

Duck Lake Journal

Volume 1



home lake for literary arts

Duck Lake Journal
Volume 1

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Duck Lake Journal, Volume 1

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Reading Chinese Poetry

The year has passed and winter comes again.
An icy wind slips underneath the door.
Awake, asleep, I wear the same thin clothes;
if no one brings me rice, I do not eat.
My thoughts turn toward the distant lights of home;
outside the window, snowdrifts hide the fields.
Keeping to my book and single lamp,
neither horse nor tiger, I'll go on.

Christopher Stolle

Niches and Notches

history chisels more
into solid rock
than hands ever could

the ornate right angles
the forceful keystone
the flaring hips

the fingerprints
of dozens of children
the sunshine burned
into the façade
the flaking undercarriage
keeping history moving

the whispers, the laughter,
the school bell echoes
the trolley, the cars,
the chestnut mare whines
the smiles you can't hear
and the fear that won't listen

the shocking fire stains
the deconstructed limestone
the gentle rebuilding
and the start of the year
at a brand-new school

42 From 90

Jackie ran toward home
his cleats stubborn
his pants fashionably dirty
his cap racing behind him

the fans bewildered
the pitcher stunned
the catcher confused
by such disregard for decorum

the third base coach livid
cursing, stomping, chasing
after his charge

the teammates swarming
the coach retreating
the manager fainting

the umpire extending his arms
to take flight with Jackie

Heidi Blakeslee

I don't think I'm punk rock anymore

i'm not sure that i ever was,
though it may have started
around age 14 or so
when I said
'fuck the church' (to myself,
stole sweaters out of my stepdad's closet,
and stalked around
like a ragtag iconoclast

hiding in the library
during lunch,
sitting on the floor in the corner
reading Amy Tan
listening to nofx
on my discman—
there may have been some punk in there

high school definitely more so
punk shows
dancing to bands

camping in the woods in college,
punk was there
me swaggering around with a bottle of 151,
throwing some on the fire
passing out in my sleeping bag

but now?
shit no, i'm too tired to be punk
i value quiet way too much
and i
rarely sing

but i know, push came
to shove,
i would fight the hell
out of that revolution
if I had to
i know there must be a spark
in there somewhere
hiding, waiting
for me to let it rage freely

maybe you don't have to try to be
anything
maybe you just are what you are
goddamn it,
I think I might still be
A punk

Anastasia Jill

pollux goddess

I am not the kind of girl
they name constellations for,
so I create one from broken gemini back;

a centerfold of eyeballs
digs pigments from Jupiter's swollen belly.

I write my name in diamonds,
and tell the universe that it's raining.

The Teacher Who Bled Music

by *Thomas Allbaugh*

He was teaching part time there. He still lived sixty miles away and had not been given an office that first year, so usually, after his late afternoon class let out around five thirty, he went to the mall built recently next to the university to wait for his next class. Few went there in the late afternoon. The mall, on the edge of the mostly empty downtown, would close right at six in the evening anyway. It was the only mall he knew of that had been built right downtown where so many of the storefronts were now boarded up. It had been put there to draw business from the university. He wondered if it did better during the day. He had begun to wonder why his first classes out of grad school had been here where the auto industry had recently abandoned the town. On this evening, he had started to wonder what he was doing and if this would be all he would do, and then the one student who sat in the middle of the classroom approached him. He'd hardly noticed her the first few weeks.

"I know this is going to sound weird," she said. "Your teaching was like music tonight."

He tried to avoid looking insecure. He wanted to ask her, Is that good? Instead he asked, "You mean I rocked?"

"No." And she watched him, he noticed as he looked down and nodded. "I mean it was something else. And it was very good. I think I began to understand something that you were saying about argument. I'd never quite seen argument in those terms before. I mean my dad always argues, and he always has to be right. I never saw it as building bridges to the truth. Anyway, I will show you on Thursday."

Thursday was when their first drafts were due. He didn't expect that, or anything. That it came to her like music. Was there a teaching college for that? Could that be taught? Did

anyone want it to be taught? Could one assess it?

“Your lesson was music to me.” Could that be positive?

So because of her, tonight he changed his destination, and instead of going inside the mall and getting a soft drink, he found his way outside where there was and still is a walking bridge over a small river that still runs through the southeastern side of the city campus. He had more often looked on the river from a distance, usually from his late afternoon class. But tonight he went there as a grayness fell over the once busy auto town. He stood on the walking bridge and watched the water gently flowing underneath and thought about how he used to sing. He wondered why he had stopped singing. He had studied writing also and there was a point when he was doing both, playing in places where they heard him. He looked at the ripple in the dark water going under him. Now the students did not listen to him. It was as though he had become someone wholly different, as though in combing his hair differently for the classroom he had lost the right to say what he had to say.

This was not an easy time of his life. Neither had his twenties been easy, he had to admit, when he was struggling to make a living playing in coffeehouses. When had anything ever been easy? There were just the right decisions that he felt good about in the middle of all the other stuff. Going to grad school had been the right move. It was strange to him now to be teaching people who were sometimes older than him who were also struggling because the plants had mostly closed and they were forced to find new work and they couldn't just graduate from school and go work in the plant for the rest of their lives. They counted their money—he could picture them doing so in their minds—and wondering what they could possibly bring to this new study they were taking. And why writing? Why was it required? Why was anything required? They had launched out for a new world and now were merely adrift.

He stood there above the water, glanced back at the college, thought about the class he had just left, where he had some eighteen year olds who hardly listened to him. In about twenty

minutes, he would go in and teach the adults and they would engage him in conversations about life, and that would feel more welcome. A few years ago, he thought, when I was singing, and I wasn't that bad, and those eighteen year olds might have given me the time of day, maybe even listened to me. And then he thought that maybe his whole approach was wrong. And right there, on the bridge, he messed up his hair and parted it down the middle again. Like he was twenty again. He thought about letting his beard grow for three days. Really, he thought, I haven't really changed now, except that I'm not singing familiar songs to them; instead, I'm trying to teach them to write, part of the adult world they bounce off like astronauts on the atmosphere, seeing the colorful Earth and wanting to join it, but always coming in too hard and bouncing back out.

He thought about his student who had talked to him after class.

Was this what came of a life of music after it was put away? Whatever he did afterward would be anticlimactic and mediocre, until, occasionally, the old life would bleed through.

"It came to me," she said, "like music."

Walking back into the building, he saw his shadow in the glass doors and his messed up hair, and he went to the rest room and combed his hair in the new way before he headed back to meet his adult class.

Stephen Carter

Entrance

Dark,
but not quite,
as I entered my room,
not expecting
Dad on my bed,
his form emerging from the not quite dark.
Lid of the old wooden record player raised,
a saxophone cutting
the silence.

What are you doing?
Just listening to Trane...
and dying.

These sounds
entered me.
The darkness
stayed
behind.

Mountain Music

Deep wooden flutes,
Dark shapes carved out of firelight,
Hurling their long tones at the mountain.
The elder plays the bass,
The flute that speaks directly to the bones.
The young are fooled into thinking
That the glory goes to the youth
Weaving his tale high above.

But the elder knows
That without his foundation,
There would be nothing to fly above.
The elder learned long ago
Just how sinuous he could make his line,
How high he could make the flute climb,
How far into the heart of the mountain he could reach.
He knows how long to wait before his line will meet itself
Returning from the mountain's wall.
He takes in breath before the youth.
His instrument speaks more slowly.

Annotations

by David Miller

Rankine, Claudia. *Don't let me be lonely: an American lyric*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2004. Print.

You read good things about *Citizen*; you have been lecturer in African-American literature for two years now and figure you should check out this new poet. When you head to the library, all three copies are checked out. So, you take *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* home. You wonder how these paragraphs and stories about cancer count as poetry. A slowness slowly sprouts in your heart. Dark purple fingers search the tunnels of your body. Your lungs become Dutch-apple pancakes, trapped with air. You assume what you feel is a by-product of toxic masculinity.

But still that slowness persists. You become aware your heart is a basin full of holes and the warm waters of your life keep leaking out. Finally, in accordance with the corporate structure of your PPO, you visit your family doctor. They hear slowness so deep in your body, they fear it's your pancreas. Nobody survives the pancreas they tell you. They bring out long needles, urine collectors, liquid nitrogen and scalpels. A machine the shape of a squid's tube shudders and shakes around you (you fall asleep for a moment, you dream of orange trees by the side of the 10 back when Yucaipa was less desert and more farmland) and if you lie there longer, you will become absorbed into the light and just as you're about to be consumed by claustrophobia, the MA pulls you out and shows you cartoons of your body. In your throat grows a navel orange. Your doctors tell jokes. They laugh about your slowness. You laugh, too. It's only thyroid cancer after all. You return to your apartment, to the book lying face-down on your night table like a suppliant in a Greek tragedy. Like

Cassandra with Agamemnon, begging him to listen. You didn't listen before. You were full of your victories, the opportunities laid out for you, the spoils you didn't earn from battles you never fought. You're going to die unless you listen. You're ready—you tell yourself—you understand knowledge can only be received when you realize you know nothing. You know nothing, you reassure yourself.

Capaldi, John and Windwood, Steve. *The low spark of high-heeled boys*. Island Records. 1971. Vinyl.

“the spirit is something that no one destroys”
— Steve Winwood

You cannot say how it started for Lars, only that he evaporated from the living room every night. You believe it has something to do with his grades. Every afternoon when reruns of *Adam-12* begin, your babysitter orders him to his bedroom. You watch your brother vanishing so slowly his outline lingers in the folds of the curtains.

Your babysitter, like you, loves *Adam-12*. He tells you he's gonna make Detective when he joins the LAPD. He's playing linebacker at La Serna to earn scholarships. You're afraid of him: his thick shoulders, the prickle of his beard, the way his laugh tortures his body on its way out. One day, Lars is sick and Perry's body is chuckling at the screen. He asks if you have cleaned your room yet, last time he checked it looked like a tsunami landed there. So you head there.

The hallway is well-lit. Whatever walks here can clearly be seen. Soon, you see a shadow moving along the wall. Your babysitter puts a hand on your shoulder and asks whether you have a girlfriend. You never tell anyone what happens next for almost ten years.

No one speaks of trauma because there is no trauma, not in your family, only a history of obstacles surmounted. So, each morning, your skin grows more translucent; the morning light picks out the thin bones in your hand; your hair withers at the root; teachers stop calling on you in class. One day, your mom pours three bowls of Kix, not four and your brothers punch each other's arms, but not yours. People pass through you, a moment of warmth: your only conversations.

So, after ten years, you dwindle to a lingering scent in the sofa, a whisper in the drift of sleep, and you finally tell your dad what happened. He laughs because it's a funny joke, and then he grounds you, and then he sends you to a psychiatric acquaintance who prescribes Percocet and porn magazines. Your dad shares his library of amateur nudies and the sort of sadness that cannot shake itself away.

On the bright side, you sell much of the porn and can afford a used Honda CRX. You find out where Perry is living now. He's a patrolman for the Brea PD. You follow him home a couple nights a week. His wife and son greet him by the door most times, but once, he stops by a liquor store. He sits in his car, sipping clear liquid and flipping through a magazine. You watch. You feel sadness, hate, you have a baseball bat, a hammer, a pen. This man has a wife, a child, a second life.

