cannot make it out.

What is she yelling? All Rue needs is to remember, to know if it was worth turning her into who she was, or is. And yes, she knows the answer, but she needs to remember. No, she knows, but she needs to remember. Hard. *Do not beat yourself up, Rue. It was a long time ago. And Mother would yell all day. Sometimes all night, if the alcohol began leaving her system by sundown, turning her into Babadook. You do not have to remember, nor is it possible. Just go home and rest your eyes, Rue.*

What is she saying?! All we know, and all Rue knows, is it is something obscene, something so obscene she would be embarrassed to tell someone that Mother is even capable of such thoughts, if anyone besides Father would even believe her. Something so obscene, you make yourself forget it, and yet, it forever provokes you to kill and want to die, provoked by something as simple as a dirty knife left on the kitchen table. Or something else, as, in this case, the knife is still in Rue's hands. *You know what to do with it, Rue. You've done this before. Well, not really. You just have to come back and drive now.*

"I'm coming, dad. See you both soon."



Gilbert Calleja, *untitled*. Fragment from the series *Bodies In-possibilities*. Mixed media on fabric, 2024-2026.

# Equinoctial Alignment at Mnajdra: *A Choreography of Recurrence*

*by Tanja Cilia*

---

At Mnajdra the light is not welcomed;  
It is invited. Calibrated.  
At the equinox  
the threshold admits the sun:  
a measured blade  
sliding between uprights,  
across the worn sill,  
into the inner apse.  
Design, not accident.  
Orthostats bear five millennia.  
Coralline breathes salt.  
The corbelled roofing, long collapsed,  
persists in suggestion.  
She stands where illumination narrows,  
where the floor inclines  
toward libation holes dark with conjecture.  
When the beam reaches the altar, she moves.  
Bare feet trace the curvature of the apse.  
Her palms skim spiral and bovine relief...  
Tarxien's insistences:  
muscle and flank pressing outward from stone.  
Across the ridge, Haġar Qim keeps watch  
above the filament of sea.  
Between temples... wind.  
Outside the portal, the tethered animal strains,

sensing alteration in the air.  
Frame drum. Bone rattle.  
Pulse answering pulse.  
She turns in deliberate revolutions,  
mapping architecture onto muscle.  
Temple as body; body as enclosure.  
Within the apsidal embrace she becomes axial,  
a provisional omphalos  
on an island long practised  
in centrality and invasion alike.  
The blade rises. A brief arc interrupts the morning.  
Blood meets stone, seeking carved depressions  
their function debated  
their gravity undisputed.  
She lowers with the offering.  
not collapsed, but complete.  
Behind her the rite dilates, tilts.  
She releases a sound older than speech.

---

The island accrues syntax.  
Phoenician keel.  
Latin road.  
Roman order.  
She gathers another sequence:  
exordium.  
divisio.  
confirmatio.  
confutatio.  
peroratio.  
Rhetoric as containment.  
Logos disciplines the vernal surge.  
Memoria curates what must not surface.  
She recites within an orthostat mind,  
stacking terms like dressed blocks,  
constructing an interior corbel against collapse.  
Cornu fractures air. Buccina answers.  
Lyre threads civility through vibration.  
Yet beneath dispositio, the earlier rhythm persists.

Paris. 1913.

A theatre replaces the forecourt;  
gaslight supplants dawn.

The bassoon ascends—  
nasal, insistent, improper.

Bodies bend against classical line.  
Feet strike earth instead of aspiring.

The audience recoils.

She knows this geometry:  
angular, percussive, deliberately archaic.

What scandalises one century is recurrence in another.

She feels again the apse's curvature,  
the weight of orthostat shadow,  
anticipation pooled in stone cavities.  
Prehistory does not recede; it rearticulates.  
In every era, there is a figure who bears excess...  
once reclining in clay, abdomen ample,  
eyes closed not in sleep, but in inwardness...  
and another who must rise to dance it.

The circle resolves  
as sunlight finds its seam in stone.

And she cries out.

Not scandal,

Not ecstasy...

Recognition.

# Penthouse or The Joke of All Time

by *k.d.zwierz*

---

They told me to be quiet  
And they told me to be candy  
To smile and be sugared

And they told me I was beautiful

They told  
That's how they taught

Hushed and buttoned up  
Just as I buttoned down

Lips, belts

Taught me to be nice  
So nice  
To smile a tearless numb

Taught me to do anything  
So I'd do any thing  
Be any thing

Be an alien  
Because aliens don't have bodies

A new sensation  
From outta space  
Split open  
Cold and clean  
Sweet-juiced

Slice by slice  
Delicious, delicious

Bones, blood and hair  
Ripe and picked, picked  
Picked at

fed off

And like it better than anything in the world

Then dropped where they'd found me.

Kill me.  
Kill me, then go to hell  
With no more illusions

And now that all my teachers are dead,  
There's nothing more to do but dance.

# mothers

by *k.d.zwierz*

---

I see her now, wearing her past like a cloak  
stitched of secret shames,  
fastened with hairspray and dusty perfume.

She cooked and laughed and never spoke of lovers jailed,  
of village men shot in streets; those thoughts  
kept ransom within a restless pantry

that was her company and her counsel. Her balcony  
was the heavy peace of one long cloister –  
darkened by confidences

just as voiceless as the sisters to whom my mother  
would turn for guidance. So little sound was there,  
cells and carpets thickened by a god with sleep in his eyes.

Everywhere, secret pacts.

She kept a canary in her foyer – a subterranean room,  
cold and lightless but for a chill golden shimmer  
that glowed from that little bird; a fissure,

a mute hall that held the surface tension,  
kept by a yellow bird who fell stone cold from its perch  
when we came too close to dangerous words,

words that shook the earth as she gave up her spirit, words  
that stitched shut the veil, sealed the tombs;  
words that rose and choked

like dead feathers burning.

# Lombardy Poplar

*by Julie Mitchelmore*

---

Exalt  
every branch raised  
around each bough unbowed.  
The feather of you visible  
winter-lit from angel's wing now rooted  
quill, reaching all arms to heaven.  
Spring, green shimmering leaves  
sough in soft psalm  
exalt

# Waking my 11-year-old at 2 am

by *Malisa Garlieb*

---

He hits me flat-handed  
and he's not even awake to apologize.  
He hits me when the lancet hits  
his finger, before I get the jewel  
of blood onto the test strip.  
I try again, don't blame him.  
How could he feel this diagnosis  
as anything but assault.  
The glucometer beeps and I take out a juice.  
You're low I say though he's not awake.  
I pull on his shoulders and he whines.  
Get up I say. Drink this I say.  
His insulin pump beeps, tardy in its duty  
but effective in breaking through sleep.  
My son moans, growls, wobbles  
to an upright seat—I can't have him choking.  
I hold the juice box to his mouth  
and remind him to drink, to drink more,  
to drink again, to drink it all up. He hates me.  
I allow him to lie back but I watch  
for breathing, for color in his moony face.  
I watch how his jaw twitches and see  
subtle angles emerging, a cross  
of Peter Pan and Christopher Robin.  
His elongated limbs twist within the sheet  
and break free. I wait out fifteen minutes  
and repeat protocols. This is how it is now,  
how I get to be by his side.

# Squash, Not the Vegetable

*by Young Kim*

---

*Three-wall nicks and boasts.  
Grey peaks, milky turquoise lakes,  
and blue skies beyond.*

## **I. Beginnings**

I reached my peak as a squash player in my mid-thirties, sometime during the 1980s—a good decade to be chasing a small black ball around four walls in the Midwest. I had started playing in law school, mostly because I wanted an indoor sport immune to Chicago’s meteorological mood swings. I had previously played tennis, but squash struck me as the most elegant of the enclosed games: strategic, quick, a mix of geometry and psychology.

I played first on the old narrow hardball courts, with their worn maple floors and solid back walls, the sound of the ball like a muffled gunshot—pop-pop-pop. The rhythm hooked me. There was a clean perfection to the stroke, wristy and controlled, like cracking a whip or skipping a stone. I remember thinking it was the only time in law school when my body and mind worked in tandem—briefly liberated from casebooks and fluorescent lights.

