

Necro Magazine

#4
Winter
2020

"Halo" ✕
By Douglas Campbell

C U L T U R E

First Born
By Aida Bode

|

The Door
Two Misfits
In Maid's Water
By Strider Marcus Jones

|

Nature's Job
By Henry Alley

|

Flowers in My Hair
Giallo
Ganges
By Susana H Case

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Two Misfits

STRIDER MARCUS JONES

it was no time
for love outside-
old winds of worship
found hand and mouth
in ruined rain
slanting over cultured fields
into pagan barns
with patched up planks
finding us two misfits.

i felt the pulse
of your undressed fingers
transmit thoughts
to my senses-
aroused by autumn scents
of milky musk
and husky hay
in this barn's faith
we climbed the rungs of civilisation
so random in our exile-

and found a bell
housed inside a minaret-
with priest and muezzin
sharing its balcony-
summoning all to prayer

with one voice-
this holy music, was only the wind
blowing through the weathervane,
but we liked its tone to change its time.

Terra Nullius

AMANDA ELLIS

“Found” by those sailing the Santa Maria
Into the New World
History of
Doctrine and Discovery,
Imperialism and subjugation

Interpret and re-interpret
Colonial norms
Until all land is put to
 “civilized” use
Control by conquest

Contemporary geopolitics aside

“The People” thrive as best they can
On pockets
 Of traditional territories
Living with nature, not despite it

Today’s privileges, yesterday’s colonialism
Token gestures or meaningful practices?
Do you acknowledge the land you are on?

A message to all
Forget Columbus –
He was lost.

We have always been here.

The Layer Cake

EDWARD AHERN

We are a skewed birthday cake,
generations of lopsided layers
baked badly by ancestors
of fervent but defective intent,
teetering atop the stale and dried out.

The layers descend into the past,
inedible and mostly forgotten
while we the temporary top deny
bad ingredients and tiltings
and frosting with crème cruel.

We concoct the next tier
with hope and even love
but use a cookbook specifying
flour of custom and bias
and spices of mistakes.

It is a mighty wonder
that the cake still stacks
and those just set in place
don't slide off to extinction
on the icing of our failings.

Black-Eyed Peas

LINDA IMBLER

A bowl full of luck for New Year's Day
black-eyed peas steaming off the stove
add a dash of pepper sauce
or maybe some ketchup
It's a Southern thing
superstition
but I can't
let it
go.

Shackled

ED MEEK

We sometimes have to shackle
the women prisoners
when they are giving birth.

What did you expect--
hand-holding? Shackles are needed
to keep them from escaping
after they deliver.

If they didn't want to be shackled,
they shouldn't have gotten locked up.
Abuse is no excuse for breaking the law.

Especially someone with a record
who can't afford a lawyer
and is advised to make a deal.

19 years to life
The deal Nikki got
when she shot and killed
the man who raped
and tortured her.
She had to save her child
she told the judge
who was unmoved.



Rustmap

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

My Last Dinner With The Duke

PAUL BRUCKER

I provide sufficient information and context
to arouse his interest but not satisfy him.

I plan to conclude the necessary business before dessert
so I can enjoy a double brandy and feel the better for it.

I move in close, anticipating sounds of support,
not familiar snarls of stomach.

Adverse to sour cream, he asked our server
to banish it from his chicken. I suspect the cook did no such
thing.

The server's lovely, comfortable in crowds at crucifixions.
Unfortunately for a man in my position, she inspires inappropriate feelings.

Feelings dismissed, I persist: "We must make civilization
more useful and peaceful.

Withdrawal from all problematic solutions is no solution.

We must over and over again, choose life over death.

We must not let ugly rumors become ugly, untimely truths.

It matters little how much you wish it were different
or how little it was or how much it will become.”

Prolonged silence follows his heartfelt sighs,
notwithstanding rumbles and tumbles of digestion.

I know what he thinks: We must divert those funds
for six thousand life-sized statues of soldiers and horses.

As if on cue he asks, “Why sir, are you out of your mind?”
I respond, “Of course not! Kindly think it over.”

Eternal silence continues to underlie whatever we say,
uttering volumes of indecipherable truths.

In far corners, I perceive outer walls and floors:
Mere symptoms of our limitations.

So, I arise to make emphatic faces and arm movements
to facilitate my large brandy and sense of peace.

Then you catch my eye with a mysterious look
of questionable motives.

It's been ages since I rained kisses

on your lips, neck and pale eyelids.

You were supposed to be my muse, not a nuisance
who expresses no need for my temperament, my kind or me.

I return unharmed to my seat. The duke prattles on about papal
authority,
an issue I sidestep with a few pious platitudes.

It's useless to say the royal campaign rages on with no respect to
truth,
useless to argue for a stable currency, fair taxes and a fresh code
of law.

The duke is comparatively illiterate, knowing little Latin and
even less Greek.
Besides, philosophy sets out to neither settle our problems nor
save our souls.

I will endure unlike my allies who dangle on half-dead trees.
Yes sir, I will survive and celebrate this brandy, this most excel-
lent brandy.

Spirit Is The Thing With Salt

ELLEN HUANG

after Emily Dickinson

Spirit is the thing with salt
That flavors all the earth
And holds to good in midst of flood
And never stops—for war—

And blazing—in the soul—is felt
And weary must be the wolves
That could rob this little light from me
Slay body but not the soul.

I've heard it in the face of death
And thrown coins in the face of forth
And if one should call it harsh
It's but a crumb of our horror—

Spirit is the thing with grit
That moves the heart with fury
And pushes tables over, cracks braided whip
To cause dens of thieves to scurry

And trouble is made—in being yourself
And hungry must be the awoken
That listen to the Spirit's wisdom call
And fight for all the folk—

I've heard it in the dead of night
And on the edge of bed
The Spirit still is stirring here
Moving through many I meet—

Spirit is the thing with light
That colors hope of heaven
And speaks for all who love and live
And strengthens kin forever.

And lovely, in your bones is felt
Gentle warmth, life is beginning
And trembling must be the ones
Who call our holding hands sin—

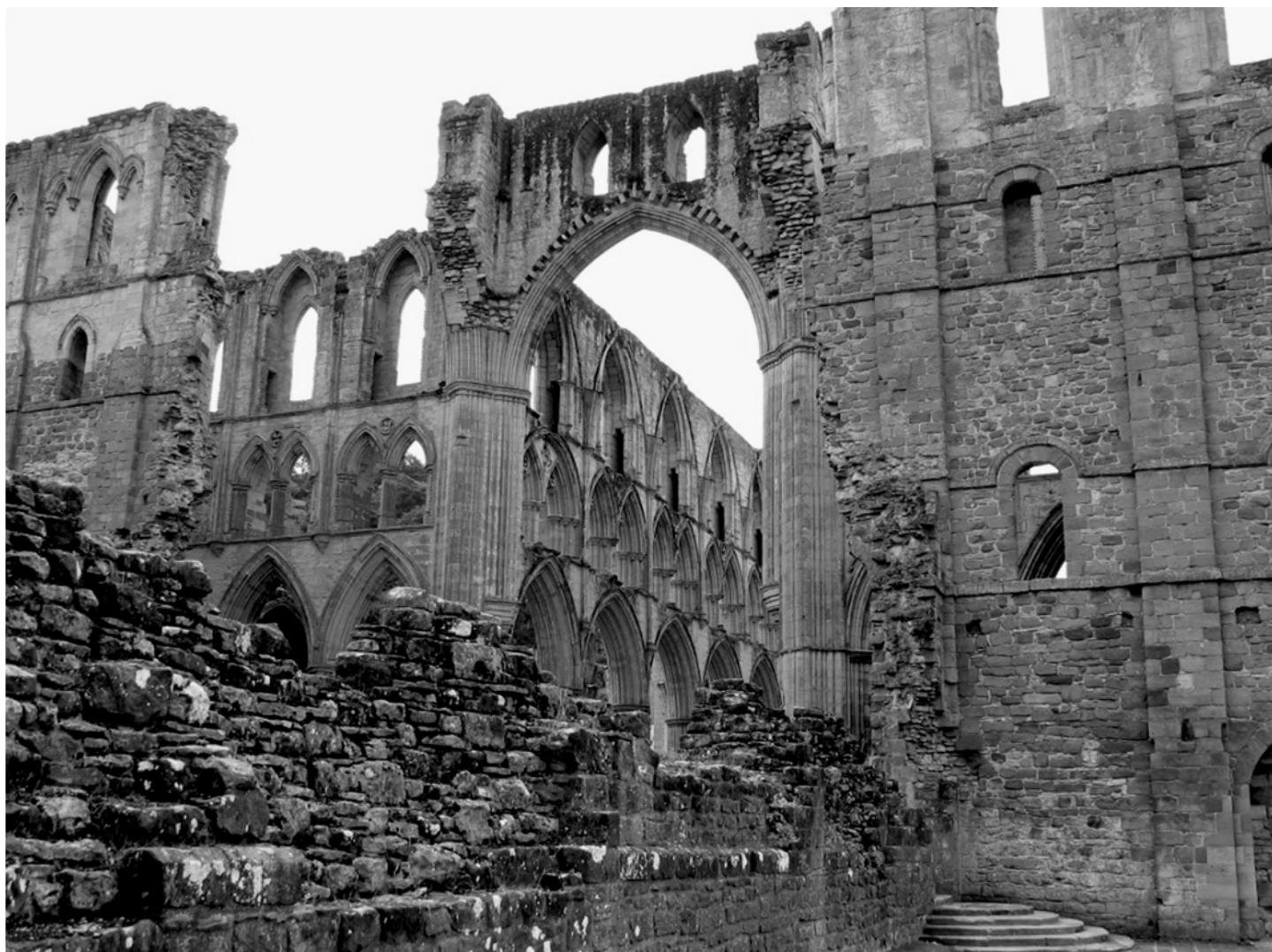
I've heard it said She knows us well
Encounter Her without and within
See her in the marches and prayer
Hear her stir—and sing—

Spirit is the thing with power
She soars and crafts our dreams
She lights the candles, turns the tables—
Brings us to everything.