Your face begins to itch, and you are holding the hammer by its claw. The air tastes sour. And you remember his breath, his skin, the place where his chest meets his shoulder. A song slips from the radio, all jazz-fusion and oblivion; you evolve into a saxophone note lingering in the smoke, sustained by voice and light; you will continue, you tell yourself. The hammer slips to the floor mat as you drive away.

The Way to the Stars

By Anne Baldo

We lived on a dead end street. Across from us, a tattoo parlour and a shop called Sugar and Spice, the same lovesick mannequin in leopard-print lingerie and a purple wig slouching by the door for as long as I could remember. At the end of our street was a convenience store selling cigarettes and stale candy, grimy windows papered over with movie posters from the nineties. *Titanic*, Jack and Rose in a dreamy embrace, unaware of their disaster.

Tamás was always saying how he was going to walk across the street and get a tattoo, *per aspera ad astra*. A rough road leads to the stars, or the way to the stars is difficult, depending on your translation. But he never did.

Molly told him, *you're afraid of the pain*.

If I was afraid of pain, he said, *I wouldn't be with you*.

But he wasn't with her. Or he was, and then he wasn't, and then he was again. I existed for him in the voids between. Molly, her own arms tattooed with orchids and nihilism. A skinny silver nose ring. In her thin tank top, black script on white cotton, *the living being is only a species of the dead*. Blunt and beautiful the way sharks are, a sharp girl, teeth and bone. (Don't think about her).

I lived with my mother in a white house on the fringes of suburbia. To the left, a long ways down, the neglected train tracks, and to the right, if you followed our street all the way to the end, the Detroit River. In between were houses whose exteriors had years ago begun the long slow sag to the dirt, their bones starting to show. Paint peeling like sunburnt skin. Loose shingles. Gravel along the roadside littered with skinny blue-flowered weeds and bottle caps, broken lighters and dead birds, some with wings still curved over their bodies, graceful as a dancer with a fan. Those burlesque performers of the

fifties, black velvet gloves to their elbows, red satin peep toe pumps.

I was going to make dinner, right? So I went to the freezer and I could've sworn there was a box of chicken breasts in there, but when I looked I couldn't find any. Great story, I know. I tell it at parties.

Tamás refilled our glasses with whisky and blood orange juice.

You don't go to parties.

Neither do you.

I know. Parties aren't for people like us.

People like us?

People who hate everything, he said. *We're misanthropists.*

Right, I said, even though I was getting a little tired of pretending to hate everything. Joylessness could be exhausting. Like how last week I had told him I didn't get why people got so crazy over babies. *They all look like swaddled prunes.* But I didn't want to lose the feeling that we were in something together. Him and me against the world.

If I stay up, I might call, he texted me, and I stayed up, but he never did. Not out of cruelty but carelessness, in the way we are with those who love us the most.

Good times, bad times, someone had spray painted on the brick wall behind the convenience store. The broken glass shattered in the roadside gravel, gleaming dull like the burnt out stars in the space documentaries Tamás was always watching. In the summer months, people drifted to their porches, cigarettes dipping at their lips, while the dust of the street drifted up over the lawns, leaving everything ashen. The dead grass. Remnants of rose gardens, like the one in my front yard, inbred descendents of purer strains with wistful names, Absent Friends and Village Maid, Victorian and doomed. Perpetually Yours, a climbing rose, creamy white and yellow, and Damask roses, their oil used for perfume. When I learned this, years ago, I used to crush the petals on my wrists, a child chemist drowning petals in jars of water, a distillery on my window-sill.

In the midst of the neglected roses, smiling and serene, was a statue of the Virgin Mary, left behind by whoever had lived here before. Eyes closed, palms open, she seemed to emit a tender amity and goodwill. My mother recurrently threatened to evict her, but she was not around much, these days. Instead she stayed with Palmer, a man she'd met in her group therapy for eating disorders.

"What kind of name is that?" I asked.

"Don't be rude," my mother said. "It means *pilgrim*." That would appeal to her, the image of a man on a journey to a better place, dauntless and committed. Once a week she had met with other women in a room over the city market that smelled of pungent European cheese and bleach, salty and sour. They were offered coffee and given badly photocopied lists of emotions, each with a corresponding cartoon face. *How Do You Feel?*, the caption read. You could be agonized or blissful or guilty. You chose which one was you at the start of each session. Palmer had been the leader, the teacher, the therapist. Whatever the title was. All those things. I missed her around the house, but not the way she watched me in the kitchen, anxiously, the nervous way she squeezed my arms, or the depressing devotion to her food journal, sparse meals duly recorded day after day. I knew she didn't want to but she did, she couldn't help herself, the way she checked the sizes on my tags, always hoping, the worried looks as I spooned out cereal, measured milk in a cup. *Because it's just so easy to go too far*, she said. As if I had no idea.

And now she was mostly gone, for days at the lake, with Palmer. A cottage with a ticklish septic system and, the weekend I went with my mother, a fly infestation, beading the walls and windows darkly, a dull hum. *Palmer*, from the palm fronds pilgrims brought back from the Holy Land, confirmation they had gone, a missionary. He looked like a Botticelli angel redreamed by Warhol; gold curls and overblown lips, blue eyes serene behind thick black eyeglasses, retro or ironic. 'Ophelia,' he said, smiling when we met. "Get thee to a nunnery," and he laughed.

I thought of my best friend Aureline, who was into astral projection. She talked about it as if it were as easy as stepping into another room. Evading your body to wander in the stars, in a field of light somewhere between heaven and earth. And then when you were done you could slip right back into your skin, like falling into your warm bed at the end of a long day. How did you do it, I tried to remember. Something about deep breathing and quartz crystals. Palmer was still going on and on.

"Like in *Hamlet*," he said.

"I get it," I said. "I'm an English major."

"First year," my mother added helpfully, as if we hadn't got to Shakespeare yet.

"We studied *Hamlet* in grade twelve." Aureline had played the king. She wore a paper moustache and crown, and got the class to laugh as she staggered around at her death scene, a wooden ruler clutched like a sword at her side. *O yet, defend me, friends; I am but hurt*. The hopeful way my mother was standing there, one hand on the kitchen counter, in her new sundress, the bones sticking out in her shoulders like knots on a rope, broke my heart a little. Her skin and hair tawny with the sun. *Tanning makes you look thinner*, she said, and I said *so does death*. I gave up on astral projection, and walked myself out of the room.

Palmer came up to me after dinner. I was sitting on the back steps, staring at the lake between a screen of blue ash trees at the edge of the property. I was already pregnant then, the first time, but I didn't know it yet. I only knew I was so tired, and I couldn't understand why. Six o'clock and I felt my eyes keep sliding shut, like those old baby dolls they used to have, with the blinking eyes that closed when you tilted them. *Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?*

"I'm really sorry about earlier," he said, awkwardly. "I wasn't trying to make fun of your name, or say anything, you know, about women..."

Come get me out of here. I'd sent Tamás a text. He'd replied an hour later. *Molly's over*.

'It's fine,' I said. I was thinking about Molly then. She was in some of my classes, but we didn't talk much. She was probably

sitting on the sofa in the basement with Tamás now, like I had been last night, watching some wonders of the solar system documentary and drinking whisky. Or they were doing something more interesting, they must have been. I couldn't really picture Molly, with her beautiful tattoos and aviator sunglasses, wasting her time in Tamás' damp basement, under the brooding gazes of his mother's portraits of the saints. She played guitar, and had backpacked through Europe. She had better things to do.

Palmer looked relieved. I just wanted him to leave, so I could be alone again. *Get thee to a nunnery.* I had thought about becoming a nun before, even researched it. Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart. I liked the idea, of sisters, of the peace they promised, of being cloistered. *You'll never be a nun,* my mother said. *They won't let you wear all that makeup.*

"No," Tamás said when I told him. "I just can't see it, really."

"Why not?"

"You like drinking too much," he said. On the wall over the television hung a portrait of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, known for the Miracle of the Roses. Upstairs in the kitchen, his mother moved around, cooking sour cherry soup. The house smelled like cloves and cinnamon.

His mother, Lili, a bitter sprig of a woman. She worked nights at the casino, and when I saw her at home she was almost always smoking, or cooking. She called Tamás *lelkem*, my soul. That winter we'd crossed paths at church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in the parking lot after mass.

"Ophelia," she said, "I didn't expect to see you here."

"I've gone for years," I said and I had, though fitfully.

"Remember? I had my First Communion with Tamás here." My mother still had a photograph of us, seven years old and standing in her driveway by the roses, Tamás like a little groom in his black suit and shoes. I stood at his side in a white dress, lace gloves, a veil. I thought at the time it meant we would get married, or in a way we already were.

Lili's mouth twitched into a strange, faint smile at the mention of her son's name. "Oh yes," she said, tapping her red-enamelled nails against her teal leather handbag. She wore a

scarf, too, teal silk, and a yellow gold cross around her throat. I wondered how someone like Lili, so tidy and neat, perfectly tucked in and combed, could have a son like Tamás, who always seemed to be unravelling at the edges, in need of a haircut, a razor, vitamins of some kind, an application of sunshine. I felt the same way, myself, everything needing to be nipped, fixed, all split ends and stray threads – if I could only be more meticulous. Like Lili in her silk scarf tied in a tight hacking knot and her lipstick that never bled. Like my own mother, who weighed all food when she cooked on a slim digital kitchen scale...

“Oh, yes, well,” Lili said. Her small gold drop earrings glinting in the winter sunlight. “I suppose I just assumed you were *lapsed*.”

Lost, fallen, slipped. At the cottage it was April, the cruelest month. (*Breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire...*). Palmer was still standing there, holding a glass of icewine. “Your mother and I are just about to start a game of Scrabble, and we’d love if you joined—”

I held up my phone apologetically. “I actually have some research to do, my Intro to Canadian Literature Exam.”

“I understand,” he said, quickly, I could see he was relieved I’d devised an excuse. I never went back to the cottage after that weekend. I couldn’t stand lying in bed at night, listening to my mother throwing up in the bathroom down the hall, or Palmer bringing her roses from a roadside stand in the morning.

Besides, it was better at home, alone. I could listen to Leonard Cohen on a low, gloomy loop, mix butter and brown sugar in a bowl and eat it with a teaspoon. Outside the window, Mary beamed in the waves of sunset coming through the sparse trees. I loved all her names – Most Blessed, Star of the Sea, Lady of the Wayside. Morning Star, Mother of Mercy, Mother of Sorrows. Mystical Rose, Refuge of Sinners, Untier of Knots.

I licked the teaspoon. My heart reverberating in my chest like a hummingbird, too fast, sugar-starved, when I woke up from a nap. I never slept in the middle of the day, which was

how I knew. That and the smell of the roses in the garden coming through the window, suddenly rotten.

The first time, the spring time, was over abruptly as it began. Looking down to see the bathroom tiles speckled with blood, the flood that followed. The bleeding first, and then the pain, tidal in its urgent pull. Feeling wrung out inside, like damp laundry. The guilt that settled in when it subsided, instead of relief. Because I'd had moments where I'd hoped for this and now, as everything turned red, I felt like I'd summoned this into being. Like when we were young and said if you stood in front of a mirror, and said *Bloody Mary* three times...even though I knew better. (Don't think about it).