When I married and moved to the northern suburbs, the rhythm changed. The younger, hungrier players still played downtown after work, sweating through their shirts before the last Metra train north. I became a lunchtime player, sneaking out between client calls and depositions, returning to the office with salt on my temples and a handful of peanuts to tide me over. My legal assistant used to cover for me by saying, “He’s in court.” She never specified which kind.

I wasn’t trying to be secretive; it just seemed more professional that way. Squash was, for me, both release and ritual—a good way to get away from the everyday pressures of a lawyer’s life.

## II. The University Club

Most serious players in Chicago eventually made their way to the University Club on Monroe Street at Michigan Avenue. The U Club was more than a building; it was an ecosystem, a throwback to an era when men in three-piece suits took elevators to mahogany locker rooms and discussed business over lamb chops. Founded just after the Civil War, the Club occupied a twelve-story Gothic revival pile across from Millennium Park, with a leaded-glass library, dining rooms, a swimming pool, sleeping quarters, and, crucially, its squash courts.

By the time I joined, the Club had gone coed, though its manners were still faintly Edwardian. The membership hovered around fifteen hundred, of whom roughly three hundred were “squashies,” and ten of the twenty board seats—unofficially—belonged to them. Governance followed the ball.

I first visited the U Club in college, as a guest of my university’s president. He had brought me to lunch to display to the trustees what a “tame student” looked like, in contrast to the radicals then occupying administration buildings. Afterward, wandering the clubhouse halls, I peeked into the library and saw a row of old men dozing in leather armchairs, newspapers draped like blankets across their laps. I thought they were hired props, paid to provide atmosphere. Part of me envied them. They seemed at peace, surrounded by wood paneling and the gentle hush of privilege. I remember thinking: Someday I’d like to nap here.

Years later, I did join—and occasionally I did nap—but mostly I played. The club’s courts had a particular smell: sweat and varnish, a trace of cigars drifting from the men’s grill upstairs. The sound of the ball echoed through the stairwell, a percussive heartbeat.

Lunchtime squash became a small society of its own. We’d appear in our suits, change in silence, play forty-five minutes of frantic, lung-burning points, then shower and reemerge in the same suits, pretending we hadn’t aged a year. In the locker room, players discussed mergers, divorces, knee surgeries. The court was a place where partners could settle arguments or where opposing counsel could become temporary allies, at least until the score was seven-all.

The U Club also hosted major regional tournaments, drawing players from Milwaukee, Kansas City, St. Louis, Detroit, and Cleveland. During those weekends,

the building vibrated with energy: sweaty men in headbands queuing at the juice bar, spectators leaning over the balcony rail to watch the semifinals, the pros circulating like demigods. To be on those courts was to belong to a peculiar fraternity of obsession.

### **III. The Game**

For the uninitiated, squash looks like racquetball's austere cousin—same box, smaller ball, tighter strokes. But the feel of it is entirely different. A good squash stroke is compact, wrist-driven, more about timing than muscle. The ball, struck properly, makes a soft thup and dies neatly in the back corner.

After hitting a shot, the player must return to the “T,” the small intersection of lines at mid-court. The T is home base, command center, and battleground all at once. The prime directive is simple: after striking the ball, you have an affirmative duty to clear the way, giving your opponent an unimpeded path and a clean view of the front wall. Squash, at its best, becomes a kind of dance—two players exchanging positions in a wordless choreography of anticipation and retreat.

A shot that strikes the side wall before the front wall is called a boast. A perfect shot that hits three walls before dying at the junction of floor and side wall—a three-wall nick—is a thing of beauty. It's the game's version of a checkmate: graceful, final, impossible to return.

The game itself began in unlikely places. In 18th-century London debtor prisons, inmates passed time playing “racquets” against high walls. At Harrow in the 1830s, schoolboys punctured the balls, creating the distinctive “squash” sound and softer bounce. From there the game spread across the British Empire, carried in steamer trunks to India, South Africa, and beyond.

By the 1920s, two versions existed: hardball squash in North America, using a smaller, faster ball on narrower courts, and the international (softball) game everywhere else. The divide was partly cultural, partly practical—the colonial outposts favored endurance and craft, while Americans preferred pace and precision.

I began with hardball but, like most Chicago players, eventually switched. The transition felt like moving from chess blitz to marathon. Rallies stretched into minutes-long exchanges. Fitness mattered more than finesse. Where once a clever drop shot could end a point, now you needed lungs like bellows.

#### IV. The Golden 1980s

In those years, I lived in a rhythm of court and commute. I played or trained five or six times a week, often driving on Fridays to tournaments in Madison, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Detroit, or Cleveland. The format never changed: single elimination, thirty-two players per draw. Friday night meant your first match, usually against a local hopeful; Saturday meant two more if you survived; Sunday, the semifinals and finals.

At the Saturday night party, you could always tell who was still in the draw—those were the men sipping water and leaving early. The rest of us drank beer, swapped injury stories, and debated the ethics of borderline lets. It was a circuit of camaraderie and competition: fierce on the court, forgiving afterward.

Chicago itself was a lively squash town. The U Club was its cathedral, but there were outposts in Lake Forest, Winnetka, Evanston. At the Winter Club in Lake Forest, where I sometimes played doubles, the racquets pro was a young man named Mark—handsome, athletic, primarily a tennis player moonlighting in squash. We met in a local tournament once. He had textbook strokes but still moved like a tennis player, lunging when he should glide. I won narrowly, ending the match with a straight drop that left him gasping. He called out, “Oh!”—that small exhalation of surprise that every squash player secretly treasures.

It was an era of transition not just in equipment but in style. The North American hardball scene was dominated by the showmen—chief among them Sharif Khan, son of the great Hashim. Sharif was magnetic. He’d play to the crowd mid-rally, flicking his eyes at the audience before hitting a kill shot. He made the game theatrical without cheapening it.

Internationally, the sport belonged to Pakistan. Hashim Khan, the patriarch, had begun as a barefoot ball boy in the 1920s at a British officers’ club in Peshawar. After hours he practiced alone, developing a compact, lightning-quick game. In the 1950s he won the British Open eight times, then emigrated to the U.S., teaching in Detroit and Denver. His nephew Jahangir—JK to fans—would become the greatest player of the 1980s, perhaps of all time, winning more than five hundred matches consecutively, a streak no one has come close to touching. I later connected with him on LinkedIn, a digital echo of the old international fraternity. He remains in Pakistan, a dignified ambassador for the sport.

There was a strange symmetry in it: a game born in colonial prisons now dominated by the descendants of the colonized. On court, hierarchy dissolved into reflex and muscle memory.

## **V. Decline**

No sport flatters the passage of time. In your thirties, you feel indestructible; in your forties, you learn the vocabulary of ice packs. My decline came gradually: first the knees, then the shoulders, then the Achilles tendons—one, then the other, both snapped during points I can still replay in my mind.

The first rupture came at the Illinois State Doubles finals. A loud pop, like a gunshot, and I was on the floor, unable to rise. Months of rehab followed: the clumsy walking boot, the slow reintroduction of motion, the humiliation of realizing you can't climb stairs properly. The second injury arrived years later during a singles match against a U Club pro. I knew immediately what had happened. Pain, then resignation. You don't make the same mistake twice—but sometimes the body does.

After that, my play changed. The reflexes dulled. I could still place a shot, still coax a dying drop from the front wall, but my movement lost its elasticity. I began losing to players I once taught. The lunch-hour games grew more social, less competitive. I told myself that was maturity, but it was also surrender.

The sport itself was fading at the Club. The younger members preferred golf, triathlons, boutique fitness classes, or just their computers and cell phones. The courts were quieter, the walls less scuffed. Squash never had great television appeal, even with the advent of all glass walls—the ball too small, the action too fast for cameras to follow. It remained a connoisseur's game, one best experienced from within the glass box, where every breath and heartbeat reverberates.