And trouble is made—in being yourself
And hungry must be the awoken
That listen to the Spirit's wisdom call
And fight for all the folk—

I've heard it in the dead of night
And on the edge of bed
The Spirit still is stirring here
Moving through many I meet—

*previously published in a collaboration between
As I Am and Diverging Magazine*



Rievaulx Abby
DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Promise Not To Kill Me

ELLEN HUANG

if i tell you a story.

shall i tell you of the kingdom
infested with rats in human skin?

burn the spinning wheels.

shall i tell you of the children
abandoned, baking in the forest?

lock up spinners of straw into gold.

shall i tell you of the bride made corpse,
dead so everyone now fears her?

your child may be a changeling.
your grandmother may be a wolf.
your neighbor may be a witch.
shall i tell you how the kingdom burned
hollowed out when the rats they feared
were their own sacrificed children?

a witch may be your neighbor.
a wolf may be your grandmother.
a changeling may be your child.

melt the mirror shard in your eye,
too bewitched and blind to see.

here, i shall bury the story
a bean under a hundred ashen mattresses
safe from the rest
of us.

previously published in Rigorous Magazine.

Fairy Tale Love

ELLEN HUANG

Not all fairy tales
By true love's kiss were resolved;
Not all love's that kind.

Hansel and Gretel
Lost, lured, suffering as one
Burned the witch as one.

Gerda and Kai, friends
Sacrifice through bitter storm
To warm frozen hearts.

Brother and Sister,
Runaway, spellbound siblings
Protect each other.

Seven ravens flock
Girl ventures to edge of world
To see her brothers.

Six swans taking wing
Girl sews in silence for years
So brothers can land.

And Thumbelina
Cared deeply for her swallow

Who helps her take wing.

So I wonder now
If a spell imprisoned you
Deep and dark and strong

Would holding you dear
All the comfort I can give
Be love true enough?

What if the swan lake's
Enchantment breaks by choices
To love, not one vow?

What if the beauty
Loved the beast differently,
Unconditional?

[cont. new stanza]
What if the mermaid's
Human prince shared souls, did life
Without a single kiss?

What if I told you
No need to change who you are
Nor me who I am

Love of friends transcends
Beyond til death do we part
Sweetest of them all.

Living in the Dark

MATTHEW MCAYEAL

Comrade Song Jin-Kyong awoke with a start. Her eyes were open, but there was nothing to see. It was pitch black.

Jin-Kyong lay wide awake on her floor mat, not feeling tired at all. But there was no point in getting up now. There was nothing to see or do in the darkness that surrounded her. And even if she did, she'd need a candle, for all the electricity was shut off at nine o'clock. Of course, her stomach felt empty, as it had always. All her life, there had never been enough food. But their remaining corn rice — that was, corn ground into rice-sized grains — needed to be saved for breakfast. At least things were not as bad now as she was told they had been in her parents' day, a time known as the Arduous March.

Of course, she knew why there were food shortages. It was because of the Miguk-nom, who had divided her country and enslaved the people of the South. But the Miguk-nom could never win. Her people had Juche, self-reliance, and their unwavering faith in the Outstanding Leader of the Party. The Miguk-nom could make them suffer, but still, they would survive and fight back. They would never surrender. And eventually, someday, their motherland would be unified again under the glorious leadership of their Outstanding Leader.

Tomorrow would be Jin-Kyong's first day in the People's Army. She was looking forward to it. There would probably be more food in the army, she supposed. And she would be a part of her people as they struck back against the Miguk-nom. That would show them for what they had done to her country! The

Miguk-nom thought they were so powerful, but they did not know the strength of her people and of their unshaking faith in Juche!

But hadn't the war been over for more than sixty years now? That was sixty years in which the Miguk-nom had known the strength of her people, and yet they had not given up. Unless another war started, all they could do was maintain the status quo, and that was no proper way to get revenge. That status quo hadn't dissuaded the Miguk-nom for sixty years, so why would it start now? She reminded herself that the Outstanding Leader was all-knowing and all-wise. He knew the best way to take revenge. She just had to maintain her faith that he knew what he was doing. Maybe victory wouldn't come tomorrow or even in ten years, but it would come someday through his glorious leadership.

She wondered if she'd even get to see a Miguk-nom. She supposed the best chance she had would be sitting across a table from one at the Joint Security Area. It was hard to imagine a Miguk-nom sitting at a table, all calm and civilized. After all, she'd grown up seeing posters that depicted them as vicious, deformed barbarians. She supposed they must be at least somewhat civilized to have built all their helicopters and tanks and so forth. It seemed strange that a race of such bloodthirsty savages was capable of acting civilized. Not that that would fool her, of course, since her people knew their true colors well.

Jin-Kyong's eyes bore into the darkness but still saw nothing. In such complete darkness, doubt and uncertainty began to descend over her. She suddenly found herself questioning everything she knew. The Party used to say that life was better in the North than in the South. After everyone learned it was the other way around, the Party admitted that point, but said their

brothers and sisters in the South still longed to be free of the Miguk-nom, still wished to be cared for by their beloved Outstanding Leader. If the Miguk-nom were so evil, why would they make life good for the people under their rule? If the Outstanding Leader was so great, why was there so much hunger and corruption?

No, she couldn't think such things! It was a crime to doubt her Outstanding Leader for even a moment! Jin-Kyong's heart quickened. Even inside her head and in a pitch-black room, was it safe to think such a thing? Why, if she said such out loud where the police could hear, her whole family would be disappeared, probably killed, and rightfully so. Wasn't that the way the world was supposed to work? Wasn't that what she had been taught all her life?

Though she couldn't see it in the dark, the wall had side-by-side portraits of the Outstanding Leader's father and grandfather. The Great Leader, the founder of their country, had been dead for over twenty-five years and the image of him on the wall was an inanimate object, but she still felt ashamed to be doubting his grandson while under his benevolent gaze. Surely, he would be disgusted with her for that. How could she be so ungrateful for everything he had given her and her people? What was wrong with her? Was she insane to have thoughts like this? Or...

Or did everyone have those thoughts? Maybe no one actually believed what the Party said but simply repeated it out of fear. There was no way to know. She was scared to even think that, let alone ask someone out loud. For that matter, was anything the Party said true? Maybe the Miguk-nom didn't actually exist. Every sacrifice they had made was for the impending war, but the war wasn't happening. Would there ever be a war? Was it all just an excuse? Did a world outside of her country even ex-

ist? How could a society like that come into existence in the first place? Why would millions of people agree to let a small number of liars control their every thought and feeling?

No, she must be insane. She lay there in the still darkness, unable to know anything for certain. She would have to hide her insanity from everyone, she thought as her heart pounded uncontrollably. She would have to make all the normal, healthy people think she was one of them, that she still had true and complete faith in their Outstanding Leader. Maybe if she tried really hard to make herself believe it, she would redeem herself, and then, she would no longer be crazy.

This fictional story does not depict an Orwellian dystopia of the future or a totalitarian regime of the past. It depicts North Korea, a country that today is shrouded in darkness both literally and metaphorically.



Grinding Stone
MICHAEL EMERALD

Pride of Man

MICHAEL EMERALD

He who will eat with the devil
Must have a furrow throat like a pit.

Gods are unfathomable granite—
They must be obeyed.

The spirit of departed ancestors:
ethereal, invisible— eternal guardians
Of the living bodies
That has blood & sweat.

In my tribe,
gods are images of earth, granite & wood.

To appease them,
consult Abogunrin¹
He knows the language of the gods.

He approaches the shrine of Ogun²
He stands before the shrine

In his hand, a small gourd rattling
Pouring libation on it
From a keg of palm-wine

With his other hand; Chanting

“When a cobra gives birth, it dies.
Its children take up their habit
When a king dies,
Arole³ takes up the throne
The pride of a man,

Is in his tradition”
That is the meaning of culture
in my tribe

¹ Consultant of the God of iron

² God of iron

³ His heir

Who?

PRAMOD SUBBARAMAN

When does a habit
Or a practice
Of a culture
Become a tradition?

What are the features
That make a norm
For a culture
To adopt as tradition?

How does one
Adapt oneself
To assimilate into a culture
And then own its traditions?

Why do the opponents
Of multi-culturalism
Create the most obstacles
To the sharing of traditions?

Where will this take us?
This hatred
Of other cultures
Wait! Isn't that the tradition?

Goya's May 3rd 1808

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

I want to paint like Goya did
when he placed that line of French Soldiers,
none of them facing us,
none of them able to look into our eyes

as they fire, blasting those peasants
and priests to heaven or hell.
Maybe the peasant with the radiant white shirt,
with his arms spread, mimicking

those of Christ upon the cross is blessed.
Whatever the case, he will soon wear
his own bullet driven stigmata.
I want to etch searing images of soldiers

like those Goya scratched with his stylus,
which cut through the thin
molasses-colored hard ground
to gleam then bubble within the acid's bite.

But don't make me suffer through defeat
and occupation; don't make me watch
my friends die beneath rearing horses,
as I run away screaming from that night.

Controversial

TALI COHEN SHABTAI

I love people who
are controversial
that their polemic is spiced with unambiguity
in doses
that they eat throughout the day.