'It's for the best this way,' Tamás said, after it was all done. 'Don't you think?' I had only told him a week ago. I'd found him sitting in the garage, watching a hockey game in a lawn chair. Lili must have made him mow the lawn because he had dead grass all over his clothes, and his shirt off. Pale chest, wishbone-thin. Sweat shining on his cheeks.

"Hey, you want a beer?"

"I think I'm pregnant."

"Are you kidding me?" The garage smelled like cut grass and gasoline. Jars of Lili's canned red peppers gleamed on a shelf by the window, floating in salt brine, shiny as blood. "How do you know?"

"I took a test."

"Maybe the test was wrong. Can they be wrong?"

"I think they're pretty accurate. I don't know."

"So maybe it was something you ate."

"That's not how they work, really. They measure hormones..."

"I just think you should wait a few days, and try again, you never know. Like, let's not worry until we know for sure."

"It's for sure," I said.

"So people never get like, a false positive? You're telling me that's a completely unheard of phenomenon?"

"I'm sure it must happen sometimes."

"So there you go. Just relax."

I sat down on a lawn chair across from him. Lili grew and dried garlic, and the white braids hung from the rafters in the

garage. What was I waiting for? For Tamás to ask *how do you feel*, for him to put a hand on my stomach, to hold me? I felt, strangely, that this was something I had somehow done alone.

“Didn’t you tell me you thought you were pregnant before?”

“I told you my period was late. And it was. That’s not the same thing.”

“You were so worried for nothing.” The papery white skin of the garlic mixed with the gasoline and damp grainy smell of beer was suddenly unbearable. Tamás gestured at the television with his beer bottle. “If the Leafs would just give Reimer a chance in net.”

I got to my feet, feeling inconvenient in a trivial way, a child whining to go pee at an inopportune time. “Yeah, well,” I said. “Maybe next year.”

“Give me a call and let me know what’s going on,” he said. Now he looked vaguely apologetic, or maybe only drunk. “It’s just kind of bad timing, you know, cause me and Molly just got back together.”

* * *

I put the teaspoon in the sink and sank the test deep in the garbage. I changed into my best dress, dusty rose with skinny straps over the shoulders, an uneven hem. Perfume like crushed petals. I thought of my mother, the way I watched her at her dresser years ago, brushing eyeshadow on, fine-grained violet, licking her lashes with a wand dipped into a tube of mascara. *A lady never wears too much makeup*, she’d say, but how much was too much? And now I wondered not just that, but who it was who decided the arbitrary limits of these things in the first place at all. Steady-handed, I sketched a lipstick heart on my cheek.

Outside in the garden, Mary beamed serenely. A miracle of roses. A merciful loosening of knots. It was raining, you could smell it in the weeds, the gravel, the dampening of dust. *Petrichor*, rain on dry earth, from the Greek words for stone, for the lifeblood of their deities. Blue flowers at the roadside drooping from the weight of water, dripping over broken glass.

Tamás answered the door when I knocked. He was wearing a Hockey Night in Canada t-shirt, grey pajama pants. His glasses perpetually a bit crooked, his blond hair wet from a shower. He forgot to buy his own shampoo a lot and smelled like Lili's, sweet, damp, floral. *My soul*. "You coming in, or just standing out in the rain? What's on your face?"

In the hallway mirror I saw the heart had bled in the rain to a dark smear. With the back of my hand I smudged it away, following him into the kitchen. On the table was a cutting board, yellow onions fresh-chopped and wet, and the smell of lemon juice, dill, paprika.

"My mother's home," Tamás said. "We should go downstairs."

Last time I'd been here, weeks ago, I'd been startled to see Lili sitting at the kitchen table as I came up the stairs, after. Tapping the ash from her cigarette into a glass ashtray, solving a crossword in ink, she didn't look up when she spoke. *I hope you aren't playing with fire*, she'd said. As if we were arsonists.

In the basement I searched for signs of Molly—her twine and turquoise stone bracelets on the coffee table, her philosophy textbooks on the sofa—and saw nothing of her.

"Molly broke up with me," Tamás said. "For good, this time. For some guy in her Ethical Theory class. They fell in love debating universal moral principles or some shit, I don't know."

"That's too bad," I said. He looked as if he might have been crying, or maybe it was only the shower he'd taken. For years it had been the same way, since high school, Tamás was with Molly, Tamás wasn't with Molly, *she loves me, she loves me not*. I existed for him in the voids between, and what exists in voids is nothing.

He said, "I'm glad you're here." And he was kissing me, or trying to, but my mouth wouldn't open. There was a space documentary on the television, the Kuiper Belt, a man was droning on, they were never narrated by women. We were on the sofa, his hands skimming the surface, like the way you cleaned the dead leaves off a pool. The dead leaves, my dress. Body of water. I wondered if maybe I wouldn't even have to say anything, this time. If when Tamás was over me he would

somehow sense the truth. The princess and the pea. It was how the prince knew it was meant to be.

In space, if two objects made of metal touched, they would join together forever, cold welding. They had to be the same, though. Two things of copper, two things of gold. On the ceiling over us was a galaxy of plastic glow in the dark stars, childhood remnants, a dull luminous blue. He called me Molly sometimes. (Don't think about it). *Molly can you pass me the—or Moll, what do you want to eat tonight*, or just *Molly*, a sigh, a sign. She would always be there, a vestigial reflex, she could not be bled out. She would return, like a revenant, like a butterfly or a bird hopping continents for better weather, even if it was only in the haze of a dream.

But tonight Tamás mumbled my name, the way I thought I'd always wanted him to say it. He put his mouth on mine, whisky and blood orange juice (don't think about it) pushing my dress up over my hips (don't). *The universe is infinite*, Tamás said. *All of this existing in repetition, on other planets, with differences. Imagine another world like this one but maybe there the sky isn't blue, maybe there blue isn't a colour at all. Maybe in another universe, we're not together*, and I said *I thought that was this universe*.

I got up. On my way upstairs I heard Tamás calling my name. In space, they say it is always silent, but that isn't true. It's just that sometimes there are sounds we can't hear. I kept going up the stairs, dizzy with longing, with love. Love like ultraviolet light, which can hurt and can cure. Electromagnetic radiation, like radio waves, fields in perpetual ripple, perpendicular to each other, perennially, like the radiated energy from stars, beaming on and on and on.

Small Eden

I

you know the drill
unmake the bed

flesh

.

.

.

without bones

his body takes off
leaving you
in the brassy glare
of a sun

lamp

turned on

II

You are part-time
a match box

.

.

.

to be scratched

against you are not evening fire

not morning breakfast

not coffee ring on the table

when he is finished

he will dog ear

the page

.

.

.

set the book down
and close the door.

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios

Cadence

The Pan Am Flight 103 crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland on Dec 21, 1988, a result of a bomb planted by a foreign agent. All 270 passengers perished. The perpetrator never found.

It took me a long time to climb/the stairs / of the attic / each step /over and over / stretched / into a black landscape / a long staircase / In my dream / I am at the top /searching /searching/for a dress/folding cloth/ over cloth / on empty wire skeletons/scraping past me / until I find a black one / a long sleeved knit / with a high neck / I know it must be for a funeral / a funeral / a funeral / for my son / But which one?

Just before Christmas, we travel to La Guardia to pick up Nick, my son who is returning home from a semester in London. I'm not thinking about the dream, perhaps I am watching the landscape fold past the car window, or tuning out the static on the radio's classical music station, but that is before my heart explodes in the air and crashes to the ground in Lockerbie.

The clock stops / I lose the flaming crash time / the silent hands time/ the black dreamless sleep time / the broken body time / the closed casket time/

What is it to have a memory folded over and over like black velvet,
a cadence from which you can never retrieve
his aroma,
his lilting voice
or the sight of his back
as he runs out the door,
but only remember searching / searching /
Where is my black dress?

Stare deep into the gene pool.

Mother's slotted spoon
chews circles
inside the saucepan,

it's teeth clack on the counter.
She brews fish heads
chops onions,

blades cut black thoughts
from chambers
like rotting celery hearts.

Blame, the color of scarlet,
bleeds into the pot
like beets.

Finnish eyes
glitter malice
hide and deny

restless waters.
Twitching fingers drum
impatient tattoos.

Her little girl gorges on fairy tales
and dirigibles
on stars that fall in showers.

In her chest
a meadow
startled with magpies

Steve Klepetar

The Small Print

It may have been a mistake to spend
so much time counting, while the day
was blooming outside.
The last flowers had burst into yellow flame.

Two rabbits sat quietly in the grass.
It may have been wiser to laugh a while
in the sun.
Still, the wind will rise,

and rain will pour down.
Houses will tumble into the flow of a great flood.
Neighborhoods will crackle and burn.
Someone always chooses the rough pages

of a ledger or the dusky smell of ink,
bent over, struggling with bad eyes to read the small print.

Behind Them the Valley

People on the move, with rain falling.
Mud splatters with every step.

Where are they going, with their sacks,
dogs trailing on the wet road?

They climb the hill as it rises above pines.
They strain with effort, but hardly speak,

only calling occasionally to a dog
or a child.

They have walked out of a nightmare,
and their faces are pale and stained.

Behind them the valley yawns,
a vast mouth trembling without mercy or shame.

Steve Klepetar

Now You Are One

*“fly in the wind of the dead
above me, float on the water
of my dreams.”*

Yehuda Amichai

So many dead, and now you are one,
gone into that pale throng so quietly
I almost missed your slipping,
the last breath hovering above your bed.
I come to the street of restaurants,
all those smells lingering,
cilantro and garlic and roasting meat.
You ate so little, and always the same foods –
yogurt and a little cheese,
chicken drowned in a pot with paprika
that lasted many meals,
and always cookies, two at a time all day.
You gave away as many as you ate,
sweet little bribes you banked for favors.
Now all you eat is wind.
May that fill you, so you remain with the stars,
with the hawks wheeling across the sky,
with the stream floating by my house
as I dream you back into your body,
your rusty voice repeating the same prayers,
the same dreams you said were never coming true.

LITTLE BLAZES

by *Joe Baumann*

Elouise sipped from the pina colada she'd mixed before setting the fire; the coconut rum was cheap, and she'd used too little ice, so it tasted like suntan lotion. She drank it anyway, leaning back in the chaise lounge she'd dragged into the front yard as the fire she'd set under the Skylar coffee table with bamboo legs stoked in the living room. The lounge had dug into the shag carpet that felt like seaweed against her toes, leaving behind a racetrack of her steps from the back deck all the way to the front porch.

The fire spread quickly, coursing across the floor like a skittering army of beetles, even though she hadn't used an accelerant. She never did, anymore: after the first blaze, in her ratty one-bedroom apartment where the air conditioning never worked and the refrigerator's water line had sprung a leak twice in the first month, she hadn't been able to get rid of the smell of gasoline no matter how many scented candles or sprigs of incense she burned afterward. Dumping entire bottles of cheap, rosy-smelling aerosol air freshener didn't work either (nor did Glade or Febreze plug-ins), and when she tried sprinkling Comet over the floor all she was left with was the smell of gasoline mixed with urinal cakes, so after that she told herself she would just let her trusty Zippo and a bird's nest of newspaper do the trick, even if it took longer.