## **VI. Egypt and the Present**

If Pakistan gave squash its legends, Egypt gave it immortality. Beginning in the 2000s, Egyptian players transformed the game with artistry and audacity. They were fearless shot-makers, combining the discipline of the Khans with Mediterranean flair.

There was Mohamed El Shorbagy, “The Beast”, relentless and physical; Karim Abdel Gawad, “The Baby-Faced Assassin”, all finesse and angles; Mostafa Asal, “The Raging Bull”, whose blocking tactics made him both villain and spectacle. On the women’s side, Nour El Sherbini, “The Warrior Princess”, became a four-time world champion before turning twenty-five; Nouran Gohar, “The Terminator”, crushed opponents with power; and Raneem El Welily, “The Enigma”, floated through rallies with balletic grace.

The Egyptians’ dominance was total, but also poetic—a nation that had inherited the British game and reimagined it in Arabic rhythms. Among them, there was even a rivalry of geography: Alexandrian players versus those from Cairo, each claiming a purer lineage of style.

I still watch their matches online, amazed by the precision and athleticism. The rallies stretch impossibly long, the ball struck a hundred times before dying in a perfect nick. It feels like watching an evolved species of the game I once knew.

My favorites among the non-Egyptians—Paul Coll, “Superman” from New Zealand, for his unbreakable stamina; Joel Makin, “The Golden Tiger” from Wales, fierce and analytical; and Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, “The Colombian Cannonball”, whose flying dives turn rallies into theatre—remind me that the game, though global, still speaks a universal grammar: angles, anticipation, grace under pressure.

## **VII. The Court as Mirror**

Sometimes I think squash was my first philosophy. Inside the court, you confront the self stripped of excuses. Every point is a miniature moral experiment: the line between aggression and restraint, calculation and instinct. The court measures not just physical skill but emotional discipline—the capacity to recover from a bad bounce, a lucky nick, a missed let.

The “T” at center court becomes a metaphor for equilibrium. Every shot drives you away from it; every recovery is a return. Life outside the court, too, is a constant rally between extremes—work and rest, ambition and fatigue, winning and letting go.

There’s a story old players tell: a novice once asked a pro what the secret of squash was. The pro replied, “Hit the ball and get out of the way.” It’s both tactical and existential advice.

## VIII. Coda

I still play, sometimes, though “play” is generous. The legs are slower, the rallies shorter, the recovery time longer. But the pleasure remains—especially in that moment when the ball leaves the racquet, arcs toward the front wall, and dies just right.

I no longer chase rankings. I play to feel that rhythm again, the whispering thud of the ball, the brief illusion that time hasn’t changed anything essential.

Afterward, I sometimes walk past the U Club library, where the old armchairs still sit beneath portraits of forgotten members. The same silence hangs in the air, a faint smell of dust and polish. I imagine those dozing men of my youth—props or not—nodding in approval.

Squash, like the law, teaches you to live within constraints: a box, a rulebook, a time limit. But within that confinement lies possibility. Every shot is a negotiation between order and chaos, every rally a dialogue between two people who understand the terms.

The game has outlasted my knees, my ambitions, even the culture that once sustained it. Yet whenever I step onto the court, I feel the same quickening, the same gratitude.

The ball hits the wall, rebounds, and for a few seconds I’m back in that echoing space between youth and age, winning and losing, past and present.

*Three-wall nicks and boasts.*

*Grey peaks, milky turquoise lakes,  
and blue skies beyond.*

# The things I leave behind

*by Nolo Segundo*

---

The books of course. Some read,  
but most will remain virginal,  
ensconced in their bookcases  
as time compresses me.

There will also be the photos I took  
of lands I had dreamt of as a child  
but traversed as a young man,  
treading the world like an old-time  
sea captain, sans ship or crew....

Few images of me—my vanity did not  
bend that way, though I was skilled  
at being selfish, reluctant to give my  
heart away, though now I see it was  
really just fear—Old Man Fear, the  
oldest of all bar Death itself.

But I learned, yes, the hard way mostly,  
as was my wont,—and Fear  
moved his old bones away from me,  
letting my soul warm, letting my heart  
grow to love another soul for most  
of a lifetime...

That will be the best thing I leave  
behind.

# The City With No Name

*by Aliza Wyman*

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I met you on a mission trip. I was seventeen, you were twenty-seven. I thought on that roiling bus ride that the age difference would be enough to wedge you away from me. We were building houses for hurricane victims. Me digging ditches in my overalls, small even for a girl, stick arms and an eating disorder I couldn't shake, more scarecrow than skin, Louisiana mud up under my fingernails. I had never been so far from home. Valentines' week and you and your girl were fighting. She'd come into the girls' dormitory screaming. We lived in that hostel place, where cockroaches skittered on the floor. There were bugs in all our luggage. All the girls sat on the bed with her, squeezing her shoulders, brushing her bleach-fried beauty queen hair. And I alone stumbled out to find you, the Gulf sun setting behind the fire escape shadowing your unpretty profile, your heavy head in your hands wondering what you'd done. I just thought you needed a friend.

You asked me what I thought about God one day, coming out of the bodega, a red bandana tied Rosie Riveter-tight around my sweating head. You swung an orange soda bottle in a plastic bag, me running down the pavement with my arms out, under the drifting willows, the branches scraping my shoulders like a haunting. I was trying to write my own personality then. No one knew me back at college yet. A freshman. I wanted to be a femme fatale, like I'd read about in all my poetry books. I wanted to eat men like air, just no one had let me get close enough yet. I looked over my shoulder, batted my blonde stub eyelashes.

"I like to believe there's someone up there who forgives us for all that we do," I said.

You with your wolf smile. "And what have you done?"

I shrugged. "Oh, you know, I have my mistakes."

"How many?"

"Excuse me."

“I don’t think you have any. I don’t think you’ve ever even been kissed.”

Face red, tears pressing at the back of my eyes. “Have too.”

I lied, because you’d done it, pinned the butterfly to the corkboard, chased me to the mouth of my warren and chucked a torch right in. There was nowhere left to hide.

“That’s alright, kid,” you said. “I’ll keep your secret.”

I don’t know how to write about you, because I don’t want you remembered, that rusted blasphemy that you made out of my bones. It seems so obvious in hindsight, your finger tugging patient on the thread that held me up.

Then your girlfriend shooting daggers at me from her eyes, on her bunk across from mine, her feet tucked up under the blanket.

“You should watch out,” she said.

“What?”

“He’s not a good guy.”

“Neither am I,” I said, because it fit with the part I was writing for myself. At seventeen I only said things I didn’t believe.

The bus rolled back into town under two feet of snow, the tires parting the drifts like clumsy knives through wedding cake. There you were, in your basketball shorts and holey sweatshirt, walking down the steps with your roommates, joking and shoving about who knows what now. Maybe you were talking about me. I walked alone back to my dorm, my roommate still gone and nothing to eat. The world outside a white wasteland. For a week, I’d lived under the spotlight of your gaze. Now, on the outside, I couldn’t bear it, felt the outline of my skin dissolving. I couldn’t catch my breath for the dead feeling coming up over my head. It felt entirely possible that I would rattle around this room like bones in a coffin for the next four months and nothing would happen to me. That I would be returned unscathed to my mother at the end of the semester. It made me want to pluck the skin from my face, this feeling. I wanted it back, all of it, Nashville barbeque, that crackling flesh on my lips. The railroad tracks that ran up along the marshes by the beach. The King cake baby caught and chipped between my teeth. I wanted it all back. You were just the only number I had to call.

You planned a party around me. Friday. You would buy my alcohol.

What did I want? Or had I never drank before? I was such a baby.

And no worries, if I hadn't, you would hold my hair back. You would keep me safe. You would even let me sleep in your bed if I couldn't make it home.