And that taboo is not only for purposes
of research for them
in the night hours
when the darkness encourages humankind
to communicate
hormone with hormone in the intercourse
of two
at the most!

There are other women
who fertilize a number of men
in a day, and wear a necklace around
their necks with 'phallic' stones
by the light of day
they are
the polyandrous.

I love controversial people
like Yeshayahu Leibowitz

who
forces us to see with brutal clarity
the sharp-tongued intonation
that for various reasons was comfortable for us
to evade

he earned Israeli society's nickname "prophet of the apocalypse."

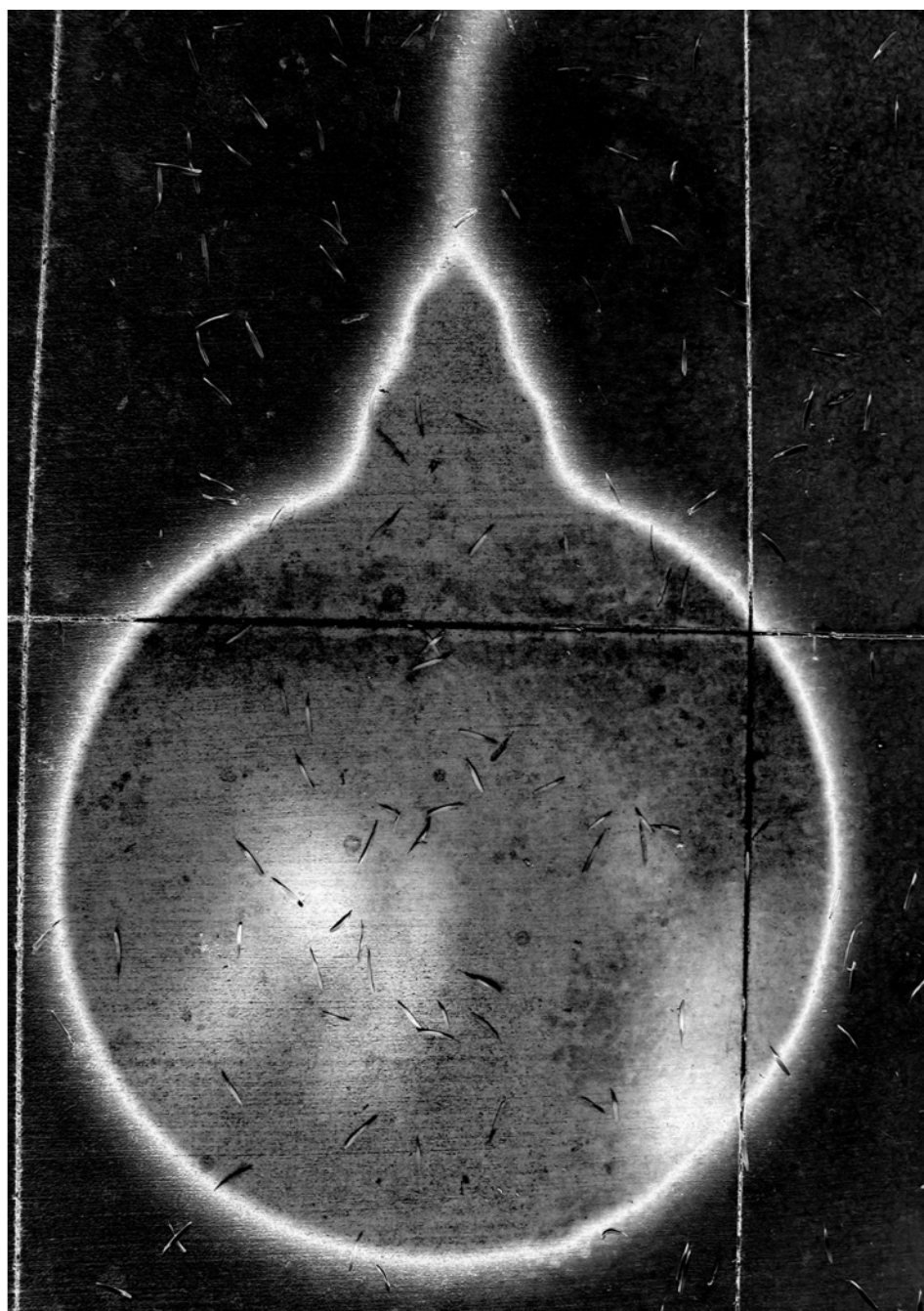
He
conceived concepts of philosophical questions
and found in them contradictions
even though many claimed otherwise –
for that I have solidarity with him

moreover, he did it so
differently from the accepted definition
that stimulates and challenges
my
intellect

his sharply-phrased wording and use
of the paradoxical
could instigate in me
an orgasm
of the sensual type
in the hours when I read

his book
“Five Books of Faith.”

I like being me
I don't flow continuously
in the water
that you are sipping now
I shock your
digestion
until the body cries out
to vomit
like this poem that is not understood.



Halo
DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Margins of Society

TALI COHEN SHABTAI

I love remote sights
they provide an answer to offer a glance at the lives of human beings on the margins of society,
it's funny how much transparency there is in them – until I see my own life within them.

Empty and fearful, the impure and lepers, homosexuals and transsexuals, prostitutes and homeless harlots, junkies gripped with insanity
those lacking everything, incurable patients, gangs.

These in these places
with an element devoid of any status – indeed
the status indicates location while the role indicates the active part

It is enough to smell the figurative stench
in remote places
to
understand the departure of these people
from what was once their role before life on the spine that involved
expectations of society
and secondly of their status, where they were before
in society

These are two sides of the coin: a status and a role that no longer attach importance to them in these remote places when they are detached like a bank note to a whore on the margins of society
in an urban alley

In typography, the margins are the blank part that is commonly left between the body text and the edge of the sheet of paper
as is well known, the margins surround the text on its four sides and are usually blank

As in life just not from my angle of view
the core of the page is the text that the margins delineate
but why wasn't it mentioned that there are other messages that characterize margins other than being "blank"?

Like
constant headlines,
page numbering or footnotes. In the past it was customary to decorate the margins of manuscripts with illustrations I am sure that even today.

How lovely such a notebook!

Think about it! If it weren't for the margins that are the page's pillar, the text would not be possible

whether the page margins
fill a space of 2.54 cm or less.

But!

Typically, the reader chooses to completely ignore the existence of the margins and continues reading.

That's how it is in life, too.

Brown Mountain

TONY REEVY

The low, dim ridge,
pasty-green in summer heat,
limb-brown and rock-grey
in winter chill, nondescript,
hides its secrets.

Pallid tales--wandering,
star-crossed lovers, Reb
deserters, murdered wives,
hidden stills--
try to explain.

We don't know
what kindles its fires
or, truth be told,
our own.

First published in The Mending Wall

Uwharrie

TONY REEVY

The Uwharrie region, the setting for this and the following five poems, is a range of old mountains located in the North Carolina Piedmont, at about the geographic center of the state. The Uwharries are roughly south of Greensboro, north of the South Carolina border, east of Charlotte and west of U.S. 220. They are small, gentle mountains topping out at under 1,000 feet in elevation. The Uwharrie region is famous for its folklore, especially for its supernatural legends.

They say that
once
a man came for boys
here in these hills.

A hunter,
a conscription man.
Come to take them
to fight
Sherman's Georgia fandango.

They hid out
in the rocks, mine pits
of Purgatory,
a hill like
that one

over there.

The boys
wouldn't fight,
but they had spunk.
They shot that man
deader
than a planked shad.

And that man,
the old ones say,
voices low,
that hunter,
that conscription man [stanza break]
still walks up there
on Purgatory,
still walks today.

Wait,
someone says,
Purgatory?
Isn't that over there
where they put
the zoo?

ARDGADG

First published in Now & Then

A Place in All Seasons

TONY REEVY

There is something to be said
for seeing a place in all seasons.
April's minute, glimmering flowers,
September's boiling, ruddy waters,
January's skeletal branches.

The old road, dipping to the river,
once rutted by buckboards
carting corn to the mill.
Now dented by walkers' shoes
and the hooves of morning deer.

There is something to be said
for seeing a place in all seasons.
Last summer's insistent cicadas
missing this July but
coming back in sixteen years.

The great blue heron,
appearing unexpected,
gliding silently downriver.
Seeking its secret,
August roost.

There is something to be said
for seeing a place in all seasons.
For taking the path, rain or sun,
one step, one leaf,
one root at a time.

Ideology as a Way of Life

TALI COHEN SHABTAI

Women like me, yes
have been added over the years to overshadow
what preceded us
that is mostly
not in line
with our agenda.

The accepted wording is
not what
will satisfy our desires –

Desires? Ours? Well then, I write
in the female first person plural
so as not to sound
as one who sins with pretension
as an individual woman,
however
I do not have many female friends for this journey
and those who have already passed
through a station or two
according to
the
fixed
rules
of society

A woman like me
tries
to stay free
from society
and at the same time
to be in it
with boycotts in double-digit ages
until the arrival
of the adolescence age
and beyond

I bear this bitter
in
sult
so far.

So! Spare judging
me
that “Cohen Shabtai
has rules
of her own...”
as Amos Levitan* wrote about me.

I came
with the goal of
satiating inspirations
based on
my theories

Therefore
I collect poems of the margins of humankind,
since
they have a greater potential
to waver from
the conventions –
just like me!
With 50 cents
in my wallet
I
live my own actions
lest
my inarticulate mouth
will be passed over and my eyes?
My eyes are blinded.