But it couldn't take too long. Even though she'd ripped out all the smoke detectors in the house, Elouise didn't want the fire department to show up too soon, despite the fact that they would probably slow down as soon as they saw whose house had been reported, the pitched tingle of adrenaline fading from their bloodstreams and giving way to lazed annoyance. They wouldn't hustle to the nearest fire hydrant (four doors down, which would buy the fire some extra roasting time) once they found her, body ensconced in a

sarong, legs crossed at the ankles, face angled toward the sun hovering over her pitched roof like a big orange marble. She wondered if they had her address memorized, if their dispatcher read out the house number and street in an exhausted drawl, forewarning the men that they might as well pace themselves.

She'd been arrested after the first fire. Elouise had gone quietly, accepting the female police officer's handcuffs as if she were taking a job offer or saying yes to a marriage proposal or an offer of a lifetime supply of beer. The rancid smell of the holding cell and the harsh fluorescent lights almost made her wish her mother was still alive to be her one phone call, but she shuddered the idea away. She'd been ready to plead guilty despite the harried arguments of her public defender, a man who squinted despite thick glasses that gave his eyes a cartoonish sheen under the warm fluorescence of his dusty office. But then the charges had been dropped once the fire marshal, bewildered and exhausted, reported that the fire hadn't damaged a single thing. Not one wall was scorched, not a single carpet fiber singed. Her possessions were all safe—which Elouise knew was an understatement—and the structure of the building was, as far as he could determine, compromised not at all. If anything, the screws and nails and beams and drywall were better than ever, tighter, more secure, coated with less rust, as if the fire had purified the apartment building like something out of a biblical parable.

"I could have told you that," Elouise had said, rubbing at her wrists as if she'd been cuffed for the duration of her arrest and arraignment. She hadn't requested bail, but her public defender had secured her release on her own recognizance. She had considered flying away to some tropical island just because she could, but then the thought of exchanging currency exhausted her. When the judge dismissed the case, the smash of his gavel felt like a gong against her brain.

To say that the apartment fire had been her first was a fib. When she was fifteen and her father died in a car accident, ramming his truck into a stop sign and sending himself through the windshield when his body was filled with more Jim Beam than blood, she gathered up as many things from his bureau

top as she could: coin jar; alligator skin belt; bottle of *Bleu de Chanel* he never used and she had no idea how had come to sit there gathering dust in the first place; gilt-framed photograph of him and her mother before Elouise popped into the world; crumpled tickets from the Indian casino. She spread them in a heap in the backyard, dousing them with paint thinner before lighting up a White Diamond match and dropping it atop the pile. She'd waited until her mother was gone, her first trip to Winn Dixie since the funeral because she was out of orange juice, so Elouise wasn't concerned about the smoke signaling what she was up to. What did worry her was the lack of stench; she expected the curling photographs and the crackling paper to smell like *something*, but the only odor that assaulted her nose was that of flame and damp earth. She stared at the heap, expecting the alligator belt to curve in on itself like a drying turd, but beneath the sharp slivers of fire nothing seemed to be happening. When she hauled out a bucket of water and smothered the flames, she discovered that the coins were more polished than they had been before and the buckle of the belt was shining. The cologne bottle winked in the sun. The grass surrounding the junk was untouched, unscorched, and, in fact, as green as a child's drawing sketched with the most verdant crayon available. She buried her father's things in the stream at the edge of the property, letting the cold water sluice through her fingers as she hauled up enough mud to cover the cache of sparkling coins.

One of her neighbors, a man named Mick who looked like an underwear model but worked at a gas station on the graveyard shift, appeared on his stoop, frowning. Elouise knew he liked her, could see from the half-snarl of his lips and the softness in his eyes that he enjoyed the sight of her in her sarong, which rode high on her hips when she laid back. Elouise's legs were tan—her body could still boil even if her possessions could not—and she stayed fit via circuits of free weights and the rowing machine at the fitness club next door to the gas station Mick manned at night. Both were open twenty-four hours a day, creating a gaudy, fluorescent illumination in the darkness. Sometimes Elouise woke at three in the morning to go kill her thighs with squats and deadlifts

and then, sweaty and effluvious, stopped in the gas station, buying a Gatorade she didn't drink, just to see the perky attraction Mick poured in her direction, his eyes boring on her in such a way that she knew he wanted to see her nude. She was pretty sure he had a six pack and the flair of muscle that shows the hip bones, but not in an emaciated way, and she often longed to see Mick's midsection if for no other reason than she'd never seen such musculature in person before. She didn't really want to sleep with him, but if the opportunity to feel the tight squeal of such a stomach arose, she wouldn't let it pass.

"El," Mick said when he had thumped down from his front porch and stopped next to her chaise. She could smell the musk of his beachy cologne: mandarin oranges and chlorine. "This again?"

"Things were a mess," she said, slurping on her pina colada. "I didn't want to dust."

Mick sighed and pinched at his nose, his bicep flexing beneath his t-shirt. Mick's clothes were a size too big, but she could still see his gym-built muscles and the pop of teal veins. He didn't move with the smooth glide of a natural athlete, someone whose stock of strength comes innately packaged; no, Mick lumbered, but he wasn't a meathead endomorph. His body didn't squirm with the confused gait of someone who has Frankensteined size out of bench presses and hammer curls and too many chalky protein shakes. His was the kind of body Elouise appreciated, the lean-mass sort that took total-body workouts and a dedication to a low carb diet.

"Nothing will happen to your house," she said. "Relax." She held up the pina colada sweating on the grass. "Have some."

"You know I don't drink that crap."

"Only the best Natural Lite for you. I know." She set the drink down. "Don't worry. The fire department is on the way. And it's way too humid out here for the fire to be catching, anyway."

Mick shook his head. He was taller than Elouise but always appeared optically shrunken when she looked up at him. His eyes were like little blips of blue fire, and she

appreciated the thickness of his hairline, though she told herself bald was beautiful, thinking of her mother, whose chemo treatments had failed to do much of anything except wither her eyebrows and her chestnut hair, transforming her into something that reminded Elouise of the creepy newborn dolls she received for Christmas as a child.

She never told her mother about the restorative fires, who was struck down by cancer when Elouise was twenty-two, a recent-enough college graduate to be wide-eyed at her steady paycheck. Her mother died without knowing much about her daughter, the purifying spark in Elouise's fingertips held secret behind her pursed lips just as she had kept hidden the way her father would slough out of his marital bed and into his daughter's, Elouise rigid and cold, willing herself to grow claws and teeth and razor wire to cut him down, wash away the beer-stink of his breath, shave away the calluses on his palms that grazed her belly button. He stank of motor oil and Old Crow.

Mick sighed again and plopped himself down on the grass next to her, crossing his legs Indian-style, or whatever it was—Elouise couldn't remember—that was now the politically-correct thing to say. His shorts rode up far enough to reveal hairless tan thighs, waxy like he was a doll instead of a person. She thought about asking him why he shaved them but then slurped more pina colada instead. Mick picked at the grass, slicing a few plucked blades with his thumbnail.

Soon enough the familiar whine of a siren pulled through the air, a low whistle that grew into a high-pitched squeal that reminded Elouise of pigs being led to slaughter. She pictured the fire engine hauling down the four-lane road that led to her small side-street, cars pitted to the curb, some of them stupidly turning on their emergency flashers, blinking like frenetic cats' eyes. She didn't look up or crane her neck to watch the approach of the red behemoth that would douse the fire in her house, leaving everything a little soaked (another plus: the things inside didn't suffer wet rot, no matter how much the firefighters pounded the carpet and walls out of annoyed spite). Elouise wouldn't even bother mopping the kitchen floor, risking tumbles and slips while the linoleum and

Formica were still slathered with dots of wet, the grout pooling with liquid.

“I don’t know why you won’t just vacuum,” Mick grumbled as the fire engine turned onto their block, its bleating siren cowing their eardrums.

“Oh, come on,” Elouise shouted. “This is a lot more exciting than vacuuming.”

“Vacuuming won’t burn down my garage.”

“You haven’t seen me try to vacuum.”

There were four firefighters, all suited up in the same Nomex hoods and shimmering vestments that flashed in the sun like mirages. They carted out their red Duraline hose that reminded Elouise of a Twizzler. She wondered if the men were muscular and lean beneath the crinkled plastic of their suits; she’d seen stills from charity calendars before, smooth-lined men with steel traps for midsections, bodies stripped to the waist, hints of the pubic region peeking from VersaPro pants, thighs and pecs smeared with Photoshopped ash while axes and hoses were draped over shoulders the size of grenades. Maybe these men tramping across her lawn, careless of the periwinkle and impatiens planted in beds of wood chips underneath the windows and along the snaky walk leading to the front door, had abs like Mick’s.

They did not engage Elouise directly except for one firefighter, the youngest if looks were accurate and not distorted by the plastic shielding of his helmet. He removed it, briefly, blond hair bristly and shining with sweat, and Elouise felt a momentary stab of grief that he had to endure the sauna of his equipment for her sake. But then she told herself that no one had forced this life upon him, and she also told herself that he looked good marinating in perspiration the way athletic types often do, the sheen accentuating his cheekbones. He said hello and informed her that they’d try to take care of things quickly, as if they were reupholstering a recliner or—and this made Elouise stifle a chuckle—coaxing a petulant cat from the dogwood in the side yard.

Their first efforts focused on containing rather than extinguishing. Two firefighters took each side of the house, spraying down the trees and the brick and the roof and, at

Mick's exhortation, the side of his house, too. They traipsed briefly around back; Elouise's yard held no trees, just a stretchy swath of scutch grass and fescues and some St. Augustine, a smorgasbord of greenery that rolled to a drainage ditch and then an empty field of stalky somethings that reminded Elouise of unkempt hair. Finally they turned their attention inward, entering the house with hoses on full blast, careful at the front door to account for potential back flash. Elouise watched in silence as the firefighters first shot streams of water through the open door before they were swallowed by her house, courting the blaze with care, tamping it down one roasting piece of furniture at a time.

After her abortive attempt at burning her father's things, Elouise set little blazes from time to time, trying to prove to herself that she could immolate something if she just put her mind to it. She took her clothing, the heaps of sweaters and stockings and blouses too small for her or slinking away from fashionability, tossed them into tiny piles and lit them with matches; instead of turning to ash they fit anew, their colors brightened. Stains rushed away, carried off by the huffs of smoke hurling into the sky like unfurling masts. Her mother's jewelry lost its tarnish where it should have melted; old books transformed from moldy and dust-laden to fresh, marginalia melting as if erased. And the biggest failure of all was when she finally tried to burn up all her bed sheets that still reeked of him, the low-thread count fabric simply going soft and fluffy after the flames had eaten their way through them. She threw them away.

"See?" she told Mick when the firefighters were finished, her house sauna-sweaty. Elouise could picture the soggy couch, the slick surface of her kitchen cabinets. "Like I said, no harm done."

"Except to taxpayers' wallets," Mick said, standing. He watched the firefighters ravel their hoses. "Other people pay for your clean up, you know."

"So do I. It's a give and take." She moved to slurp from her drink but the glass was empty. "Also, I donate to Backstoppers. Do you want to come inside?"

"I'd rather stay dry."

“Okay. See you sometime.”

“I live next door. We see each other all the time.”

Elouise stood, shrugged. “You never know, do you?”