On my first day on campus, the RA in her tight smiling skin handed me a key card and a rape whistle on a blue lanyard. Shiny cold metal. I kept it in the top drawer of my desk. I followed the rules. I didn't think I needed it. I never walked anywhere at night alone. I avoided the dark alleys, the wooded bends and twists behind the education building. I thought myself safe, running in my mini skirt down the sidewalk in broad daylight, headlong into your teeth.

I had been taught that rape was lightning fast, swift violence, the kissing cousin of war, the foundation of Rome, the humiliation of Judith. Cut and dry, a black and white thing with a bad guy, a head to cut straight from the shoulders.

No one warned me about your slow way, the termite crawl of you beneath my skin for weeks before you ever even touched me.

Everyone told me we were dating.

That first party, on that Friday, I told you I wanted Jager with a Moxie chaser, because it sounded tough and tasted awful. The point of drinking then was to punish myself. Our hands brushed on the red solo cup. You taught me dice games, let me wear your hat, laying on the floor, chin propped in my hand. Your dorm room was a four-way street, a suite, and you never alone. It looked like a family. I wanted that.

I slept in your bed that night. You tucked me in like a father, kissed me on the forehead and left me lying in the dark. I could see you through the crack in the door, sleeping under a jacket on the couch. You were always such a gentleman. I felt safe, in these sheets that smelled like you. I didn't know we were playing chess, you never advancing, always waiting for me to come to you.

I keep a picture of you on the dart board of my mind, way in the back, behind a locked closet door, where no one ever goes. There you are, your double chin, your yellow rat teeth, the stubble that gouged my face. Your thick tongue between thin lips, always tasting like onions and mayonnaise, like you'd just licked the floor of a grocery aisle before leaning down to kiss me. And that vulnerable look on your face when you'd lift your mouth away from mine, eyes still shut, throat jowly and open. Me looking, always looking, thinking that if you kissed me one more time, I'd die.

In the dark sometimes, in the quiet of my grown up bedroom, I walk myself down to the back of my mind. I rip your picture off the wall. I gouge out your eye sockets with my thumbnails, tear your nose into a crater. And I hope, wherever you are, it hurts, that you sit up straight in your bed and remember. You did this to me.

You pulled the sleeves of my sweater up to the elbow, sitting alone on the couch for the first time. Superhero posters all along your back wall. I had no illusions. You were no Bruce Wayne.

But what else did I have to do? A virgin freshman, no one else was calling me. And you looked at my unmarked skin that March afternoon and clucked your tongue.

"What?"

And you told me you'd expected to see scars there.

I grabbed for my sleeves, but you held them tight.

"You just look like the type," you said.

You smelled it, the lonely and the broken on me, came circling.

"I don't want to talk about this," I said.

You didn't press, just put on a Disney movie, because you liked this, to keep the child in me breathing. You liked this, for me always to seem at once both younger and older than I was.

Our first date, my first date ever, we went to see your mother in the ICU. She was slow dying of lung cancer in a room overlooking the Androscoggin, all the space filled up with her raspy breathing. And me, a stranger blown into her path, uncomfortable in my crop top and high heels. You didn't even introduce me, just left me standing there like a ghost, a silent witness to all the easy ways a person could be undone. She didn't speak to me either, but we stayed for an hour in that stale place and I tried not to inhale any departing spirits. I was superstitious like that but you didn't know me that well, slept with a circle of salt around my bed, always held my breath when we passed a cemetery out on the road. I peeled the skin from the sides of my fingernails.

You took me out for Chinese after, a buffet shop in a strip mall without any windows where the food cooked under red hot heat lamps. And the waitress asked if I was your daughter.

I pulled at my spare ribs, red dye number forty staining my teeth, all the time you pressing your ankle into mine beneath the table.

The English professor assigned *Lolita* during my Junior year of college. Nabokov's soaring sentences about how America loves a woman, the arc and fall of his interest. I was the only student who didn't recoil. I stared at the words dead eyed. I'd been her, Lo, swinging her bobby socked feet at the diner counter. Lo, licking her spoon clean of cherry pie vanilla ice cream.

You'd made me live it.

So when a Senior raised her hand and asked why Dolores didn't run away, I got myself kicked out of class, by calling out, your leftover bite still slicked smooth over all my teeth:

"What are you, fucking stupid?" I said.

You made a kidnapping out of me, and I called it love.

I went home for Spring break. Your voice followed me, wriggling its way through the phone, echoing from the walls of my childhood home. You wanted to know everything, wanted pictures of everything. It hurt and I didn't know why. I didn't know that this, too, was theft. That when I looked at my father's armchair or my

lonely little bed, I wouldn't see Christmas and birthdays or bright shining easters anymore. I would only hear everything filtered through your voice, see you holding up every scrap of my life, appraising it under a jeweler's microscope.

You did it on purpose. You didn't want me to ever be able to scrub you out.

I will speak around it. I still cannot talk through it. The ice is too thick, and my ship, you fucker, is tired. I was fine where I was, watching *Mean Girls* in my room, alone. You called me out into the Spring snow, wearing only my brother's boxers and the t-shirt I'd gotten at the last concert I'd seen with my mother. The shirt had P!nk squatting in heels, the words *Blow Me*, printed in great bubble letters, crackled and tattered from the dryer.

You had always toed the line, left me begging, kissing me on the forehead, teasing. There were ten years between us, you said. I would always have to come to you.

But you paid me no courtesy, strange magician. You waved your wand and turned all my repulsion into desire, made yourself a rarity by making me feel unwanted. This is how you kept me around. After all, who else would want me?

That night, your roommates gone, you shrugged, a little drunk from a party I hadn't been invited to.

"If you really want to, you should do it now, before I change my mind," you said.

It was my body that climbed into that bed. I have spent years, blaming myself, scraping my skin raw trying to claw you out of me.

You had a Halo poster on the wall opposite your mattress. That's what I remember, the only thing. My brain has hidden the rest of it from me, locked it away to keep me safe.

Everything but you, standing in the doorway naked afterwards turning the light back on, your stomach draped over your thighs, the full horror of your age and your decay on display. Old at twenty-seven and every inch of my flesh repulsed.

Your voice calling out to me, not telling me you loved me, but jeering, "you fucked an old man."

You made a joke of these bones. I can't take them serious anymore.

de Beauvoir tells me that in some cultures, virgins are unlucky. That they are dispatched swiftly, by priests or chiefs, in the bush beside the village, in temples and homes. These grown men come out after the girl with their bodies, bones, hooks, a stick sharpened to a point. That after the bleeding stops, the girl is viable, loveable.

This is how I choose to see you, as ritual, a rite of passage.

Anything else rips my heart too wide, leaves me gasping.

I have to believe that you stole nothing from me.

I came to Easter at your house. We did not speak of resurrections. It was a big step, me walking into your dim kitchen in my heels. Your mama smoking in the armchair. She had you clean out your room, down on your knees, flitting through little wallet-sized photos of yourself in baseball uniforms.

“When I die,” she said, “the bank’s going to take the house.”

Your room was not a room, but a loft, with a railing overlooking the living room. She could hear all our night noises. You patted the mattress said that I must never have had this much space to play with.

It was a king and you thought yourself king too, with a right to everything.

At Easter dinner, your mama read the roster of the year’s dead. It’s Western Maine, here people die young and stupid. Four-wheeler accident, drunk driver, your high school class is a collection of blacked-out squares, your yearbook resembles a goalie’s puck-bitten mouth. I don’t know your dead.

Your sister sealed up the garage and lit a joint, the smoke playing in the dust on the glass. She left us watching her daughter in her white church dress and kid gloves stained at the fingertips.

“This will be good practice,” you told me, sliding the child onto my lap.

And all I wanted to do was grab her and run for the lock on the bathroom door and never come out.

I went to the Spring Fling dance alone. You refused me, said what did I think this was. You were graduating. Who did I think I was? You made me live with the stone cold knowledge that I had done it all for nothing. I leapt, wild into that night, pink and black tank top, a lace skirt, still too young to know that I was the most beautiful I would ever be. On my own without you, half-drunk in the strobe and the pounding bass in the cafeteria because none of our trysts were ever glamorous, but caught up always in the limit of being kids with no money in the armpit of Western Maine.