Women like me, particularly
at the beginning of
the fifteenth century
were persecuted and burned
for being independent and strong
at the Catholic church's instruction

Nowadays? You can petition
the High Court of Justice.
So it is for a woman like me.

*An Israeli known poet and editor



Shrooms #2

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Nature's Job

HENRY ALLEY

Thursday morning, the day of my launch on the Smithsonian Tour, I was taking the van to the airport alone. Markus my son was not capable of driving yet, and I did not want to worry my friends about remembering to pick me up at an early hour. At our age, it's so easy to let these obligations slip our mind. Frankly I wanted a commercial driver to be responsible for getting me to the local airport, which would get me to the crucial connection to my Paris flight. My energy was spent. I didn't want to hassle a friend into looking after me. It had taken me a couple of years for me to work up the courage to go out on this venture, after I had had to deal with the death of my husband, then my surgery, and then my son's retreat from the world. I had crept into the state of letting go, as they said, very gingerly, starting with dabbling in paints and then branching out into a consideration of an overseas tour to Paris and Monet's Giverny.

The omens of my street this morning were on my side this time. No thunderstorms. The reds of the Oriental lilies were all in full bloom. I could have taken up my paintbrush and done an early-June mark-up of the last of the irises—Prussian blue with a yellow stripe under a cobalt sky. I was all dressed and ready, and had my money belt, as recommended by our tour guide. That is, 300 francs, purchased from my bank, along with two hundred American dollars and my passport. I had read deep—as much as my eyes would allow--into one of my old-time French text books, French for the Modern World, “Avez-vous eu l'occasion de parler francais? Oui, plusieurs fois”

My sister Allison had signed on the tour with me long ago but now was no longer going to join me at our planned international connection in Salt Lake City, because her son had just been in an accident in a stock-car race. She would meet up with me later in Paris. "And frankly, Maddie," she added, "I don't see how you yourself can leave at all, with Markus the way he is."

The airporter driver was at the door. I opened the screen and the incoming light was nearly overwhelming. I felt a little dizzy with the prospect that I might actually be going on this adventure and into a world where the design was to have a good time. I thought of my brother, who always took risks, but had ended up dying in a hotel fire, because he had fallen asleep drunk and had been smoking. I thought of my father, who never took any risks at all, and never got east of the Mississippi.

Markus picked up my heavy bag and I hoisted my carry-all. My sister's admonishing voice, from recollection, was at my shoulder. "Have a good time while I'm gone," I told him. "You'll appreciate it, I'm sure, without me hovering. If you get lonesome, you can always go across the street to the Williams'. And your Dr. Robbins appointment comes up next Friday."

"And there's A.A.," he said.

"And there's A.A."

Here's this slender young man, no longer young, really, that is, thirty-nine, whose wife has left him and taken their son with her. And now I'm out the door. As he handed the driver my suitcase, the driver being someone who already looked Parisian, with a beret and a wizened gray scalp, I thought to myself agreeing with my sister, I must be out of my mind, leaving Markus

here alone, when being isolated up in that apartment in Seattle had driven him around the twist. The lilies in the yard were welcoming through the taxi window, though—there were some orange with burnt sienna stripes which weren't visible from the house. Mrs. Williams, the friendly neighbor, was waving goodbye, already informed about keeping a watch on the house when Markus wasn't there.

I reached out of the taxi and took Markus's hand. "There's enough cooked meals to last you three days," I said. "After that, you can always go to the diner." (It was within walking distance.)

"Or maybe, just maybe," he smiled, "I could learn to cook for myself."

This caused a blur in my eyes. I took out my handkerchief, and he lowered his face so I could kiss him on the cheek. Our driver, "Chester," from the sign above his rear-view mirror, looked over, clearly impatient with this ritual.

Perhaps it was the piety of Salt Lake City, my stopover, that made it easy for me to glide through customs. I went into a meditative mode. Something about the rather scary officer at the window that looked like a box office window—the way she peered skeptically at the photo on my passport and actually at me, up and down, several times, that helped confirm that I was indeed Madeline Starky and, I would add, a budding artist. When boarding the plane to Paris—and having found the gate an hour early—I felt as if I had passed muster, that this was my first significant travel since the death of my husband three years ago, and that this was the first time, in so many years, when I was going off for my own sense of mystery. I sat quietly in my aisle

seat as though I were in the old-fashioned Mayflower, still our biggest theatre in Carleton Park, waiting for the curtains to part. Sketches came up in my mind, as mentally I worked my water-color crayons up and down the aisle—the bearded young man in the paisley cap, a young woman with platinum hair and a floral wrap v-neck shift (taken care of in a dash of pink and burnt umber, or terre d'ombre ecru), and then—

My sister Allison, to my complete surprise, was taking her originally assigned seat across from me.

I touched her hand, as she sat down. She was within fifteen minutes of their shutting the cabin door.

“I thought you’d be in San Francisco,” I said. “Looking after Benny.”

“Benny got better all of a sudden,” she answered, having put her hat in the overhead, “his foot wasn’t broken after all, and he’s out of the hospital. I had to follow your example.”

We were moving into take-off mode, and it was impossible to talk further. Allison was in a lovely aqua travel tunic with a thin turquoise necklace and matching earrings. Her tan nicely accentuated her gray hair, which she did not cover with a rinse anymore. Originally she had been a beautiful blonde, and everyone had called her Goldie. I just looked at her admiringly, and feeling the pressure of my eyes, she said above the motors, “You could always separate yourself better from people than I could.”

Well, for one thing, she still had a husband. For another, our mother had always lived in the Bay area, and so Allison had been the one who tended to her, the one who got called when an emergency decision had to be made, so I stood an easier chance

of being able to look from the outside.

De Gaulle Airport came up so quickly; it took us by complete surprise. She held on tightly to my arm as we traveled the little underground metro to get our luggage. The same when we were picked up by our pre-ordered van to take us to our Paris Hotel, the Ecrivain.

“Is Markus going to make it OK?” she asked as we passed the Arc de Triomphe and had it pointed out to us after the fact. We were soon on the Champs-Elysees, and then about to cross the Seine.

“He’s been able to go out to the market with me without panicking,” I said. “The other night I bought Chef Boyardee for his spaghetti, Creamette noodles for macaroni and cheese for a lunch, and a full wedge of cheddar for one of his dinners. He is actually gaining a little weight after his depression.”

“And all of this he can do for himself?”

“Yes, he even can take his own medicine now,” I said defensively. “What more could I ask?”

She stayed in puzzled silence. We had had several similar discussions concerning Mother. Allison would drop everything, even a planned weekend to their cottage on Clear Lake, when Mother had the least ailment. She’d call me, San Francisco to Seattle, to ask for my advice, and I’d say, “Let it go,” but invariably she would stay home so she could travel by bus to the rest home the next morning. She didn’t drive. Her successful husband Luke, who was a dear and glorious physician, would just be perplexed. He was the soul of independence. He had never had any parents, but if he had, he would have never been this concerned.

Past the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, we went into some backstreets—through a heavily attended marketplace—and wound up in front of our hotel. It was good that a driver for the tour had picked us up, because the front was so understated, I couldn't have singled it out after being dropped by a bus, especially since my vision was blurry with being in full sun. A nice pale blue front—clearly an apartment building made over. We walked in, with our luggage, with our Smithsonian tour all abuzz in the lobby. Our leader was Algerian, a young man looking much like my handsome African American optometrist. He told us to get settled in upstairs and meet us back down here again at 5:30 p.m. for the orientation meeting and dinner. In our narrow room, about ten feet by fifteen, I looked out into our street, our picturesque Rue Augereau, and tried to focus on the window boxes (we also had one, geraniums) across the street. The reds of their geraniums were different hues than ours.

"I don't think I'm seeing things clearly," I said.

"You're telling me," Allison answered. "Look, we're in our seventies."

I unpacked my bag—everything was intact—and took out my paint box and watercolor pencils. I felt like a first-grader, but I had known there wouldn't be sufficient room or time during the tour for a full pallet and tubes of paint. So here it was—eight colors instead of twelve or twenty-four. It was another limit I had to accept. You want green, well, here's only two shades, dark and light, and just one kind of red. Still, there was just enough to play with here.

"Oh, my God, Madeline, Oh, my God." Allison was holding up her battery-powered clock, a little Westclox, that opened

out on to a tiny easel. "It's only two o'clock. I thought it was so much later. We get to nap for four hours!"

Finishing with the bureau drawers that belonged to me, and taking a few things off, I lay down on my narrow bed, just beside Allison on the other twin (we were like two kindergarteners at rest time) and went into a dream almost instantly of painting, in watercolor, our Parisian street, imitating what had been on our walls, my husband's and mine, for many years—a picture-perfect group of passersby in strokes of green and red, with brown hats and lamp posts with small yellow flowers swinging from them in pots. There was a brown chateau of a hotel in the background, with an arch running through, and in the foreground, to the side, the façade of a stone-looking library behind the green indications of the trees. It was all in a wash, but the blurriness of vision here was exactly right. I was an impressionist.

I awoke just in time to get us down to the 5:30 meeting—I had assumed that Allison had set the Westclox, but she hadn't.

We walked into the midst of their going around the board room--which was heavily furnished with bureaus, marble-topped tables and busts of 18th century-looking aristocrats, men and women alike---with each person offering a brief introduction of himself or herself. I said that I made my living now by delivering flowers in the morning for our local florist. When the public schools called me, I substituted as an art and English teacher. I dabbled a little in watercolor and that's why I'm here. My mother visited Giverny when it was first opened to the public in 1980, and this was a kind of pilgrimage in her memory.