Mick shook his head, turned away, and waved at the firefighters as they drove off. “It feels like there should be more to it, don’t you think? Paperwork, or statements or something.”

“I think they just like to forget about me.”

“Resource allocation, I guess? At the gas station, I have to account for every tin of Altoids and box of Trojans.”

“Do people buy that many Altoids? I feel like cigarettes are more believable.”

“We track those, too.”

“I’ve never smoked. Have you?”

“Only once. It hurt, and I coughed for two days. I was drunk.”

Elouise rattled the empty glass. The world was teetering a bit, the edges of things watery. Mick looked like an angel, haloed by the sun and the fuzzy shape of his t-shirt. She really wanted to see what was underneath it, how his body dove and crested like a log plume ride. She bit her lip.

“Well then,” he said. “I need to get some sleep.”

“Late shift tonight.”

“Yep.”

“I’m sorry if I woke you.”

“Don’t worry.”

“Okay.”

She watched him walk away. He had nice calves, the left one spattered with a constellation of freckles. Or perhaps they were moles. She would ask him next time.

The chaise was too heavy now that she was sloshed with shaved ice and pineapple juice and coconut, so she left it on the lawn. Inside, the house smelled like an aquarium, the splurt of water covering everything like a layer of salt. Elouise unfurled the sarong from her hips and let it fall to the floor that squelched under her feet. She felt as though she had made a day trip to the beach, taking her whole house and dipping it into the ocean. She imagined seagulls and man-o-wars, shark

fins slicing up through the surface like scissors skimming paper in two.

She set the glass on the floor and tumbled herself onto the couch. The television was dripping wet but, she knew, in perfect working order, the picture crisper, its definition so high she'd be able to see every contour of powdered cheek and painted lip, the stains and crowns and bleaching of newscaster teeth brilliant and obvious. She lay still, letting the wet of the cushions seep into her skin. Elouise felt herself relax. Her stomach uncoiled, shoulders melted. She pawed at the table and curled her hand around the damp box of matches. Sliding the cover open, she pulled one out and held it under her nose, the silky aspen smell reminding her of spearmint gum. Elouise considered popping it in her mouth or drawing it across her lips, but she returned it to the soggy box and set the closed container on her stomach, over the convex surface of her belly button.

When her mother was busy dying, Elouise considered lighting her on fire. If immolation could save her pantyhose from runs, her good china from cracks and divots (her car, even, had undented itself after a fender bender when she sparked it up, the only time she'd violated her no-gasoline policy), why couldn't it send the cancer rotting her mother's insides into oblivion? But she knew it couldn't work on human bodies: once, after she'd cut herself while chopping carrots, she'd held her bleeding hand over a lit match and only felt the biting pain of skin peeling and burning. So she'd let her mother go as best as she could. It was a quiet death, no fireworks or passionate final words croaked out like a frog's burp. Elouise was getting her nails done when the hospital called.

Elouise tossed an arm over her eyes and let herself fall to sleep, the tankard odor of her home filling her lungs like she was sniffing the druthers of freshly baked bread. There were easier ways to clean a house, she knew. Of course Mick was right. She owned a vacuum cleaner, a Bissell that slurped up lost paperclips and hair ties and the soiled bits of the world Elouise dragged inside every day. She used it, but only at night, when no one could hear her. Not that anyone was listening. The world didn't care about Elouise Peltingham any more than

it did about the homeless schmucks who panhandled outside the restaurants downtown or the battered women seeking refuge at the shelter where she volunteered on Christmas Eve. But Elouise loved the pomp, the giddiness of the flames that she brought to life. Their dance across her credenza and Windsor chairs dazzled her, and the heat that singed at her eyebrows if she got too close was the kind of warmth she needed to crack her open and make her feel.

Feel what? Like the world cared, maybe. Like Mick's body might feel if she touched it, moving and thumping and darting with life. Like the inheritance left by her parents' deaths was more than a remuneration for silence and terror. Like she could light the planet up, bring things awake by surrounding them with renewing ash.

The flat land,
once home
to coal miners,
potato eaters,
the great Flemish masters,
is swiftly losing its chassis -
its temperate climate,
broad shoulders and broad mind...
Flat voices
over-pronounce
the Flemish sounds,
over-use the dialects
in the presence of exiles,
white squatters
are getting even whiter,
ex-punks build fences
to protect the witlof gardens
from the invasion
of lowbrow middle east folk.
The flat wet land
is good for crops,
spreading the seeds,
cycling or ropewalking with sticks
along the walls
of graffiti,
stating precisely but temperately
“Dear Refugees, go home.Please.”

Marina Kazakova

It's hyperreal -
the August morning in Brussels:
black curls beneath the wispy clouds,
ink eyelashes and
fluffy eyebrows
brushing soft asphalt -
a sleeping Roma guy
smiles
while dreaming,
perhaps, a funny cartoon,
threatens to disappear
half-starved, abandoned, doomed.
The voice of Brel
is filling the air:
"Ne me quitte pas" -
too sad to hear,
too sad
to bear
the hyperreal picture
of the blessed
left totally 'à deux',
with asphalt,
with dreams,
with Brel:
"I will offer you
pearls made of rain" ...

Malignancy

Even as
my body was
waging a war on itself,
forming entire separate
networks of blood
designed for naught but
rerouting sustenance from
vital parts of my being,
in an insane selfish drive,
I had formed plans
of clipping its wings
with the borrowed scalpel
of the angel of life.
A scar will then sign songs
of my bravery
A lisp will then crown my
majestic glory.
My soul will then cower
in crippling fear.
A thought has taken host
In my head.
The scalpel dealt only
in physical things.

Beso and the Others

by Alan Cliffe

The London *Daily Mirror*, June 27, 1907

RAIN OF BOMBS

Revolutionaries Hurl Destruction Among Large Crowds of People

Tiflis, Wednesday—About ten bombs were hurled to-day, one after the other, in the square in the centre of the town, which was thronged with people at the time.

The bombs exploded with terrific force, many people being killed and injured.

Window-panes, doors, and chimneys were shattered over a large area.

It now appears that the bomb outrage was connected with an attack on a Treasury van which was escorted by five Cossacks and two other soldiers.

To the Moon

Know this: he who fell to earth like ashes,
And was so very long oppressed,
Will rise higher than great mountains
On the wings of shining hope.

—Soselo

Yakov Egnatashvili 1921

I recognized Charkviani not by his face but by his voice. I was getting ready to close up when a stranger came into the tavern. "I thought I might find you here, Iakobi," said he.

These days, even here in Tiflis people call me Yakov as often as not. I don't like it but I think the Bolsheviks want to turn us all into Russians, maybe starting with our names. And they have the guns. As soon as the stranger said my name I knew he was a friend from Gori, and that voice—in a split second I knew who he was.

Along with his standing as priest, scholar, and champion drinker, Charkviani was one of the strongest singers in Gori in the old days. I was best man to Beso Dzhugashvili at his wedding to Keke, and Charkviani sang so beautifully I slipped him an extra ten rubles. What else could I do? I was a tough fellow in those days, but his voice could move a strong man.

“Kristopore? How long has it been?”

“Too long, old friend, too long.”

I locked up the tavern and broke out one of the bottles I keep under the counter, along with two glasses. I could see in my old friend's face that he was still a drinker, but he looked fit for a man over seventy; his priestly beard was now all white but still long and thick. We sat at a table near the back of the room. Charkviani drank gratefully, eyes closed in pleasure, and took a deep breath. “Great brandy...yours? Why do you keep it out of sight?”

“Yes, I make it in one of the back rooms. My boys help out. But these days the railway workers drinking up their wages and hiding from their wives want the cheap vodka. So do the Russian soldiers and political types who can't even order in Georgian. The good brandy sure as hell isn't for them.”

“So much political bullshit...but I don't think we Georgians will ever forget how to drink like Georgians. Speaking of the political types, our Soso seems to have moved up in the world. *what's* he calling himself now?”

“Stalin, as you know damn well,” I said with a smile. “He stops in here when he's in town. He's a good boy, really. Still close to Vaso and Sasha.”

“Well, that's good to know. But none of our sons are boys any more.”

“No.”

“Have you stayed in touch with Keke?”

“Off and on. She was so beautiful...”

Charkviani nodded, smiling through his beard. “We all loved her.”

“Indeed...Soso.” He gave a rueful smile, casting his eyes heavenward. I freshened his drink as he spoke. “Somehow I wasn't surprised that the Bolsheviks decided to take our independence back, but I never thought Soso would be leading the charge for them.”

“Well, we were only independent for a few years ... I'll confess I'm torn about it. Generally I'm no great friend to the Bolsheviks, but I can't hate Soso.”

Charkviani shrugged, letting it pass for the moment, and spoke again: “I know you got closer to Keke later on, after Beso's decline, but is it possible that you...”

“I don't know. Does it matter? I loved Keke and I've been more of a father to Soso than Beso ever was, or ever could be. I helped Keke with money and sometimes in other ways, as you know. People would talk, but so what? And I was proud when Soso started calling himself Koba after me. I helped because I could and because I wanted to, it felt natural.”

Simon Gogchilidze, a master at Gori church school, letter to Archimandrite Serafim, Rector at Tiflis Seminary, 1893

I received your enquiry today regarding the student Iosif Dzhugashvili. His marks have been consistently high. His Russian is excellent, as is his singing voice. He takes the solos in choir and lately he's been singing professionally at weddings. I would advise you to accept him. “Soso,” as he is usually called, is a natural leader. His quick intelligence lives alongside a certain high-spiritedness. As to the rumor you mention, yes, it is an open secret that the priest Christopher Charkviani told our late headmaster he was Dzhugashvili's natural father in 1888, when the boy was nine or ten. His mother wanted him educated and our school only takes the sons of priests. But I have always assumed it was true. The boy has a passion for

books and learning that he could not have got from the man his mother married, a cobbler and, frankly, a drunkard. I tell you this not to ascribe bastardy but to recommend him.

Archimandrite Serafim, private journal, 1893

This Gogchilidze—what am I to make of him, or of this letter? He thinks I'll be impressed that he wrote to me in (mediocre) Russian, and he thinks he has written a recommendation. It does not quite read like one to me. He might be trying to tell me to keep an eye on the boy. "A natural leader?" Well, that could be for good or for ill. Those "high spirits" of his sound like rowdiness. These Georgians are a barbarous, insolent, and slovenly race, but the Russification of my charges here is a mission from God and the Tsar, however onerous it might be. As for the Dzhugashvili boy, I must pray on my decision. He could be a bad influence on the other boys. But it is our duty to bend boys like him to our ways of thinking, our ways of serving God. And, of course, we can be very persuasive. Sometimes the rebellious ones end up as the kind of priests that God and the Empire need, that is, the kind who inspire genuine religious devotion. Whatever decision I make, I pray I won't live to regret it.

Damian Davrishashvili, Gori police chief, retired. August 1907

"That boy of mine—who would have thought he had it in him?" So said Beso Dzhugashvili. I could have said the same to him. Our sons are so much alike, they even look alike—and I hear they're still thick as thieves. Literally. Nobody's been arrested in the Tiflis robbery, the money hasn't been recovered, and the newspapers have more or less stopped printing stories about it. But I still have my sources in Tiflis. Beso's son and mine have both been mentioned. The police and the Okhrana could have them confused—they're both from Gori, both named Ioseb and called Soso. But I was a policeman before I was a father, and I have no illusions about my own son.