I kissed the first boy who danced with me, a stranger with acne craters and a good body. Like Freddy Krueger. I wanted this, for him to take a clawed fist and rip my life apart, tear open the nightmare I'd made of it.

One of your roommates saw me. I came running out after him, chasing him along the sidewalk, screaming, tears streaming down my face.

"Don't tell."

The high heel split from my shoe, sending me sprawling. I rolled my ankle, limped bare foot back to your door. You had already locked it. I didn't know it, but we'd already spoken face-to-face for the last time. I slammed my knuckles into the wood, until I bruised bone, until the RA knelt beside me like I was a child and told me that if I did not stop, she would call the campus police. I didn't drive myself to violence for the love of you. I don't want the scene misunderstood. I'd left my best self in that room and now I couldn't get her back.

In the weeks to come, your voice rose up like spirit messages from my Facebook account. I let most of them dissipate, turn to smoke. But one has stuck with me, for over a decade.

"You just used me to open the floodgates."

I'd been made filthy in your eye. For that, you stripped me down, pelted me with stones, until I believed it too.

Your influence on me was not so easily cut. You had kept me in the dark, your undiscovered coal, under the careful pressure of your hands. I was your diamond. I only wanted to be my own dull rock again.

It has been a decade. You are my best kept secret. The man I married does not know about you. I see you nowhere, but your body resurfaces for me in strange places, like a corpse bobbing through the swamp of my mind. My pregnant silhouette in the mirror is your stripped bare body at the light switch. You run across my brain with your spool of string, forming connections I can't break.

I still cannot say the name of the city in which we met. I cannot see it written or hear it said without needing to run to the shower, anxious, like Lady Macbeth at the sink. Out, out, blood.

It was a beautiful place, where the Gulf met the banyan trees, the red eyes of the crocodiles bobbing at night. Trumpets screaming in the dark and me always shaking cockroaches out of my suitcase on my way out the door. You've made it all a story I can't tell anymore.

# Father // Son

*by Rufus Wright*

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*“It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Frederick Douglas*

He’d drive a ten-penny straight  
into the two-by-four  
with one silent smash  
a satisfied smile.

Rolled up his sleeves not mindful  
of the muscles just eager to change  
the tire. Jacked up the car  
I thought could have just lifted.  
Then plugged the crowbar on,  
jerked once, loosened a nut.  
Spun the bar, watched the lug leap off.  
Five times.

Five times other way.  
Spare on.  
On our way.

Let me challenge him at gin.  
Drank Cutty. Dragged Camel  
after Camel.

Talked non-stop, remembered every card  
and told me, “You’re about to go down”  
as he laid down his hand.  
“Gin!”



Gilbert Calleja, *untitled*. Fragment from the series *Bodies In-possibilities*. Mixed media on fabric, 2024-2026.

# We are given each...

*by Justin Hollis*

---

We are given each a piece of white construction paper and a box of crayons to share. You draw a field of flowers, a purple lion with a red mane and bright blue tail. But the brittle crayons snap in my clumsy child fingers. “Ghosts,” I say, when you ask about my picture, and point out the mother and father ghost. The ghost little sister. “You can’t see them, but they’re everywhere. They’ve even read the diary hidden in the hatbox under your bed”. Bawling, you run out of the room. Any minute mother will storm in and paddle my bottom with that wooden spoon of hers. But now I too am a ghost. Receding into the background of a childhood lit by the eerie glow of the television. Eating a cup of vanilla ice cream.

# Stumbling in after a late night...

*by Justin Hollis*

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Stumbling in after a late night, I discover an old woman in my bed. I'm drunk, but this is no hallucination; when I try to shake her awake, she snorts, and her arms and head shrink into her nightdress like a turtle. I collapse beside her, too drunk to care, but sleep doesn't come. The old woman's cold as death, smells something awful, and every couple of minutes she rolls over and cries out a different man's name. It takes a half-hour of tossing before my eyes grow heavy, when I realize I have to pee. Feeling my way back down the hall, I see a warm light pulsing from the bedroom. The old woman floats up by the ceiling, transfigured like a prophet, and where she lay there's a litter of kittens. The kittens mew softly, hungry, but I have no bottle of milk to feed them. Instead, my masculine breasts are engorged, and my nightshirt soaked through. But why am I crying like a child? My mother had left when I was just an infant, and here is the gift of the old woman: the chance to nurture another living creature as I had never been.

# Barbers & Booze

*by Rob Leone*

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Someone from the British consulate popped by, an earnest youngster in wire-rimmed glasses and a snug suit. He carried with him an air of foreboding and some papers. The apartment, on the top floor of an old building in the west seventies, had an unreliable elevator. Rough stucco covered the walls and amber bulbs glowed in the wrought iron light fixtures that lined the hall. They reminded Malcolm of a medieval castle every time he flicked on the lights. No one climbed the stairs this far unless they had serious business with Malcolm, which was rare. There was the odd FEDEX package and food deliveries of course, which he kept forgetting to cancel.

“Mr. Hollinghurst, you really must complete these forms, it’s absolutely necessary.”

“Oh yes, quite so, young man, quite so,” he replied, taking the papers and edging the junior diplomat ever so gently toward the door, all the while trying to shield him from a view of the apartment’s interior.

There were three Blue Apron boxes stacked in the corner of the living room, unopened. The long defunct ingredients for a Middle Eastern vegetarian stew oozed from one of them. A buzzing of tiny flies divebombed the pile like miniature Luftwaffe fighter planes in the Battle of Britain. Periodically, they would all disappear, only to return later in the day, full of life. They had gone off somewhere, perhaps Denmark, to refuel was Malcolm’s theory. In their absence Malcolm missed them. They were company, not intellectually stimulating, mind you, but cheerful and busy, despite the Nazi overtones. A fold-up hospital bed and stacks of sketch pads on a table occupied the opposite corner.

But the young man—Cecil—was not to be deterred. He had it all, Malcolm thought, the razor-sharp hair that glistened in the dim light. The razor-sharp jawline, the fine grained beard, the flat stomach, the ripe and rippling buttocks. Malcolm dared not get too close for fear of cutting himself on something.

“Mr. Hollinghurst, the consulate has tried contacting you several times

by text and email but there has been no response. Your US work visa will expire at the end of this month, if you don't renew you'll lose your job and be deported." Cecil recited this unfortunate scenario in a flat monotone bordering on sing song. He had an odd way of rolling his lips when he spoke, as if his mouth contained extra teeth that got in the way. Aside from the eyes glazed over by what Malcolm assumed was an excess of internet connectivity and social media saturation, it was his only flaw. For the grand finale, he exposed a glowing tablet and pointed it at Malcolm's face. Bold italic paragraphs spelled out his future in no uncertain terms. The final sentence, in blood red type, said it all: ***The US State Department will institute deportation proceedings against you within 30 days.***

"Quite so, young man, quite so," Malcolm repeated smiling. "So sorry I can't invite you in." Slowly he closed the door in the boy's near perfect face, waited for the click of the lock and wandered slowly into the bedroom, depositing the precious papers in the wastebasket.

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In contrast to the unfortunate mess in the living room, Malcolm's bedroom was neat, almost spartan. There was a small plaid overnight bag on the bed. His passport and wallet were on the dresser next to a small black marble urn in the shape of Bastet, the Egyptian cat goddess.

For the first time in a week Malcolm opened his bedroom window and peered into the setting sun; a sliver of Central Park West spooled out block after glorious block. It was late summer and the lights were just coming on. The traffic had become a burnished band of yellow gold light against the dark green of the park, all courtesy of rent control and Malcolm's refusal to move even once during his thirty years in the city. He thought again of the boy from the consulate and smiled. His dire warning reminded Malcolm of a crone swooping in on a black cloud with a death decree clutched in her bony claw. "An old witch with flawless skin and a manicure," Malcolm said out loud.