Allison said she handles tapes and records and VHSs at their local library, and volunteers for Lighthouse for the Blind.

Upon hearing this, she was immediately paired up with a legally blind man in our tour, who had a paid attendant but also needed a “buddy”—the one who watches out for you during the entire ten days of the tour. Being explicitly told not to hook up with anyone we had known before the tour, I was paired with a good-looking young electrician who was traveling Europe with his Spanish wife. As Allison and I sat together in the dining room, waiting for a wonderful sautéed salmon in the open-air—and we were surrounded by green lattices that held passion-flower—I said, “Now’s your time to bow out. You don’t want to be saddled with someone to look after while you’re trying to enjoy France. If you don’t know how to explain why you don’t want to, let me try out my French on that guide.”

“You don’t get it,” Allison said in the tone she had used on the plane when she had told me that I was the one who more easily separated myself from people, “I wrote about my willingness to help others in our pre-trip questionnaire. I want to help that blind man.”

Inwardly, I threw up my hands. When the two of us, back in the 1940s, used to travel to the University of Cal at Berkeley via the trolley from San Francisco, Allison would invariably get to talking to someone who had just been dumped by a boyfriend or girlfriend or who had just been robbed. “Avez-vous lu ce livre aujourd’hui?” I’d ask her, to get her back on task. I would be pointing to her copy of Swann’s Way.

The next morning, after we had taken the Metro out to Sainte Chapelle, I was standing in that magnificent cathedral and looking at the figure of Saint Louis glowing like a white votive candle beneath the rich stained glass, when our guide came up and said, “Your sister has gotten some news from home—it

got relayed from the hotel desk—and she wants to see you immediately.”

I caught her in a pew in the midst of explaining to her “buddy” the blind man and his attendant why she had to leave the group and call back home. His attendant—a woman in her fifties in tight Capri pants, halter, and barber’s type visor—looked actually relieved that Allison was leaving her to deal with her good-looking charge all by herself once more. For truly he was handsome—as handsome as Jean Paul Belmondo.

“What is it?” I asked the moment we were outside and facing the delicate scrollwork of the delicate Gothic portal, also the stone saints in naves on either side.

“Benny has broken out in shingles. Luke sent the message. We need to remember how we came over on the Metro so I can go back and call and pack.”

“I’m so sorry to hear,” I told her. “But you don’t have to go back home. Benny can recover from the shingles without you there. Luke is a doctor.”

“Doesn’t matter. Benny says he wants me.”

I did in fact remember how to get back to the hotel on the Metro—the switch was at Concord—and we just had to do everything backwards. I considered just grabbing a taxi, but taxis are not that easy to hail down in Paris, and I thought I could borrow more time this way to convince Allison to stay.

But to no avail.

At the hotel, I finally shut up and helped her pack after she called home and confirmed her new reservation. She could catch

a plane out tonight. It broke my heart to watch her put away all the paints and brushes she had been planning to use in her free time. Leaving her to her final toilet articles, I took the winding staircase down to the lobby, making sure I was watching my step ("Keep your eyes ahead of your feet," one of my friends had warned me about walking in Europe). At the desk, the rather glamorous attendant, whom I knew to be Italian-American—looked as if she was expecting me. "You have another message," Francesca said, and handed me a note. It was from Markus. I was to call at once, no matter what the time. She pointed me to a little booth in back of her where I could dial out.

"It's five a.m. here," he told me. "I've had a dark night of the soul. I can't sleep. Haven't been able to since you left. I just can't make it alone."

So this was how I was going to lose Giverny. Not through Allison but through my own set-up back in Carleton Park.

"Did you eat yesterday?"

"No."

"Did you go over to the Williams' and have a chat?"

"No."

"Did you get to an A.A. Meeting?"

"No."

"Did you call Dr. Robbins?"

"No."

"Then try those, and remember, nobody cares whether you

sleep or not.”

I came out of the booth, and made arrangements with Francesca about Allison’s van, and then helped bring her luggage down to the lobby since the bellman was out with someone else. When I told Allison about my phone call with Markus, she just stood there in her travel dress, and shook her head in chastising disbelief. “I don’t understand why you aren’t getting on this van with me.”

Then she handed me a sheath of sketches she had been saving. “These are from Mother’s treasure trove. From when she came here. With Aunt Greta.”

*

The next morning, we had some wonderful preludes to Giverny. The Musee Rodin Paris—we were in a courtyard with the coal-black Le Penseur brooding down on us, in all his beautiful black nakedness from high upon a block between deep green cone-shaped trees, and then all the multi-colored roses in the background. Next, the white swirl of the The Lovers up on the second floor. We were to have a special look at some of the paintings that were in his house. Then we were being bussed to Montmartre to see the street where Vincent Van Gogh had lived with Theo, a street that slanted upward passing the large four-story white, shuttered, and window-boxed building, 54 Rue Lepic, and there, during those two years that Vincent had resided there, his paintings had changed to their new mode.

I stood on that street corner, listening to the guide, and delighted that he was occupied and could not call back to the hotel, as he did yesterday, to see if there were any messages pending.

Charles, my assigned “buddy,” who looked somewhat like my son before his depression, came up beside me, took my hand and said, “Imagine that. Vincent.”

I didn’t try to take my hand back. I was thinking of Markus, how he had been a distinguished archaeologist once, had been featured in New York Times Magazine, fifteen years ago, as one of the up and coming young people in the country. There he was in print, before the public eye, tanned in his singlet and floppy hat, sitting against a major boulder in a dig and looking over a map, his wide, muscular neck bent and intent—such a sense of direction! And then later such a surprise—he was quitting his position at the university and becoming a tour guide in all parts of Europe, while spending very little time at home. The blow came when, in coming back to Carleton Park, he visited at the house and told me he was gay and that he had been having affairs throughout the U.S., and now he had just gotten his HIV test results downtown, anonymously that very afternoon. He had to do it here, so that his wife would never find out. Thankfully, the results were negative.

“You’ve been making her vulnerable,” I said with anger. “You didn’t know how those results would turn out.”

I let go of Charles’ hand, even though I wanted to ask him, as he returned to his smiling wife, who was as beautiful as Yvonne de Carlo, how his parents had gotten him launched. After that AIDS talk, Markus’ and mine, he went downward in a spin, lost his job as a guide, and then his wife filed for divorce and won custody of their son. Confused and distracted, he ended up investing in a disastrous medical supply business, with dubious connections to dubiously prescribed medications. He was

soon hooked on them himself, and then in another spin. Treatment and then a depression ward soon followed.

As we descended the steps out of Montmartre—very long ones, and slippery, because of an incoming light rain—I felt the residual fatigue of all those drives up to Seattle, cajoling Markus to get better.

But as we boarded the second Metro to meet our bus that would take us to Giverny, Adrian our guide came up to me with another slip of paper. “You’re to call home,” he said. “Do you want us to wait while we find you a pay phone? It’s a little complicated calling the States that way, but I can help you.”

“No,” I said. “Don’t delay the group, You’ll miss the time we will be allowed in.” (He had been adamant about everyone showing up for the bus at “take off,” because of this. We wouldn’t get a second chance because of the popularity of Giverny.)

“Then you’ll take the other Metro back to the hotel so you can call there?”

“No,” I told him. “I’m going with you.”

On the way to Giverny, the sky cleared and the weather smiled on us, the way it had when I had left Markus on Thursday. Soon I could see the lovely rivers of the Seine and eventually the Epte, and as we wound through all the necessary back roads of that countryside in Normandy, I said to myself, Oh, this is it, and then stepped out of the bus and saw the country house and the multi-tiered garden. It was one set of roses after another, with one striking climber being the color of a

sunset. And then the regimented rows of flag iris, rising, blue and striped yellow. Purple clematis hung clustering and a virtual quilt of crowded nasturtiums, red and yellow, led up to the country house door. Shasta daisies broke out of nowhere, above a take-over of purple cosmos with gauzy leaves. It truly was a playground.

We then had to go through security but they allowed me to keep my portable watercolor set in my purse. The heavy-weight but friendly male guard, however, smiled and said, in a thick accent, "But mind you do not hold tour up by setting up some easel."

"No, no," I answered. "C'est si bon. Where would my easel come from anyway?"

Adrian was still looking at me skeptically, as the mother who had refused to return the call from her son.

I followed them out of the garden and around the perimeter of the lily pond. We went over the little green bridge. At a turn in the path, I looked out over the water, with willows (viridian glowing) and wisteria (permanent violet) hanging over. The lilies were clustering circles of smaller circles, green-padded, and with magenta rose and white stripes resting lazily beneath all the commotion above them. I stopped and took out my three and a half by five sketch pad and my portable colors. Our guide was going on and on about Monet's cataracts in his later life and how they bedeviled them but how, eventually, he saw his way out through surgery and glasses. I caught the lilies quickly on the sketch pad—white, "rose madder stripe" and the green beneath them—also the wisteria and willows. My own tears were starting

up. The tour was leaving me behind now,

I looked at the work I had done, the moment we made the full circuit of the pond and returned to the estate and the magnificent garden in tiers.

In the gift shop, I bought a print, Monet. *Nymphéas, Paysage D'eau: Waterlilies*. And on the back I wrote, "A mon fils, avec mon amour, tu mere, 17 juin, 1990." For Allison, I got a calendar, Monet's Gardens at Giverny. And then seeds for Markus' garden, when he returned to his wife or got his own home or simply stayed in his apartment with pots on his window sill—Chrysanteme des Moissons, Bluet, Rose Tremiere, and Capucine. For the Rose Tremiere, the instructions read, "Semez les graines d'avril a juin, en pleine terre ou en pot. Recouvrez d'une fine pellicule de terre. Arrosez e laissez faire la nature, Elles fleurissent au soleil tou lete ave peu de soins." "Sow the seed from April to June, in the open ground or in a pot. Water and let the nature do its job. They flower in the sun, all summer long and they don't require any cares."