In any case, speaking of the Dzhugashvilis, I had a visitor the other day. It was morning, still cool, and I was reading in the garden behind my house. As I looked over the papers from Tiflis, trying to find something, anything, about the robbery, I heard a loud rapping through a back window I'd left open. I went inside and through the house to the front door.

“Who is it?”

“.....vili,” came an indistinct reply. I couldn't make out the first part of the name, which could have belonged to any one of a dozen men I've arrested over the years, but the voice was faint and I didn't sense danger. I opened the door. And there on the step, leaning on a cane, stood Beso. Still alive, contrary to rumor, and back in Gori. And he had come to see me, of all people. How many times did I have to arrest him? I had barely seen him since I banished him from Gori back in '88, after he stabbed me in the street. He must be around sixty now but he looks much older. And most of the fight seems to have gone out of him. All Georgian men think our Georgian wine makes them bigger men, but guys like Beso should leave it alone.

I could tell he was in a mood to talk, and the robbery was on my mind. I invited him back to the garden. When he asked who would have thought his “boy” had it in him, I knew he'd heard about Tiflis.

“That 'boy' of yours has been making quite a name for himself, Beso.” I was thinking of forty people dead in Erevan Square, with horses and men blown to pieces. “Do you know something the police in Tiflis should know?”

“No. Do you really think I'd tell them if I did?”

“Probably not, but I had to ask.”

“But suppose he *was* involved—don't you think he should send his father a few rubles, at least?” I looked Beso straight in the eyes without answering and without looking away. Which is, of course, often the way to get a man to speak of what he knows. But in truth I didn't have much hope that he had anything to tell. After a moment or two he looked away from me, glancing toward the Gori Fortress on the hill in the distance, a majestic sight no matter how many men have died

fighting over it. Something thoughtful came into his face, and he looked back at me. "By the way, Damian, you're looking well. And I'm sorry I stabbed you that time. I never believed the stories about you siring my boy. How could you? But people were talking about all kinds of shit like that and I was tired of Keke crying to you every time I took a drink. Can't a man be in charge in his own house?"

It's true that I was close to Keke, and Soso too, although, if I'm remembering right, the rumors were more about Egnatashvili.

"It's in the past, Beso."

"So it is..." Suddenly he looked as if he were about to weep.

"Do you need a drink?"

"Maybe just a taste." I got a bottle of vodka and a glass from the house; he put his drink away in a gulp.

"Thanks. By the way, who the hell is this Lenin guy?"

I didn't know what to tell him. I hear Lenin is pulling the strings, from abroad, on at least some of these robberies. But who and what *are* these Bolsheviks, or Social Democrats, or whatever they call themselves? They might think they're rebels, or "socialists," or "anarchists," but they sound like bandits to me. Of course, this is Georgia. I don't know that there ever has been much difference here between rebels and bandits. But Georgian bandits who send the money they steal to a Russian man in Sweden... maybe I'm just a provincial policeman who doesn't understand politics, or maybe I'm just not a man of this new century, but it doesn't make any sense to me.

Ekaterina "Keke" Dzhugashvili, Besarion "Beso" Dzhugashvili,
Tiflis 1930/Gori 1907

From a story by an American journalist in Georgia

Josef Stalin's mother is spry and alert at seventy-one, ensconced in a surprisingly modest room at the former palace of the Russian Viceroy in Tiflis, Georgia. A nunnish headdress

belies an occasionally salty tongue and, one suspects, a colorful past...

“Soso's father? He was a good looking man in the old days, and he had a good trade. What did I know? I was, what, fifteen?”

“When did you last see him?”

“He showed up back in Gori a little before he died—he wanted money but he really wanted to talk about Soso.”

* * *

“Davrishashvili tells me our boy's working for a rebel chief from Moscow, but he sounds like some new kind of priest to me.”

“Soso lost his religion a long time ago.”

“Maybe so, but the priests in Tiflis are tricky bastards. Filling his head up with big ideas that don't put food on the table...”

“Did you?”

“...and have nothing to do with anything you can see or touch—the priests left their mark on him. Davrishashvili said he and his friends don't even keep the money they steal. And you want to tell me he's not soft in the head? I told you you never should have sent him to the priests. I could have made a man out of him. Making boots for the army is a real trade, not like religion or that poetry bullshit. *The Knight in the Panther Skin*, now that's a real poem for you. Still, he's tough, and that's because I'm his father.”

“Tough? So you're the tough one here? Who supported him all those years?”

“I helped when I could. 'Who supported him?' Who supported *you*? I hear it was Egnatashvili. I don't want to know why.”

“Beso, if you think Soso's tough because of you, what do you think he got from me?”

“How the fuck should I know? Probably his castle-in-the-sky ideas.”

“I wanted him to be a priest, and I don't apologize for that. There is no higher calling, and they live better lives than we ever did.”

“And the care of people's souls? Do you think the seminary made a good shepherd out of him?”

“Stop trying to be funny. But you know...he adores Kato and the baby. He's a kinder man than you know.”

“What's the baby's name again?”

“Iakobi.”

“I should have known. I guess he'll be calling Egnatashvili 'Grandpa Yakov' as soon as he can talk.”

Yakov Egnatashvili 1921, continued

“It is sad about Beso,” said Charkviani. “What ever happened to him?”

“He died ten or twelve years ago.”

Charkviani nodded, unsurprised, and continued, “I can't drink now like I did in the old days, but Beso and I had some good times back then. The day he married Keke...” My old friend shook his head and grinned.

“God, who could forget?” said I. “Probably the best day of his life. Keke was the prettiest girl in Gori.”

“Yeah, and we started drinking early that day. We Georgians know how to put on a celebration.”

“Yes.”

“And the singing, and the food, and everything else—it was like nothing could ever hurt us.”

Josef Stalin, letter to Simon Gogchilidze, 1922

I hope you're well. You're the one master from Gori I've stayed in touch with. The others, the priests, were too rigid and dogmatic; I could tell you were impatient with them. And if a student may instruct a master, there is a contradiction at the heart of the priest/teacher's endeavor: as men of learning they read and get their students reading, but once that starts they

soon lose their ideological control, because there are books out there that speak of science and reason rather than religious faith. I was always getting in trouble at Tiflis Seminary for reading forbidden books, and lending them around, but what could they do?

Simon Gogchilidze, private journal, 1931

I only visited Moscow once. I'm not an exceptionally religious man, at least not for a schoolmaster who has taught generations of boys how to sing the music of the Orthodox liturgy. But I do appreciate beauty, and the Orthodox Church has brought a good deal of it into the world. The Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow took forty years to build, and when I attended the consecration back in '83 I felt the presence of the divine down to my cells. The cathedral was the most beautiful work of man and God I ever saw. The consecration ceremony was magnificent; you could hear the Moscow River underneath the singing, lending itself to the sound like a heavenly choir. And now the cathedral's been destroyed, dynamited to make room for a "Palace of the Soviets" and to loot the gold of the ceiling. That "science and reason" of Soso's—today I shudder.

I hardly recognize Stalin as the boy I knew, although I can say, in hindsight, that Soso did have a will to dominate his fellows. If he was a rebel he was the kind who would try to keep a tight grip on the workings of the rebellion.

Someone like Archimandrite Serafim, with whom I kept up a somewhat stilted correspondence for a while, in the 90s, would say that uncertain parentage leads to uncertain outcomes and character; he came to regret admitting Soso. (He thought those yellow eyes were alarming!) There might be something a little dogmatic, even overly-mystical, in such a notion, which I don't really share. But I wonder whether any teacher, or any parent, or parents—whoever they are—can ever have the slightest damned idea of what they're letting loose on the world.

The journal in which the above entry appeared was found and confiscated in a police raid during the Great Terror of 1937-38. Its owner, aged eighty, was spared by order of Josef Stalin.

Its owner's daughter, a Tiflis physician with three adolescent children of her own, served ten years at hard labor.

The journal was never returned.

Excerpt from "To the Moon," by Soselo, aka Stalin, adapted from translation in *The Autobiography of Joseph Stalin*, a novel by Richard Lourie.

Barry Peters

The Bernie Emoji

Bernie Sanders suddenly appears
among the faces. Thick glasses,
wispy white hair, yellow complexion.

If my father were still alive,
and if he owned a cell phone,
I'd text him the Bernie emoji.

We'd reminisce about the afternoon
Time magazine with Bernie's photo
was lying on his hospital bed.

The nurses said they looked alike,
Bernie and my father, who didn't live
long enough to see Trump elected.

That would have killed him
instead of the broken leg,
subsequent pneumonia, and

requisite infection that followed,
just another happy-faceless story
of an old man losing in America.

Staff Meeting

I hope a musical breaks out
at our staff meeting today,
the administration in cowboy hats

and hoop skirts, lassoes a-twirling,
boots a-kicking, a choral-roaring
extravaganza of melodic jargon--

the harmony of deprivatization
and the action-cycle inquiry process,
the rhythm of hologamy in group dynamics--

the joy of spending an afternoon
entertained by the theater of it all.
Instead, today's PD is titled

Backward Planning: Starting with the End.
Nodding off, I begin with the burial,
picture my casket being raised from the grave

on a tombstoned hillside in October, the sun
brilliant through tangerine leaves turning
green, tears rolling up mourners' cheeks

as I'm slid into the hearse like a tall set
of golf clubs ready to be shipped back
to the factory and forged all over again.

Greg Shapiro

Waitresses on Heroin

We're spinning dishes on top of broomsticks. Folding napkins, arranging silver, slinging hash, wringing lettuce, to entertain you. Our apron pockets cluttered with pens and needles, order pads. Clanking

with coins, we hike up our uniforms in hopes that you are a generous tipper. Wipe your chin, corners of your mouth. In the kitchen, we are heating spoons over blue gas flames, drinking enough coffee to keep our lips wet.

Racoon

No one here at dawn except
two police cars. For a chat perhaps
or looking for a drug exchange
in this empty place, golf course
parking lot, too early for players,

except for me who couldn't sleep.
And one other, a rough guy,
all fur, steely teeth, piercing
eyes, his night hunt over. He crosses
my path, with "get out of my way"

on his breath. I watch him roll
across a practice green. He climbs
a chain-link fence as if all earth
is his backyard. Claws extended,
he disappears into a poplar tree.

I wonder if the cops saw him
this masked marauder, who steals
everything night offers, even
the indolence of 6 a.m. I stroke
a ball across the silent green.

Lauren Schurhag

The Strawberry Festival

Vendors drive in from around the country,
cardboard flats heaped with ripe fruit.
A stand sells cups of hot melted chocolate for dipping,
another, shortcake. Local honey, homemade jam,
lemonade, and handicrafts: crocheted potholders,
birdhouses made in somebody's garage.
People gather in the spring air,
as dependable as the perennials that bloom
on the courthouse lawn, as the migratory tug
that brings the waterfowl back to the marshes.

Sandpipers

An unused lot near the bay:
broken glass and faded lines,
cement parking blocks askew.
A pair of sandpipers fly back and forth
probing the estuary banks with their
slim black bills. In a pothole
lined with marsh grass,
four little brown eggs.

Rajnish Mishra

Don't return awards

It's a funny game, life every day; a kind of race,
not against any one or thing, but towards an end,
the end. We win, eventually, or lose, finally.