Earlier in the week, Malcolm had given some thought to cleaning the apartment and eating better, but all that was beside the point now. What he wanted was a haircut, the old fashioned kind in a proper barber's chair with Bay Rum and a shoulder and neck massage afterward. "Your hair is your best feature," his mother often said to him when he was a boy. Now the color had faded from glossy black to thunderstorm gray. Nevertheless, Malcolm liked the way it complemented his British accent and the old brown cable knit sweater he wore winter and summer. All together it made him feel like a university don; Oxford, perhaps, or Cambridge.

In his twenty-two years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Malcolm had cycled through Modern and Contemporary, the American Wing, and Ancient Near Eastern. But if you asked him, he would have told you that his favorite was Egyptian. “Not just because it’s beautiful, which it is, but it was all functional—eating utensils, storage jars, tomb paintings; they all served a practical purpose.” Everybody called it the Met, but not Malcolm. Ask him about Fragment of a Queen’s Face and he would tell you that it was carved from yellow jasper in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty during the reign of Akhenatan. And its accession number was 26.7.1396.

Malcolm had collected a treasury of obscure facts about the museum that he would share whenever the mood struck him, which was quite often. “Did you know,” he would say after pointing a pair of Westchester matrons in the direction of the gift shop, “that we have a resident florist? Oh yes. Once a week, he creates five 10-foot-high floral masterpieces for the Great Hall. Don’t miss them, they’re quite spectacular”. He could rattle off the movies where the museum was a featured player and trot out the smallest artifact in the collection: a 1.1-inch cylinder from ancient Mesopotamia used to stamp impressions in clay. Or the oldest: an Iranian storage jar created nearly 4,000 years before the birth of Christ. Visitors seemed to love it, especially little kids. It was like getting your own special tour.

Back in the spring, Malcolm spent a couple of months doing research for a new museum publication on Medieval stained glass housed at the Cloisters. It was to feature highlights from the collection; a greatest hits album without the music was how he described it. In April, he was deep into ‘The Virgin Mary and Five Standing Saints.’ Lunch was usually a sandwich in the gardens overlooking the river. The Treasury room held a small collection of illuminated manuscripts that had nothing to do with the book but interested Malcolm. He would see Anthony there two or three times a week sketching. Odd, Malcolm thought, for a kid like that to be fixated on 14<sup>th</sup> Century French art. His favorite seemed to be ‘The Feeding of the Leprous Monk,’ by Jean Pucelle. Most boys that age raced through the collections making as much noise as possible before they ran out into the gardens which they assumed were available for throwing around a frisbee and trampling the flowers. Malcolm soon set them straight and sometimes even convinced them to go back inside for a second look.

“There’s a much larger collection at the Morgan Library downtown,” Malcolm said to Anthony one afternoon when his research had slowed to a crawl, “although ours is of exceptional quality.”

“Been there,” Anthony replied without looking up from his sketch pad. “I like yours better.” Malcolm took a proprietary pleasure in all things related to the museum, so he was delighted that Anthony, whose name he did not yet know, would, in his boyish way, assign him ownership of the 500-year-old masterpieces.

“‘The Leprous Monk’ is an interesting choice,” Malcom said. “Do you know the history?”

“I know enough,” he said. “Some French King went around touching sick people; if they got well he took credit, if they didn’t he blamed God. Rumor has it the whole thing was just a scam, like how politicians used to go around kissing babies or saying what they think people wanted to hear just to get them on their side. Looks good, sounds good, doesn’t mean shit.”

“I’m sure that there are a few Medieval scholars who would disagree with you, but from where I stand? Spot on!”

“Anthony, my name’s Anthony,” the boy said, looking up at Malcolm for the first time.

A small group of tourists drifted into the Treasury enveloped in a hum of conversation. “Seems as though politics hasn’t changed much in the last five centuries, has it, Anthony?” Malcolm said before scurrying back to his office, but the boy was already reabsorbed in the ailing monk.

The following Tuesday Anthony was in the Treasury room again. As he flipped open his sketchpad, Malcolm noticed that the boy’s hands shook. He held out a pamphlet, ‘French Illuminated manuscripts of the 14<sup>th</sup> century’. “Check it out,” Malcolm said. “You might find something in there you can use.”

“Sorry, I don’t need any help,” the boy said, barely looking at the cover. “I can beat this on my own.”

“Beat what?” Malcom asked, but the boy was silent.

“No worries, there’s no obligation, not even to say thank you. I’ll just leave it here in case you change your mind.”

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“Lovely to see you again Mr. H., it’s been awhile, please come right in.” Ronnie, whose muttonchop whiskers were oiled to a golden glow, had a special talent for making customers feel at home. He closed the heavy carved oak door and shot the bolt. Malcolm handed Ronnie a small wooden box. “The Egyptian pieces you requested, all 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, all deaccessioned. Like the others, the museum felt they were expendable,” Malcolm said with a quiver in his voice, “so nothing will be missed until the winter auction. This is the last of it Ronnie.” Ronnie nodded and placed the box behind the bar. He handed Malcolm a thick envelope in return.

Given the potentially lethal mix of alcohol and sharp instruments, it was kind of a miracle that *Barbers & Booze* existed anywhere, let alone in New York City. Regulations had been circumvented, laws had undoubtedly been bent if not broken. Money had almost certainly exchanged hands. But the name pulled them in and Ronnie had a steady stream of customers passing through his old-fashioned doorway for a first-class haircut and something from the bar.

“What’s your pleasure?” Ronnie asked, adjusting his plaid vest. “The usual?” Later, as Malcolm reclined in an old leather and chrome chair with a steaming towel wrapped around his face, Ronnie brought him a gin and tonic from the mahogany bar. “I think we’re about done, Mr. H,” Ronnie said as he removed the towel, sending up wisps of steam. “What say you?” The barber asked holding up a mirror.

“Considering what you had to work with? Fantastic. As always, I’m in awe of your talent Ronnie, you’ve made me look almost human.”

Malcolm paid the bill in pounds sterling as was the custom and Ronnie, whose face shone a little brighter for the compliments, led him out into the street.

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Anthony was skinny with hair the color of straw or wheat, something in the grain family, Malcolm thought, and he was often sniffing. The boy always looked both tired and driven and his fingers were perpetually dusted with charcoal from the sketching. If nothing else, Malcolm knew potential when he saw it and the boy’s work had life. It was confident, sensitive, beautiful even. He would sketch the same subject dozens of times, each one a bit different. Something about him scrunched up on a bench like that, in his oversized hoodie and banged up hi-tops, moved Malcolm in a way he couldn’t describe; but he liked the feeling. For so many years Malcolm had thought only about the care and feeding of Malcolm. Not that he was selfish, really, just that he assumed no one else would be interested. For the first time in a long time he said to himself, ‘I’ve got nothing to lose.’

And then aloud to Anthony one day around noon: “I’m just stepping out for lunch; would you like to join me? There’s an excellent food cart nearby, my treat.” They sat on a bench overlooking the river, their hotdogs covered in sauerkraut and brown mustard. Anthony looked a bit cold and Malcolm wanted to give him his coat, but he resisted the urge.

“I love this spot,” Malcolm said, “isn’t the view magnificent?” “Whaaat?” Anthony responded. “It’s New Jersey.” He looked at Malcolm as if he was not quite right in the head. “You want magnificent, try someplace else.”

“Where do you have in mind?” Malcolm asked.

“I don’t know. The Grand Canyon, Mt. Rushmore, a garbage dump. Anyplace but New Jersey for Christ’s sake.”

“What have you got against New Jersey?” Malcolm asked, “It’s a perfectly decent place from what I hear.”

“OK, let me stop you right there,” Anthony interrupted. “New Jersey sucks. The best thing about it is the Turnpike. Know why?”

“Let me just think about that a moment,” Malcom paused to wipe a bit of mustard from his cheek before answering. “Because the next thing you know you’re in New York City and you don’t have to listen to that terribly annoying accent.”