When I got off the bus at the hotel, and we all accounted for one another, Charles came up and had his wife take our picture together. I was delighted when he asked for my address so he could send me a copy. I had the nerve then to show him my sketch.

"You did that while we were there?" he asked.

I nodded.

"My God, do you have talent! I'll have to try that on my own, too."

"See that you do," I said, smiling, and then went in search of a phone booth and returned Markus's call at last.

"I was going to do away with myself," he said. "In the middle of the night. But you wouldn't call back."

"I'm sorry," I said. "But you'll just have to wait until I get home. And then when I do, I have some seeds I want you to plant."

"What are you talking about?"

"If I were you, I'd just be too busy for suicide."

He waited on the line.

After an expensive pause, I asked, "Did you try any of the things I asked about?"

"Not yet."

"Do them, and I'll be home in a week."

That night, with the room to myself, I pushed the two beds together and spread out, even though I had a crack below me at the center. I took up the biography of Monet I had bought at the gift shop along with the things for Allison and Markus. I read about how on first seeing the colored water lilies at the Exposition Universelle in 1889, Monet had become obsessed. It was the first time yellow, pink, fuchsia and deep red had appeared in lilies on European waters. It was because Joseph Bory Latou-Marliac had dared to hybridize the stolid white with the colored lilies from the Gulf of Mexico. I put the book aside, turned out the light, and soon dreamed of the new world of color Monet had drifted into.

Flowers in My Hair

SUSANA H CASE

City of fog and dazzling hills,
city where Screw
is sold from a vending machine,

smutty tattooed lady on the cover.
A narrow, twisty cliff road, rainbow
painted on the tunnel to Marin County.

Get high on the groovy bridge.
Get high on groovy Alcatraz.
The friend I arrived with is drunk again.

Black Panthers collect signatures for the ballot.
White Panthers collect memberships
for the co-op, Food Conspiracy.

Burn-outs call out, Hey mama.
Jugglers toss colorful rings and balls.
A worship trip to a shrine,

the bookshop City Lights.
I just had to get out of Portland, Oregon,
painted outside the café across the alley.

In front of Golden Gate Park, a wino
spits in my face.
I head home to shower.

I'm young. I'm smokin'.
I've stopped drinking, but I'm stoned again.
The flowers in my hair are wilting.

I Took A Photo Of My Mother Putting
Flowers On Her Mother's Grave In January 2015
(At Least I Think It Was 2015)

LINDZ McLEOD

Picture it;
the scene is bleached. Detergent
edges between the living and the dead,
cotton-fresh duvets over beautied bones.
She kneels, her back to me. Blonde hair spilling
over the collar of a padded scarlet jacket. The colour
is shocking against the snow.
She looks like a fairytale. I recall the sky
was flurryng, that day—
holding back the tears,
the tenderest kiss of flakes. Flowers laid bright,
I study the name engraved over and over. Glean what I can
from only one sentence. Ancient tongue
beyond my ken.
My mother stands, she turns; my name
bubbles from her guts. Genetic inklings,
although that tear-stained liver took them all
by surprise. The wind picked up.
A minor tornado of ice and fluff pushes us towards
each other, when otherwise we would have kept our distance.

At this point in life, her heart is more with
the body below than with me. I don't resent it.
I give her my arm. I can't be
jealous of the dead.
We struggle back to the car, snow-blind.
She canters, I trot.
I slam my door. She sits, facing forward,
with both hands on the wheel.
The engine idles, as I do.

Blue Earth Country

ZACH MURPHY

In Blue Earth County, the winters are bitter, but the summers that yield bad crops are even harder to reconcile with.

Mary Anne has the broadest shoulders in all of Southern Minnesota. She wakes up and begins work before dawn even has a chance to introduce itself to the sky. After feeding the chickens, milking the cows, and making sure the tractors are ready to go for the day, she comes back with enough time to make breakfast for her son Rudy.

There's still some sticky spots of raspberry jam on the white kitchen cupboards leftover from the same day that Mary Anne's husband Don got swept away in the big tornado. Don leaving jam on the cupboards when having his morning toast was always her biggest pet peeve. Now she just wishes he was here to do it again.

Rudy rushes down the creaky stairs, rubbing the morning out of his eyes. "Hi mom," he says.

Mary Anne sets a frying pan on the stove. "Hey sleepy."

"I want chocolate for breakfast," Rudy says.

"Eggs it is," Mary Anne says.

After scarfing down his eggs, Rudy washes his plate in the sink and attempts to wipe off the jam spots from the cupboard with a wet rag.

“Wait,” Mary Anne says. “I’ll take care of that.”

“I can do it,” says Rudy.

“You need to get ready for school,” Mary Anne says. “I’m not letting you miss the bus again.”

“Fine,” Rudy says as he darts up stairs.

Mary Anne and Rudy stroll down the long dirt road toward the bus stop. At the end sits a rusty mailbox where good news doesn’t usually arrive.

Mary Anne kisses Rudy on the cheek. “No spitballs or fights today,” Mary Anne says.

“Mom?” Rudy asks. “When are you going to clean the kitchen cupboards?”

“I’ll clean them whenever my work is done,” she says

Ganges

SUSANA H CASE

Wrapped in white, the dead
are brought here—instant salvation.
Babies are tied to stones,
thrown into the middle
of the river, where the current is strongest.
Pyres on the scarred ghats burn
all day, all night, hiss and steam.
If there is money, sandalwood,
mango wood, or dung-cake fires
are plentiful.
If not, there's partial cremation,
while the very poor float away.

On the day a tourist aims his camera,
a child shouts.
A screaming crowd mobs the man,
and the police drag him away.
Vultures eye the dead
as if birds too must be bribed,
as if each shrouded corpse
should be picked clean.

Ghosts in Our Lives

LENORE WEISS

Down a driveway of cement cobblestones, I talked to her about ghosts. Cam was my height, which means short, black hair gathered in a ponytail, silver and grey on top bordered by red and blue streaks. She was Asian, maybe Vietnamese, renting a basement room, which at various times had served as my son and daughter's living space. On this particular day, I'd pulled up to the house where I'd lived with my husband for twenty-five years, the same house where he had died, the same house where I'd raised my children, where we'd eaten meals at the kitchen table and stepped on the porch at night to gaze at stars. I was feeling nostalgic. I slowed down at the curb of my old house about twenty minutes from where I currently lived, wanted to catch a glimpse of the backyard where for years I had waged a battle with ferocious weeds, had transformed patches of Bermuda grass into stays of Pacific Coast Iris, a wisteria vine, an herb and vegetable plot, daffodils in the spring.

Bay Laurel trees in my new neighborhood were beginning to tease the air with spikey leaves; it wasn't yet quite spring. I wondered if the apple tree I had planted in our backyard was still there. I wondered if I'd see any daffodils with two-tone cream cups. I'd recently returned to the Bay Area following an almost three-year sojourn in the South. I think my unplanned visit was part of a reintegration, reacquainting myself with the path I'd traveled in the hope of creating a

new one.

She said it was okay for me to look at the garden even though Lester, the man whom I'd sold the house to, wasn't at home. I only wanted to look at the garden, I said to her, not go inside the house, and while I was standing there, recognized the rosemary bush I'd planted, remembered walking down to the backyard with a scissors to snip a bunch for dinner preparation. I saw a crowd of agapanthus, Lily of the Nile. The original plants were small pots I'd originally brought back from a Lake Merritt Garden show, purplish-blue and white blossoms. She nodded and said it was okay and opened the gate.

I stepped inside. There was a gazebo just beyond the backyard stairs, a raised bed filled with kale, collards, and lettuce (this may have been Lester's winter garden), succulents with thickly padded leaves, a clipped grapevine that twined around the back stairs (possibly the one I had planted in another section of the garden), an area with roses, fuchsias, jasmine, a brick walk-way possibly built with the ones we had left in a pile following the 1989 San Francisco earthquake, a pergola near the back fence, actually a stone wall that my kids and their friends had decorated with drawings. I recognized my Pacific Coast Iris in the same spot where I'd planted them. But I realized this garden was not mine. I recognized another hand at work. Still, Lester had used the plants I'd left behind, and in that way, my design had flowed into the garden. I clicked pictures with my cellphone and stepped

back outside through the gate.

Cam allowed a moment for me to ferry my thoughts from past to present. Before I could walk up the driveway to my car, she stopped me. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"How long did you live here?" She held a small notebook and a pencil in one hand. She seemed like she was about to take notes. For a moment, I thought that she might be documenting the residents who'd lived here. But for what reason? Maybe for a class? She held a pencil nervously, pulled out a small pad with a black cover.

Cam's gaze turned downward toward the cement driveway. "Have you ever seen ghosts in the house?"

My mouth dropped. Never had I expected her to say those words. People don't begin conversations with questions about ghosts, unless that is, they know what they're talking about.

"Yes," I said, feeling an immediate kinship with a woman who was standing in front of me on the cement pavement at the bottom of the driveway of my old house where I had raised my children and where she now lived. "When we first moved here," I explained, "for the first three years or so, the house had a bad feeling. Something foul. There was an ooze, something ancient that didn't care for our intrusion. My hus-

band used to hear chains rattling at night in the basement. But I wasn't sure if I believed him. He used to dress up as Richard III for Halloween and recited Shakespeare on the front porch standing before the spider webs we wove around the banister. My son said he saw the ghost, a heavy presence like a water balloon about to burst its skin. All I know is that I had a feeling of discomfort. I'd always look around before I placed my foot on the last step to the basement." She seemed relieved, nodded for me to continue. "But after a while, the ghost went away. We were happy for a time living in this house, raising our children. Maybe that made the ghost happy."