Death, the assured award for each runner, can't be returned.
You don't return awards, especially when you don't know
how to return them, and to whom.

Coming Distractions

Years ago, in town, all day,
hunkered down in a coffee bar,
I'd leave my dogs housebound,
to sleep, climb onto my desk,
stare at the front door,
my whereabouts unknown.
Today, together, we take the town
turn to the dog park,
their heads out the window,
dog-like, then after,
a sprint for home, where,
there's books, phones,
newspapers, deer, cigarettes,
meds, memories, raccoons, quail,
and brilliant big sky bliss.
What should take a week,
now takes a year.

Magnum Opus, indeed.
What a great grad student
I'd make now: pithy insight,
detailed attention, professor's pet,
smoking outside on a Quad bench,
expounding to no one,
some ersatz consideration
on widening gyres, then
slouching towards lunch.
Dear God, help me to be,
the person my dog thinks I am,
so says the bumper sticker.
At my desk, my faux-neglected
younger charge comes up,
puts her paw on my leg,
and gives me her divine gaze.

Kushal Poddar

Twins of The Heartland

Twins appear on the roof again.
Your right sleeve converses
with your left sleeve,
now settled over your heart.

You can choose anything and nothing.

My shirt rose with the wind,
and the string taut between two posts
waits for a tightrope walk.

Circus never comes in this neighborhood.

Twin does.
It means you have two hearts today.
Only blindness can negotiate between them.

Far East

“Look at those clouds!”

I say.

“Look at those pillows!”

You say.

Our backs drowned in the muddy water,
songs a paddy field hums drone in our ears.

“Look at the plane!”

I say.

“Will it bomb us?”

You ask.

Which year is it in the world?
How long did we drift in and out here?

“Look at the rat!”

I say.

“Its belly seems bloated with time!”

You say.

Steve Gerson

Recollections, Crabbing the Quay

those who fish angle to quest
the filament millimeter-thin arching through space
to fathom what's elusive in the eternity of sea
casting confidence

my family crabbed

the jetty's rocks slick with seaweed and mist
a piece of string lowered throttling a chicken bone
a lifeless neck or wing, the sea's salt
turning it flaccid

then drawing the line fearfully
a crab or two snagged legs wriggling like hanged men
thrown into a noosed burlap sack kept
in the dark

the crabs barely sludge-filled carapaces meat measured
in coffee spoons lowland inhabitants with murky views
sunken dreams scuttled sideways
circumnavigating

to crab is to become diminishment
humidity from breakers dampening a low ceiling
the green steaming Gulf fogging the grey sky
no horizon

Rondo

by *Ann Calandro*

In the middle of my thirteenth year I gave up playing the cello. It was November, and my parents had gone to Europe on a long-awaited vacation, leaving my younger brother and me in the care of our aunt. My parents may have told us that they would be away for several months, but I don't remember them telling us anything. One day they were gone, and my aunt was there.

What I do remember is sitting on the sofa with my aunt each morning, while I ate toast and she asked me what to do about my brother. The sofa had recently been reupholstered in dark green velour. I liked to stroke my palms against it and pretend I was lost in a forest. "Your brother's not eating much," my aunt said. "And I don't think he's taking baths or even washing his face and hands."

I liked my aunt, who was soft to hug and sat as if she had been placed in a buttered bowl to rise. I told her not to worry about Daniel. "He's weird even when Mom and Dad are home," I said. This information creased her forehead, but she patted my arm and said, "Go to school now." For once I didn't dawdle, or push all the buttons in the elevator on my way down, or walk down eleven flights of stairs instead. I hurried, because yesterday I quit the orchestra. Today was my first day as third clarinet in the band.

The orchestra met in the school's basement. Overactive steam pipes warred with the gasps and shrieks of string instruments. The room was dark. I told Mr. Wallinger that I was quitting as he put his violin into its velvet-lined case. The velvet was bright as a sapphire. His expression changed from tender concern to confused irritation.

"You are giving up first cello to be third clarinet? You want to play the dum-dum-dum while someone else plays the melody?"

His hands mocked me. Then he shrugged and closed his violin case. He burst out:

“You are doing so well! You are taking private cello lessons!”

Again he was silent. It did not occur to me to answer him. I stood mute, waiting for a sign that I was free to go. He shrugged again, and then he picked up his violin case and began walking toward the door. As he reached up to turn off the lights I slipped past him and ran up the stairs if I were being pursued.

I didn't stop running until I had burst into auditorium, where Mr. Hayford stood talking to several members of the band. Like the basement, the auditorium had no windows, but I felt as if I had left darkness behind and entered the blaze of day.

“You promised me I could join the band,” I said to Mr. Hayford. “I need a clarinet.”

“Someone get Beth a clarinet from the storage room. Give her a few reeds, and show her what to do.”

A boy ran off. His name was Willy Chen. We sat next to each other in science class. I waited for Mr. Hayford to ask me why I had left the orchestra to join the band. My mind was racing to phrase a single simple reason.

“Actually someday I want to play the piano,” I blurted, although Mr. Hayford hadn't said anything to me and was polishing his glasses on his shirt. Willy came back with a clarinet, a few reeds, and a book of exercises.

“Learn the first two exercises by the end of the week,” said Mr. Hayford. “Class dismissed.”

What I had blurted out was true: I wanted to play the piano. Our piano was delivered to the apartment when I was seven. It cost \$200 and was the color of chocolate milk. It was delivered later than expected, so that my mother, tired of my ceaseless questions, banished me to the playground after lunch. When I returned at dusk, tired, thirsty, and dirty but no less excited, the piano was there. My mother sat playing delicate, flickering notes. Later I would circle the number of that magical Chopin nocturne and claim it as my own. Daily I marveled at the piano's cool keys and intricate carving. Each

day I begged her to play the piano for me. Sometimes she would.

Surely my desire to play the piano was palpable since that day. At age ten, however, I was taking cello lessons. “Such a lovely mournful tone,” my mother would say approvingly whenever she heard Pablo Casals on WQXR. Then I would be lulled into believing that I wanted to play the cello and that my mother and I were partners in this endeavor. The lessons continued. I progressed against my will—too quickly for me and too slowly for my teacher, an elderly woman who once offered me a chocolate-covered grasshopper as a snack.

“Wait!” I wanted to say to someone. “The cello is too big for me.” Yet it was now a part of me, and I had to carry it to lessons and to school. It caught on rugs and hardwood floors. On the subway I bumped into poles and people. My friends teased me. Strangers smiled or laughed or sometimes jeered.

The cello was large and curved and visible. I wanted to remain small and straight and invisible as I ran unencumbered through my city. I had mastered finding the notes. I had learned to read the markings for the bow. I could, according to my teacher, produce music. She decided that soon I would learn vibrato, that controlled movement of the left hand to create a note that is fuller, richer, and more emotional than a note played dead on. Faced with this ultimatum, which I knew would be followed by more difficult pieces, duets, and solo recitals, I waited until my parents were gone and my aunt was ensconced on our sofa. Then I cancelled my cello lessons and asked Willy Chen to help me learn to play the clarinet.

Willy was the first boy I wanted to kiss. He played the trumpet, and the curve of his upper lip was a small scrolled pitcher. Over the past year we had spoken little; we communicated by pen fight. The slashes of blue were hard to scrub off, so mostly I just left them on my arms to fade.

Without any discussion, Willy and I began to leave band practice together. At first we’d walk to the music store and buy reeds for my clarinet. Because my parents were away I felt no need to go home, telling myself that I was all alone and doomed to shiver in a thin coat and no gloves while everyone else ate

hot food in bright kitchens. In fact my aunt was solicitous, willing to cook me whatever I wanted, and interested in hearing about my day, but it suited me to pretend that Willy and I were unloved rebels as we walked down Houston Street. I kept my hand in his jacket pocket for warmth.

Sometimes we'd go to Willy's house to tease Warren, his younger brother, who sat in front of the living room window wearing a white scarf and pretending to be a pilot. Then we'd sit on the floor of Willy's room and play Scrabble or practice our instruments. One day we began going to Rosie's Hero Shop, and that routine pleased us so much that, until our last day together, we never wavered from it. Then Willy would walk me home, disappearing silently as I opened the door.

"Beth?" my aunt would call from the living room, where she sat reading a book or listening to the radio. "Beth? Is that you?"

"Yes," I would say on my way to my room, where I would practice my clarinet until I went to sleep. My cat watched with cautious interest. Daniel remained barricaded in his room. Sometimes my aunt drifted around the apartment, dusting and straightening and humming to herself, no doubt counting the days until she could go home.

"Shall I take you anywhere?" she would ask every weekend. "Is there something special you want to do?" I said no. I wanted to practice the clarinet and be with Willy.

I was second clarinet by the time my parents came home. My aunt went home, and my brother emerged from his room. Willy was required to come into the apartment when he brought me home. He and I still bought reeds and walked for miles after band practice. Winter passed without my being aware of anything except the square slabs of sidewalk on Houston Street, the linty flannel inside Willy's pockets, and the sour taste of new reeds against my tongue.

The day Willy and I took the ferry to Staten Island was the last day we ever spoke. It was late April, and I had just turned thirteen. We met at the bus stop in front of the movie theater. Willy carried cartons of fried rice for our picnic. "You're so pretty," he said suddenly, and then blushed sharply.

I imagined us sitting in the grass on Staten Island, like those mysterious older couples whom I watched and envied.

On the ferry we stayed outside and watched the water breaking against the boat. It was cold and windy. Willy held my jacket sleeve, just above my wrist. Without speaking he led me off the ferry, through the terminal, and onto a bus. As we rode, we looked out the windows for a park. Wasn't Staten Island supposed to be the country? The bus went down one wide avenue after another, all spattered with shoppers and stores and cars. The rice turned cold and began to leak through the cardboard.

"Maybe this wasn't a good idea," Willy finally said. "Maybe we should just go back and eat in the terminal."

I saw that I could travel a parallel route all my life and never reach my destination. Willy and I would never have our picnic. I had given up the cello, but I was no closer to playing the piano. We were just thirteen, after all. Willy's hair was ruffled from the wind. He was chewing on his lip. I saw how young he was and how baffled by my silence. I wanted to say, "Let's go back to the terminal and eat lunch inside before we take the ferry back," but I couldn't speak. I couldn't look at him. At the terminal he threw the cartons of rice toward a garbage can. One carton missed and splattered on the floor. We sat in silence on a damp green bench and then on the ferry ride home.

At graduation in June I was first clarinet. My mother and Mrs. Chen exchanged greetings, but Willy and I ignored each other. We hadn't spoken since April. We were going to different high schools. I sat on the stage in my white dress, my curly hair pulled back hard against the June sun, and listened to the melody undulate from my clarinet. Perhaps Mr. Hayford heard it too, because he looked right at me and said, "Very good!" But maybe he was talking to us all. After graduation I returned the clarinet and music to the storage room. I kept all the reeds, but over the summer some dried out, and my cat batted some under the furniture.

"Stop chewing on that thing!" my father yelled one evening, and I threw the last reed away. It was chipped and splintered to half its former size. If I saw one now, I would

marvel that I once knew how to use something so specialized and so delicate.