“You got it almost right,” Anthony said. “Because it gets you the hell out of there and you don’t have to see anybody you’re related to ever again. Not your mother or her slimy boyfriend. Not your miserable brother. Nobody. The Hudson River is as good as electrified barbed wire as far as I’m concerned.”

“Well, I have to say, you’ve given me a whole new perspective on—it’s the Garden State isn’t it? At least that’s what is says on the license plate.”

“Yeah right, the Garden State,” Anthony replied, shivering. Malcolm took off his coat and wrapped it gently around Anthony’s shoulders. He eyed the palisades on the other side of the river and the George Washington Bridge in the distance.

“Would you care for another hotdog?” He finally said, breaking the silence. “They really are quite good, aren’t they?”

A pale yellow moon streaked with clouds was coming up as Malcolm entered the park at West 81st Street. Skirting the Turtle Pond and the Gothic Romanesque fantasy of Belvedere Castle, he walked slowly with a bit of a hunch. Lovers, drunks, and youngsters on skate boards drifted past him in the dark as he came out onto Fifth Avenue just south of the museum. Walking north, he was soon standing in front of the rescued Egyptian temple. That fabulous piece of antiquity, trapped under glass like a preserved insect, owed its coveted spot at the museum to a family of art patrons whose wealth ran into the billions. “The Met doesn’t seem to care where the money comes from,” he had told Anthony once he knew the truth, “as long as they get their slice.” And neither did Malcolm, until he did.

Malcolm walked back to the massive Fifth Avenue entrance and climbed the stairs. He pulled out his employee ID badge and dropped it on the top step. Next to it he placed an amber prescription bottle with a white twist off top. Inside there were still a few round green pills with the number 80 imprinted on one side and OC on the other. It was time to go back home.

# I get a Deeper lifestyle here

*by Solape Adetutu Adeyemi*

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On a sun-fried morning in Lagos Island,  
where danfos cough carbon dioxide into the blue sky  
and the air smells of pepper soup and hot rice,  
the okrika kingdom opens for business.

They arrive like prophets of polyester,  
disciples of denim,  
high priests of previously-anointed Gucci.  
They spread their gospel on the floor  
shirts fanned like playing cards,  
jeans folded with the confidence of second chances,  
skirts whispering, I have seen London, but I now reside in Idumota.

Ah, the choreography!  
A blue tarpaulin becomes the Atlantic.  
Clothes sail upon it  
blazers with foreign accents,  
T-shirts that once attended festivals in places  
where PHCN does not blink.

Some sellers squat and others stand regally,  
Bells in their hands, bright eyed  
Queens of clearance,  
kings of “Last price!”  
Their eyes sharper than tailor’s scissors,  
their instincts sponsored by survival.

They size you up before you greet.

If you step close in crisp Ankara and sunglasses  
they greet you with,  
“Madam! Original Zara! Worn only two Sundays abroad!”

If your slippers look like they've trekked from Yaba  
they switch tone like a DJ at a wedding:  
"Oga, no worry. I go package am for you. Na quality we dey sell."

But come modest.  
Come quietly.  
Come without earrings,  
without lashes batting like generator fans.  
Let your skirt fall below the knee in simplicity

Immediately, the radar pings.

One seller leans forward, conspiratorial:  
"Sister... I get Deeper life style here."

From beneath the flamboyant pile of club dresses  
emerges a secret section,  
skirts that fear temptation,  
blouses with sleeves long enough to rebuke sin,  
cardigans that have prayed before.

It is profiling, yes  
but make it fashion evangelism.

They study your wrist for wristwatch theology,  
your phone for denomination,  
your posture for budget capacity.

A girl with braided confidence?  
"Fine girl, this one go show your shape well-well"

A banker with stressed tie and tired eyes?  
"Oga take this blazer. Promotion is near."

And when bargaining begins  
oh, the theatre!

"Three thousand!"  
"Ha! For this?"  
"Madam, I swear on Third Mainland Bridge, I no even gain."  
"Last price."  
"Okay, because you be my first customer."

They say that to everybody.  
Even by 6 p.m.

Sweat glistens like unpaid bills.  
Voices rise above bus horns and hawkers of Gala and plantain chips.  
The okrika sellers remain undefeated  
economists of elasticity,  
psychologists of pocket depth.

Somewhere in the pile  
is a jacket that has seen Heathrow,  
a skirt that survived Peckham rain,  
a T-shirt that once knew central heating.

Now they lie on the floor of Lagos  
like fallen aristocrats awaiting new destiny.

And destiny will come  
in the form of a university student calculating transport fare,  
a church sister avoiding temptation by neckline,  
a young man buying confidence at a discount.

Because on Lagos Island,  
style is not born, it is simply negotiated.

And the okrika seller  
oracle of fabric,  
judge of status,  
minister of “Sister, come and see”  
knows exactly who you are  
before you know what you want.

Now excuse me.  
They are calling my own category.

“Oga writer! I get creative jacket here!”



Gilbert Calleja, *untitled*. Fragment from the series *Bodies In-possibilities*. Mixed media on fabric, 2024-2026.

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Adriaens, B. Anne**

B. Anne Adriaens' work reflects her interest in alienation, environmental issues and dystopia, and has appeared in various publications, including *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Abridged*, *Poetry Scotland*, *Stand Magazine*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The Other Side of Hope* and *London Grip*. Her pamphlet *Haunt* was highly commended in the Fool for Poetry Chapbook Competition 2024. She currently lives in Somerset, UK.

### **Benghu, Khayelihle**

Khayelihle Benghu is an emerging writer residing in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work has appeared in *Ake Review*, *Person of Interest*, and *Metphrastics*. Khayelihle's writing often engages with emotion, identity, and memory.

### **Budėnaitė, Aistė**

Aistė Budėnaitė is a fourth-year student of English philology at Vilnius University in Lithuania.

### **Calleja, Gilbert**

Gilbert Calleja is a multimedia artist working across a number of media and creative forms of non-fiction storytelling. In 2020 he obtained his PhD in Creative Media from the Centre for Research and Education in the Arts and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster, London with a study on 'Ethnography and experimental non-fiction storytelling: relating the experiences of Maltese Fishermen'. Apart from working extensively (2013-present) with fishermen, he has also dedicated several years to working with transgender persons (LIMINAL, 2013). Gilbert studied history of art and fine arts at the University of Malta (2000) and the University of Paris, Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne (2004). He lectures in and coordinates the Fine Arts course at the University of Malta.

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Chibuike Ukah, Jonathan**

Jonathan's poems have been featured in *Propel Magazine*, *The Journal of Undiscovered Poets*, *Atticus Review*, *Tab: The Magazine of Poetry and Poetics*, *The Silk Literary Magazine*, *Sublimation* and elsewhere. He won the Poet of the Month Award for December-January 2025 from *Literary Shark Magazine*, was the third winner of the Poetry Contest at *The Hemlock Magazine* in 2025 and the Pierian's Alexander Pope Poetry Award 2025.

### **Chinnici, Jazlen**

Jazlen Chinnici is a current criminal justice major in the pursuit of becoming a criminal lawyer. When case studies and crime statistics aren't taking center stage in her life, writing is a source for emotional release and expression.

### **Cilia, Tanja**

Tanja Cilia is Maltese, Mediterranean, and European, in that order. Her work, in Maltese and English, has appeared in several local print and online publications, locally and abroad.

### **Cox, Tinamarie**

Tinamarie Cox lives in Arizona, USA, with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in many online and print publications under various genres. Her latest poetry collection, *A Numbers Game*, was released in March 2026. You can follow her on socials @tinamariethinkstoomuch and explore more of her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com.

### **Ferguson, Mike**

Mike Ferguson is an American permanently resident in the UK. His poetry is published widely, including in the following journals: *Stride*, *International Times*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Maintenant*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Die Leere Mitte*. His most recent poetry publication is the collection *the aran aphorisms* (Red Ceilings Press, 2024).