Cam had stirred up twenty-five years inside me. I thought the ghost must be Woody or Forest, husband of the widow from whom we had originally bought the Oakland house for \$65,000, outrageous in today's marketplace. Some said that Woody had committed suicide, died in the bathtub; neighbors revealed the story more than six months after we had lived there. "He was an alcoholic," said some. "Killed in a car crash," reported others. His wife, Jane, as I recall, taught at the University of California at Berkeley, or maybe it was the other way around; her house was filled with artwork, vibrant colors, paintings with a Mazatlan sensibility; outside she grew cactus. Living there, I came to believe that there was something clinging to the foundation. But after I had

replaced the green Kenmore that never worked well with an antique Wedgewood, and also listened to a dream where my mother instructed me to hang my family's photos in the kitchen, the creepiness disappeared.

"I don't think the ghost was your husband. He bounced up and down on my bed and pulled back the covers. He scared me. That's why I put Buddhas all around the window-sill."

She pointed to the bronze and wooden statuettes. The fact that she didn't think the ghost was my husband, interested me while at the same time, I was happy he wasn't messing with her mind. His own mind had occupied a world of special relationships, mathematical probabilities especially about chess, an analytical cast inherited from his royal Russian forebears as well as the winter snow blowing across the taiga, a cutting sarcasm. But the fact that Woody was still rattling around in the basement saddened me. I was sorry he had been unable to find peace. Or maybe the ghost wasn't one particular individual, but a collective history putrefying in a basement divided into a catacomb of dirt cells. We'd covered the largest section of the floor with cement. Smaller areas were repurposed into a writing room, an area used for my son's hobbies, a storage area that on occasion became a Haunted House, and the rest, a place for lazy cats to do their business.

After my husband had died of congestive heart failure, I sold the house, moved away, and raised my daughter. I met Jenning years later through a dating service. I wasn't ex-

pecting a great romance. But when I met him at the movie theater, he hugged me warmly. It felt easy and natural. He was a self-described “boy from the South,” new to the area and wanting to be introduced to the sights and sounds of San Francisco. I was a single mom proofreading essays for my daughter’s college applications. We watched Spiderman 3, touted by critics as one of the best in the series with great special effects. When the evening was over, he opened my car door and closed it softly. For our second date, we went to a pinball arcade. I watched him work the flippers, his moves. And as we got to know each other, I looked forward to his phone calls, our dates in the car driving anywhere, listening to music, laughter, eating at our favorite pizza joint, taking walks along Leona Canyon, being together in bed. But after seven years, our relationship had fallen apart.

I’d left Louisiana in the early morning. It was still dark. My boxes were packed along the back wall of the garage waiting for a trucking company to pick them up at a later time. It rained all the way through Texas. I stopped for breakfast in Canton outside of Dallas at a restaurant that was half “World Famous Hamburgers” serving beef, duck and elk burgers, and half a “World Famous Dairy Palace” serving 32 flavors of hand-dipped ice cream. I was glad they also served breakfast and poured coffee. Both were excellent. At the cash register they gave out emery boards imprinted with the restaurant’s name. Plastic poinsettias were stuck inside boxes of plastic philodendrons. I’d been driving for hours and sat in a red-padded booth. Seating areas were packed close. In front of me sat a man and a woman; the woman faced me, her hair

carefully coiffed. She looked to be all about business. "What do you do on the weekend? What kind of chores do you do?"

The man answered without hesitation. He was prepared. "Oh, I like to relax, not do much. Sit around and listen to music. Putter. Fix things. Sunday I go shopping, laundry. Things like that. Like to pour myself a beer. I watch football, but I'm not an addict."

Satisfied, she volleyed with, "Are you a thrower? Are you jealous?" He discussed his relationship style, no, he preferred to talk things out rather than hurl plates through the air, "I'm a communicator," and while he was capable of jealousy and hated to see someone he had loved go out with another man, he tried not to be a total asshole. They both seemed satisfied. From there, the conversation drifted to real estate and politics. At first I thought this woman was a real loser; I'd never heard of anyone interviewing a prospective lover about relationship style. But after I thought about it, her approach made perfect sense. Maybe they were considering moving in together. Maybe she wanted to know what to expect. He didn't ask her any questions. At least not right then.

Throughout my marriage, I felt that my husband had been emotionally unavailable. Jennings also was unavailable, but in a different way; he worked anywhere from five to six days a week in a city hours from where we lived, leaving me rootless in the South. During the week he slept on a friend's couch, driving back on weekends. I couldn't build a life based on absence. There were other issues. . .

I drove in my Camry along Highway 20 stopping to sleep in Abilene, Texas on to Las Cruces, New Mexico to Tucson, Arizona where I stayed with cousins and hiked. I told my story to the sentinels of the desert, the saguaro cactus, before catching Highway 5 to Los Angeles and then to the Bay Area. I tried to understand why as an older woman I still found myself involved with unavailable men.

I never wanted to acknowledge a certain ghost, the memory of a boy who took my virginity without love, feeling, or even excitement, just a brutal savage embarrassment. It had been a fundraiser for a political group at Manhattan's upper west side, an art show. We had volunteered to sleep overnight and ensure that none of the paintings were stolen. I became aware of his presence on the floor below, heard him slowly, deliberately climb upstairs. Afterward, he looked through me, would not talk to me, turned his head away, my first experience with intimacy. Many years later when rape became openly discussed, I considered that I had been a rape victim. On some level, it felt like rape. Something had been taken away from me, something I tried to get back.

Intimacy with the important men in my life always has been preceded by difficult circumstances: as a young woman, my first husband and I had been married in a hospital a few months before my father died of cancer; the father of my children had a mental breakdown when we first started to date, ambulances screaming up and down the street, and Jen-

ning, who fell out of a tree and smashed his entire left side bringing me running to Louisiana, our life together different than the planned honeymoon trip across the country. Maybe all along I just needed to acknowledge my ghosts, to know that intimacy was not the same thing as pain.

I asked Cam about the neighborhood, asked if there was much drug dealing going on in the neighborhood. Back in our day, there was a crack house across the street presided over by the Hawkins family. Lou had worked for the school district doing food prep in the cafeteria. She had eleven children. One of the boys had committed suicide in the house. Others bounced between the street and prison. Daughters went homeless, sometimes in shelters, sometimes back to their husbands. Every Sunday Frank, their father, went to the horse races at Golden Gate Fields dressed in a green vest and a cap pulled over his close-clipped hair. Lou eventually lost her leg to diabetes and would sit on the top front step in a wheelchair. Once they caught a possum that was scrambling around in our basement, cooked it for dinner and brought us over a plate. I heard that the Hawkins family had eventually moved to Las Vegas where their cousin Evander Holyfield lived, a World Champion boxer in two divisions.

“The neighborhood is quiet,” Cam said.

We almost shook hands, but had established an intimacy in less than an hour that went far beyond a handshake. I had helped to validate something about her experience, and she had helped me to take a step forward. We hugged. I smiled.

Her hair was red, white, and blue like a rock star's.

"Can I ask you something?" I said.

"Sure."

"Why were you so sure that the ghost was not my husband?"

"I asked if he had children."

"Just like that?"

"I thought if he had children, he wouldn't want to hurt me."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing."

We hugged. I walked up the driveway to my car.



Atilt

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

The Door

STRIDER MARCUS JONES

the door
between skyfloor
topbottom

is rankrotten

portalbliss
or abjectabyss.

it contains conversations
confrontations,
hiding loves two-ings
in lost ruins-

shuts us inside our self
with or without someone else.

we,
the un-free,
disenfranchised poor
have no bowl of more-
only pain
on the same plain
as before,

homeless
or in shapeless boxes,
worked out, hunted, like urban foxes-
outlaws on common lands
stolen from empty hands.

files on us found
from gathering sound
where mutations abound
put troops on the ground.

Giallo

SUSANA H CASE

Italian term for a crime/detective novel or film, originally a cheap paperback with a yellow cover.

The floors of the drug king's villa
are Roman mosaic.

He knows to avoid his own product.

I don't need a psychiatrist, I just need a whore,
the king bays at a prostitute.
He's like a hound.

The cop wants revenge; his wife is dead,
run over by narcotraffickers.

Guys who read books are dinosaurs,
says one boy. He wants to be a pezzo grosso
(big shot), steals money,
to fund his drug enterprise, and a car.

How much is 300 kilos of cocaine? A big haul,
it's more than one person can carry.

ARDGADG

There's always someone who looks to escape,

after one last score, from working for the drug king
We know what happens then—bullets, not Bali.

The only certainties are sex, death, and tattoos.

Before a big night, it's smart to clean your gun.
Notice how the camera makes love to the metal.

In a giallo, everything's done for la bella figura.
All the black leather jackets are soft, fit perfectly.

Of course, it's all a macho act.
When riding his moto,
even the biggest murderer wears a helmet.
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are Roman mosaic.

He knows to avoid his own product.

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First Born

AIDA BODE

I was squeezing my mother in law's arm as I walked trying to catch her fast steps. Time after time I would hold my big pregnant belly and ask her to stop, so that I could breathe. My knees were shaking and I felt my face get white from pain.

"Come on, we'll be in the hospital in no time." She spoke without turning her head.

"I wish Roland was here." – I responded and my voice got stuck in my throat.