The year before I went away to college I started taking piano lessons. I liked the lessons, but there was no real magic associated with them or with the music, not in the way there had been on the day the piano was delivered. At college I couldn't practice, and I forgot most of what I had learned. In my junior year my aunt died. In my senior year Rosie was murdered, stabbed to death on the ferry that Willy and I had taken to Staten Island.

Last week my mother called to ask me if I wanted the cello. She was cleaning out closets and asked me if I wanted various papers and books. Then she mentioned the cello. "It was your aunt's cello," she said. "Did you know that?"

I hadn't known that. Or had I? I suddenly saw the cello, hunched over in its mildewed cotton case, trapped in the hall closet between the vacuum cleaner and the broom. When had it gotten so small? I wanted to play the piano so desperately and to free myself from the cello so frantically. Where have those desires gone? I have a piano now. It sits in the dining room, piled high with newspapers and library books. I pass it many times daily yet play it rarely. "You should take lessons again," my husband urges. Now it is the cello that tugs at me. It seems smaller now, and it would be easier to handle. Knowing where it is and that its fate is in my hands reminds me once again that I have lost them all: my aunt, dead; Willy, somewhere unknown; Rosie, murdered; and me, the girl who ran so quickly through her city.

My mother is still talking. "It's not in great shape," she says. "I took it in to the music store to see if it can be repaired." "That's good," I say, without really listening. I think about the cello. It is across the river, holding out its arms to me. I will drive in to the city that is no longer mine and bring it here. I will have it repaired. I will take cello lessons again. I will take piano lessons and cello lessons. Yes. No. I can. I can't. I will leave the cello in the closet and let it continue uninterrupted on its solitary journey of defeat and decay. Some things cannot be made sense of or even examined too closely, let alone repaired or replaced. No. I need to go get the cello.

“Let me know what I should do about the cello,” my mother says, interrupting my reverie. “I can get it repaired if you want. Or you can just take it and decide what you want to do with it later. The man at the music store told me there’s some point of no return with all instruments, but he doesn’t think we’ve reached it yet with the cello. Listen, I have to go now. I’ll call you over the weekend, OK?” “Yes, good, OK,” I finally say, still holding the receiver, long after my mother has hung up the phone and is gone.

The Writers

Thomas Allbaugh, an associate professor of English has taught writing and composition at Azusa Pacific University in Southern California since 2001. His stories have appeared in *Relief*, *The Blue Moon Review*, and other publications. His novel, *Apocalypse TV*, was published by eLectio publishers in September, 2017.

Anne Baldo lives in southern Ontario. Her work has appeared in *SubTerrain*, *Qwerty*, *The Impressment Gang*, *Carousel*, *The Windsor Review*, and the anthologies *Whisky Sour City* and *Sweet Lemons 2* (Sicilian Studies).

Joe Bauman possess a Ph.D. in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as the editor-in-chief of *Rougarou: an Online Literary Journal* and the *Southwestern Review*. He is the author of *Ivory Children: Flash Fictions*, and his work has appeared in *Barrelhouse*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Zone 3*, *ellipsis...*, and many literary journals. He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at St. Charles Community College in St. Charles, Missouri, and has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes. He is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Gateway Review: A Journal of Magical Realism*.

Ann Calandro is a medical editor, mixed media collage artist, children's book author and illustrator, and classical piano student. Two of her short stories, a dozen of her poems, and three of her children's books have been published.

Alan Cliffe is a literary critic and fiction writer in the Cleveland, Ohio area. His work has been published in the literary journals *Aspasia* and *Guide to Kulchur*, as well as the *Cleveland State Vindicator*. He is now a book critic and contributing writer at North Coast Voice, an arts and entertainment paper published near Cleveland.

The Poets

Heidi Blakeslee writes from just northwest of Pittsburgh. Topics of fascination include cats, ghosts, serial killers, and weird literature. She has published two poetry books, *Should the Need Arise: Poems*, and *The Empress of Hours*, and two novels, *The House*, and *Strange Man*. She also published a memoir called *The White Cat: A Paranormal Memoir*. She lives with her partner, James, and seven cats.

Steve Carter is a writer and jazz guitarist. He taught music and English at Berklee College of Music. His first book of poems, *Intermodulations*, was recently published by Maat Publishing. His poetry has appeared in many magazines, including *Hanging Loose*, *Carolina Review*, *Stand*, and *Clackamas Literary Review*. He has 10 CDs of his music available on his independent record label, Frogstory Records (www.frogstoryrecords.com).

Steve Gerson, an emeritus English professor, writes poetry about life's dissonance and dynamism. He's proud to have published in *Panoplyzine* (winning an Editor's Choice award), *The Hungry Chimera*, *Toe Good*, *The Write Launch*, *Ink & Voices*, and *Gravitas*.

Mark Gordon is a novelist and poet who grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals in Canada and the United States, including *Poet Lore*, *Quiddity International*, and *Roanoke Review*. His three published novels are *The Kanner Aliyah*, *Head of the Harbour*, and *The Snail's Castle*. He is presently living in Toronto, Canada. He maintains the website, markgordonauthor.com, which he cordially invites you to visit.

Ruth Holzer has published poetry in *Poet Lore*, *Thema*, *Slant*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Rhino* and *Chiron Review*, among others. She has published three chapbooks and received nominations for the Pushcart Prize.

Anastasia Jill is a queer poet, fiction writer, and aspiring filmmaker. Her work has been published or is forthcoming with *Poets.org*, *Lunch Ticket*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, *Ambit Magazine*, *apt*, *Into the Void Magazine*, *2River*, *Requited Journal*, and more.

Marina Kazakova (b. Gorky, 1983) is a writer, poet and audio-visual artist in Belgium. Published internationally in magazines and journals (*Three Rooms Press' Maintenant*, *AntiNarrative Journal*, *Crannog*), Marina is a frequent performer. She has been shortlisted at different poetry/ film-poetry competitions and was awarded various prizes. She authored the verse novel *Tishe...Piano*, the film adaptation of which was shortlisted for International Short Film Festival Leuven 2013, Miami Indie Wise Festival 2018, XpoNorth Festival 2018, and got "The Best Narrative Short Award" at the International Film Festival behalf Savva Morozov in Moscow in 2015. Her literature deals to a large degree with confrontation with the past and explores the challenges posed both by memory and grief. In addition to poetry, Marina has written essays and articles for such publications as *The Word" Magazine* (Brussels), *Culturetrip. com* and *Seanema.eu*. Marina holds a Master in Public Relations and in Transmedia. Currently, she is Communications Officer at Victim Support Europe(Brussels), and is working on her practice-based PhD in Arts Lyric Film—Poem, a research on how the unique characteristics of lyric poetry can be expressed in film at Luca School of Arts (KULeuven).

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick-Vrenios' award winning chapbook, *Special Delivery*, was published in the spring of 2016. Nominated for a Pushcart award for 2019, she has poems published in various anthologies including *Stories of Music*, *Love Notes from Humanity*, *Hudson Review*, *Poeming Pidgeon*, *Passager*, *NILVX*, *Unsplendid*, *Scissors and Spackle* and the *American Journal of Poetry*. She is a Professor Emerita from American University, artistic director of the Redwoods Opera in Mendocino, California, and has spent much of her life performing as a singing artist across Europe and the United States.

Steve Klepetar's work has received several nominations for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, including three in 2001. Recent collections include *A Landscape in Hell*, *How Fascism Comes to America*, and *Why Glass Shatters*.

David Miller teaches Latin in South Los Angeles. He has two daughters and a wife. His poetry has found its way into *The Moth*, *Rattle*, *Unlost Journal*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *riseup review*, *crack the spine*, *Dodging The Rain*, and other fine journals.

Sanket Mishra, a cancer-survivor, wants to live in a world where the pen is actually mightier than the sword. As a freelance writer he has been published in online publications and his story, *The Volcano Erupts*, was voted Most Popular Story in a contest run by an Independent publisher in Singapore. His poems revolve around human experiences and emotions.

Rajnish Mishra is a poet, writer, translator and blogger born and brought up in Varanasi, India and now in exile from his city. His work originates at the point of intersection between his psyche and his city. He edits *PPP Ezine*.

Barry Peters is a writer and teacher in Durham, NC. Recent/forthcoming publications include *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Best New Poets 2018*, *Baltimore Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *The Flexible Persona*, *The Healing Muse*, *Jelly Bucket*, *Kakalak*, *KYSO Flash*, *Miramar*, *Plainsongs*, *Rattle*, *The Southampton Review*, *Sport Literate*.

Kushal Poddar presently lives at Kolkata and edited the online magazine *Words Surfacing*, and authored *The Circus Came To My Island* (Spare Change Press, Ohio), *A Place For Your Ghost Animals* (Ripple Effect Publishing, Colorado Springs), *Understanding The Neighborhood* (BRP, Australia), *Scratches Within* (Florida, USA), *Kleptomaniac's Book of Unoriginal Poems* (BRP, Australia), and *Eternity Restoration Project* (Hawakal Publishers, India)

Bruce Pemberton is a retired high school English teacher, tennis coach, and Gulf War veteran. His work has appeared in *Snapdragon*, *Palouse Journal*, *Northern Journeys*, *The Redneck Review of Literature*, *Third Wednesday*, *Sky Island Journal*, *American Life in Poetry*, and in the anthologies *In Tahoma's Shadow*, and *Spokane Writes*. He lives on the Palouse in rural eastern Washington state.

Lauren Scharhag is an award-winning writer of fiction and poetry. She is the author of *Under Julia*, *The Ice Dragon*, *The Winter Prince*, *West Side Girl & Other Poems*, and the co-author of *The Order of the Four Sons* series. Her poems and short stories have appeared in over sixty journals and anthologies, including *trampset*, *Whale Road Review*, *The Flint Hills Review*, *Io Literary Journal*, *Gambling the Aisle*, and *Sheila-Na-Gig*. She lives on Florida's Emerald Coast. To learn more about her work, visit: www.laurenscharhag.blogspot.com

Gregg Shapiro's chapbook, *More Poems About Buildings and Food* (Souvenir Spoon Press) will be published in early 2019. He is the author of **Fifty Degrees** (Seven Kitchens, 2016), selected by Ching-In Chen as co-winner of the Robin Becker Chapbook Prize. Other books by Shapiro include the short story collections *How to Whistle* (Lethe Press, 2016) and *Lincoln Avenue* (Squares and Rebels Press, 2014), the chapbook *GREGG SHAPIRO: 77* (Souvenir Spoon Press, 2012), and the poetry collection *Protection* (Gival Press, 2008). He also has work forthcoming in *Gargoyle* and the anthology *Lovejets: Queer Male Poets on 200 Years of Walt Whitman* (Handtype Press). His poetry was recently featured in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *the Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Chelsea Station Magazine*, *Minnie's Diary* and the Anhinga Press anthology *Reading Queer*. An entertainment journalist, whose interviews and reviews run in a variety of regional LGBT and mainstream publications and websites, Shapiro lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida with his husband Rick and their dog Coco.

Christopher Stolle's writing has appeared most recently in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Flying Island*, *Edify Fiction*, *Contour*, *The New Southern Fugitives*, *The Gambler*, *Gravel*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, *Sheepshead Review*, and *Plath Poetry Project*. He works as an acquisitions and development editor for Penguin Random House, and he lives in Richmond, Indiana.



from the home lake of literary arts:

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