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Fisher, Harrison**

Harrison Fisher published twelve chapbooks and collections of poems from 1977 to 2000, most recently *Poematics of the Hyperbloody Real*. After a long hiatus, he had new work in thirty magazines in 2025, among them *Amsterdam Review*, *The Corpus Callosum*, *eMerge*, *Metachrosis*, *Misfitmagazine*, *Panoplyzine*, *Rundelania*, *Slipstream*, *Trampoline*, and *Uppagus*. He is retired from public service and lives in upstate New York.

### **Galef, Daniel**

Daniel Galef's writing has been published in the *New Yorker*, if you count the cartoon caption contest (you shouldn't). His first book is *Imaginary Sonnets* (2023, Able Muse Press), a collection of sonnets which are imaginary.

### **Garlieb, Malisa**

Malisa Garlieb is an American author and teacher currently making a home in Malta. She's the author of *Quickfall* (forthcoming from Milk & Cake Press, 2026) and *Handing Out Apples in Eden* (Windridge Books, 2014). Her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Calyx*, *RHINO Poetry*, *Rust + Moth*, and *Tar River Poetry*. She also served as a poetry editor at *Mud Season Review*. Find out more at [malisagarlieb.com](http://malisagarlieb.com).

### **Hollis, Justin**

Justin Hollis has an MFA from Hofstra University and currently teaches language and literature at Palm Beach State College. His work has appeared previously in the *Querencia Press Quarterly Anthology*, *Action*, *Spectacle*, *Cholla Needles*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *GAS: Poetry, Art and Music*, and *The Chiron Review*. His debut collection, *Ferrying the Stars*, is published by Half Inch Press.

### **Kang, Yuna**

Yuna Kang is a queer, half-deaf, Korean-American writer based in Northern California. She loves postcards, crows, God(x), and cats.

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Katrinak, Mark**

Mark has had had poems published in *Bayou*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Lullwater Review*, *Pinyon*, *The Opiate*, *Pensive*, *Poetry for Mental Health*, and other literary publications. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Mark is now a resident of Golden Valley, AZ. When not working for a mental health agency, he enjoys birds, cats, fine wine, and spending time with his family.

### **Kim, Young**

Young Kim was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in Virginia. He is an academic law scholar who has taught at Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law, the University of Colorado Law School, and as a Fulbright Senior Specialist at University of Luxembourg. His published scholarly books include: *Justice as Right Actions* (2015); *Justice: Classical Foundations and Contemporary Debates* (2018); and *The Question of Law* (2024). He has also published *Poems from the Road* (2024), and *Where Time Softens: The Coffeehouse Stories* (2025), a collection of short stories.

### **Lake, Allan**

Allan Lake, originally from Canada, has lived in Saskatoon, Cape Breton Island, Ibiza, Tasmania, Western Australia and Melbourne. His latest chapbook of poems, *My Photos of Sicily*, was published by Ginninderra Press. Such journals as *The Hong Kong Review*, *The American Writers Review*, *Tokyo Poetry Journal*, *The Antigoniish Review*, *New Philosopher* and *Fabians Review* have published him.

### **LeGrys, Alex**

Alex LeGrys received her bachelor's degree in sociology from Bard College in 2023. In her spare time, she enjoys strumming mindlessly on the guitar while poorly singing her own lyrics, reading and writing poetry, and listening to Elliott Smith with her black cat, Christofer. Her work has appeared in *Apricity Press*, *Oyez Review*, *The Whistling Shade*, *Flora Fiction*, *Blue Lake Review*, and *The Queens Review*.

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## Notes on Contributors

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### Leone, Rob

Rob Leone is a US citizen living in San Francisco and his work has appeared in *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *Ravens Perch*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Spank the Carp*, *Evening Street Press*, *Rosebud*, *Evergreen Chronicles*, and *The Ana*. Since his retirement managing communications and outreach for a USAID-funded global health program, he volunteers as a career counselor at the San Francisco Public Library. He also co-wrote *Rights of Passage*, a play focusing on LGBTQ rights produced at New Conservatory Theatre Center in San Francisco.

### Love, Jack

Jack Love is a writer and researcher working at Texas A&M University. He has published creative work in *La Rotonde Review*, *Gotham Literature*, *Otherwise Engaged Literary Journal*, *the labyrinth journal*, *Fieldwren Literary*, and several other venues. He has also published critical work in several peer-reviewed venues.

### Maolalai, DS

DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated fourteen times for BOTN, eleven for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and released in three collections: *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022)

### Miller, Jeff

JK Miller is a former third-grade dual language teacher. He lives on the edge of cornfields. He is the first place winner of the 2025 Helen Schaible International Sonnet Contest. He is the author of the chapbook *Bicycling Poems* and *Rye & I*. His poems have appeared in many literary journals. In the summer of 2025 he rode his bicycle to see his newborn grandson, 1,335 miles. He plays the harmonica and likes to garden. <https://jkmiller.blog/> <https://www.facebook.com/jkingsfordmiller>

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Martinez, Fabiana Elisa**

Fabiana Elisa Martínez is a linguist, a language teacher, and a writer. She speaks five languages. She authored the multi-awarded short story collection *12 Random Words*, the short story *Stupidity*, published as an independent book by Pierre Turcotte Editor, the short story collection *Conquered by Fog*, and the grammar *Spanish 360 with Fabiana*. Other short stories of hers have been published in five continents in magazines, anthologies, and podcast shows.

### **Mitchelmore, Julie**

Julie is a Plymouth-based author of dark fantasy shaped by folklore, myth, and the supernatural. Her debut novel, *Fell*, has recently been published. When she isn't writing, she enjoys working part-time as a supply teacher. She also writes short stories and poetry, often drawing inspiration from Dartmoor's brooding landscape. A member of the Poetry Parlor, she enjoys discussing, sharing and writing poetry with writers across the world. One of her poems has appeared in *Inkfish Magazine*.

### **Morey, Chris**

Chris Morey was born at Cowes, Isle of Wight, England and educated at University College London. He has done a wide range of jobs and community projects. He's widely-travelled and enjoys performance art and reading. Around 20 of his short stories have been published in curated literary magazines. He lives in Marsaskala.

### **Risemberg, Richard**

Richard Risemberg was born to a mixed and mixed-up family in Argentina and dragged to LA as a child to escape the fascist regime. He's spent the next few decades exploring the darker corners of the America Dream and writing stories, poems, and essays based on his experiences.

### **Segundo, Nolo**

Nolo Segundo, pen name of a retired teacher [America, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia], became a published poet in his 70s in over 260 literary journals in 21 countries, was nominated for the Pushcart, thrice for Best of the Net, and has 3 collections published in paperback by Cyberwit.net, the latest titled *SOUL SONGS*.

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## Notes on Contributors

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### **Solape Adetutu Adeyemi**

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi is a dedicated professional with a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology and a Master's in Environmental Management. She is a researcher, a consultant, a passionate environmental sustainability enthusiast and a talented award winning creative writer, with her works published in esteemed journals and magazines, including *Writenow Literary Journal*, *TV Metro*, *Poetry Marathon Anthology*, the *Guardian* newspaper, and the *Indiana Review* among others.

### **Wright, Rufus**

Rufus Wright claims more crises than quota, more joys than deserved. His poetry comes from Blue Ridge education, MBA in NYC, teaching junior high, surviving corporations and several marriages... and hearing, watching, and appreciating what's gone on around him for more than 77 years. He lives in central Texas, loves Cindy, and writes every day. He has poems published or to be published in *Abandoned Mine*, *Emerge*, *Orchards Poetry*, *The Debut*, *The Raven's Perch*, *October Hill*.

### **Wyman, Aliza**

Aliza is a recent graduate of the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Southern Maine. She is a children's librarian.

### **zwierz, k.d.**

k.d.zwierz currently lives in Lebanon, with his partner and their cat, Malishan, working with victims of geopolitical violence to create opportunities for self-expression and release through the arts. His poem 'Tableau' was a Bournemouth Writing Festival, Writing on the Wall winner in 2025. His chapbook, *The Dead Speak*, was published by Falstead Art, London.