"Men don't come in the hospital to see a woman in labor. Roland will come when the baby is in your arms." – she said with an almost culpatory tone.

I never understood the meaning of this tradition. Why was it that the child's father shouldn't be near me while I labored? Anger started to rise within me affecting my sensitivity to the pain, which had just gotten easier. I started to fasten my steps and noticed that my mother in law was behind. I walked a few more steps and felt the pain start again. Less than a minute and all that strength, from that sudden anger, was fading away. I stopped and watched as my mother in law approached breathing deeply.

It felt as if the entire town was gray, the streets and everything on them, the shops, the little parks on the sides of the streets where old men played cards, the people in bars, some that hurried, or that tried to look like they were... everything and everybody remained behind this senseless gray setting. All that was left was this old woman in a black dress, wearing washed

out stalking, her feet almost touching the ground through her plastic slippers, which were worn out on the edges from walking the cobblestone streets. She had on scratched glasses, and kept a gray shawl around her shoulders, which she had made and brought with her as part of her dowry – over thirty years ago. She hid wisdom in every wrinkle, that wisdom of unfair years that she had lived as a girl, woman and mother. Now she was with me, almost running to become a grandmother for the first time. She didn't seem to feel tired, even though she was carrying a big bag with sheets, two nightgowns, some dry foods and two pillows. The reason for her packed items was pretty simple. The hospital staff had advised that we take all these from home and prepare not only clothes for the baby, but also these basic means for the stay in the hospital. Many women had gotten sick with some serious infections due to the very poor hygienic conditions, and their misfortune had served as a lesson for all those who came after them. These thoughts made me feel my labor pains even stronger and fear started to get a hold of me.

“It must be a girl. They have this kind of labor” – said my mother in law without hiding the joy of this foresight. She wanted a granddaughter more than anything else.

“If we only found someone to drive us there! Mother, I can't walk anymore.” I wanted to lean somewhere, but the air was too thin and nothing else was nearby.

“Ha, do you think you are the Secretary's daughter? Come, my blessed. Get yourself together. We're almost there.” She said laughing and took me by the arm pulling me forward.

It was as if we were walking in a black and white movie after all credits were given and the only thing left was the dark screen and the noise of invisible steps in a cold street.

“What are you waiting for? Come up the stairs.” She urged.

I had stopped unknowingly. I was in pain again. I lifted my eyes and noticed the hospital stairs, chipped by time and carelessness. Some wrinkled papers scratched the dust that lay in the corner of the steps, and it seemed as if they were writing encrypted messages. What was it? Were they wishing me well? I moved one leg and reached for the rail which was scratched in places, and slightly rusted in others. It was solid, although a bit shaky, but strong enough to help me move up the stairs, while not relying too heavily on my mother in law.

“I thought you were strong, my daughter, but it seems you are acting like a spoiled child.” She said in a comforting tone, although her words held rebuke.

I didn't answer. There was so much going on in my head already, so many questions and none of them seeking an answer. Everything was focused on that dust that kept rising from the dirty concrete and the faint view of the hospital that looked as a ghost coming out of the town's chest. The siding of the wall was chipped all over, the door - perhaps a glass door before, now was draped with plastic, and the white frame was dirty with hand-prints that had opened and closed the door, most probably with the panic to get out of that place as soon as possible. The door kept screeching as if it was dying. I got scared. What was this place I was entering? Where would my child be born?

My mother in law pushed the door and a heavy smell of blood awakened all my senses. The nurses seemed like yellow shadows that walked around without any purpose. One of them said something to my mother in law and then guided us in a long

corridor. Our steps continued their noise and the gray continued to keep everything under its veil. Many rooms had their doors wide open and I could see through the gray women laying down and groaning. We entered in a room which seemed painted in light gray. I thought it was a fantasy of my eyes from exhaustion and pain, but no, the room was indeed light gray. It looked as if all women there had agreed to wear white robes and bring with them white sheets. What a contrast those sheets made with the stained frames of the beds. The women were all moaning in a forlorn harmony. Beige heaters were spaced out on the sides of the walls, cold and dirty. As I stood leaning on the edge of the door, I was searching with my eyes for the bed where I would lay. The nurse showed my mother in law a bed where another woman was laying. Her sheets covered only half of the single bed and my mother in law started to prepare the other half for me with the sheets she had carried along the way. I felt my body get weaker and my legs losing their strength. The nurse turned toward me, caught me by the arm and helped me walk to my bed. My mother in law had prepared the pillows for me and both women helped me change in the clothes I was to keep in the hospital. I had so much pain I couldn't react to any of their bickering. I couldn't oppose them trying to help me in this dirty reality, neither could I fight what was going on in my head and was making my stomach even sicker than the labor pains. "Cows have better conditions than these!"- started to echo in my mind and dispel my impossibility to cry, scream, refuse this place where a fragment of my future, a piece of my flesh, a drop of my blood was about to be born. I lied down and became one with the white chorus of women that were about to give birth in this

building that seemed like a story cemetery where lives came to realize their end. Song of giving birth was more sorrowful than the wailing of old women at the graves in the suburbs of the city.

“Oh, oh...” I sighed and closed my eyes tightly to squeeze the tears.

I felt my back shake. For a moment I thought it was my pain. I got up and stayed sitting on the side of the bed.

“What’s your name?”

“Donika.” – she responded her, voice breaking. “You?”

For a moment I felt nameless. I was just a woman forgotten in an old bed with borrowed sheets in a hospital.

“Milika.” I answered. “Have you been here for some time?”

“Since yesterday afternoon. The doctors keep checking me and they tell me things they don’t even know... Hm, Milika, that’s my mother in law’s name. So if I give birth to a girl, that’s what her name will be, and if we have a boy, we’ll name him Emil.”

I didn’t speak. I was afraid to ask her anything, but she kept on talking.

“What hell of a thing is this? To give birth without anyone close by... cows have better care than this...”

“Cows” I thought “She is jealous of them, just like I am”. For some reason, images of barns and cow stalls started to blend in my mind with images of many foreign movies I had seen which showed how husbands stayed with their wives during labor expecting the birth of their child together. How many times had I told myself that my childbirth would be the same, in a little room filled with bouquets of flowers, my husband near me, en-

couraging me while a small TV aired shows that helped me think my pain away. But now, the only thing that would take my mind off of pain was the fear of this room that sucked the moaning of the women like a sinkhole.

“You don’t have any more pain?” – Donika asked me.

“Yes, I do, but I forget, I’m frozen... and feel wet.” – I said hesitantly.

“You should say that you’re lucky, that’s what you should say. Your water broke.”

“What now?” I asked as my voice shivered.

“Now scream with as much voice you have left so that any one of those yellow ghosts can hear you. They float disoriented while we groan as if we’re dying and not giving birth.

Ha, yellow ghosts! So it’s not my fantasy - I thought.

“Do you know the name for the nurse of this room?”

“Her name is Tefta.”

I called her as loud as I could and then waited. I don’t know how long that was, but I realized that ghosts come late. She came and inquired indifferently of my condition.

“I’m wet.”

“Let me call the doctor.”

Another interval. That’s how childbirth is. Waiting is longer than the pain. When I contracted time went by so fast. I felt happy as if everything would be over and done with, and I’d be out of this horrid place.

“You’re almost there.” The doctor asserted after he checked me. “When you came you were only 4 cm, but now you’re close

to 8.5. You should have called us earlier.”

I was stunned, while Donika interrupted saying

“Didn’t I tell you that you’re lucky?”

“We’ll check you again in half an hour, but if you feel something different, call. You’re almost there and shouldn’t worry.”

“Donika, how are you.” – he turned to the woman next to me and without giving her a chance to respond asked her to lay in a way that he could check her.

“We’ll have to go to surgery, Donika. I’ll notify your family so that they can come. The nurse will take you in the surgery room. We can’t wait anymore.”

The women in the room continued their groaning, some jealous of my good fortune, and some sad for Donika’s bad luck. Her back was still close to mine, but her voice had gotten silent. The choir of sighs was now out of tune. The nurse helped Donika off her bed and placed the sheets on the portable bed that would take her to the surgery room. For a moment I felt as if I lost the balance on the bed and I was going to fall. She realized my imbalance and started to laugh while crunching pain in her teeth. Her laughter sounded like a drop of water on an old tin roof. Nothing had value in that room other than the miserable song of women’s choir in agony. She left the room taking her laughter away and I remained alone in this half made bed. Other women would lay there, they’d be in labor, they’d join in the choir and yellow ghostly nurses would take care of them.

“Oh, oh...” and more tears were born of my eyes.

The nurse and the doctor came back and told me I was ready

to deliver the baby. They helped me get up and took me to the delivery couch. This room was gray, too. The light got in from a wide window with chipped sills. I could hear people walking on the street and their voices came through the window like annoying flies. The nurse opened the window and called to my mother in law.

“This is the window where we are”

I realized she was there and tried to make myself feel better. Once the nurse closed the window, the doctor turned to me and started to guide me and after a lot of counting, pushing, tears and efforts the child was born.

The doctor was holding the child and I was whispered out of my breath

“What is it?”

At that time, the nurse opened the window and I heard my mother in law call from below

“Tefta, what is it, what is it?”

“It’s a girl, it’s a girl!”

I felt disappearing in gray. This ghostly nurse took away the right of my own child’s news. My child, the child of my pain was declared to the tradition of windows and people outside. In this gray hospital, in this gray city, with a gray tradition, people are born to replace generations, to become ghosts of each other and ensure the blood line. Nothing was safe from gray. It was a gift from a long poverty of colors where life was just another form of death.

Recalculating

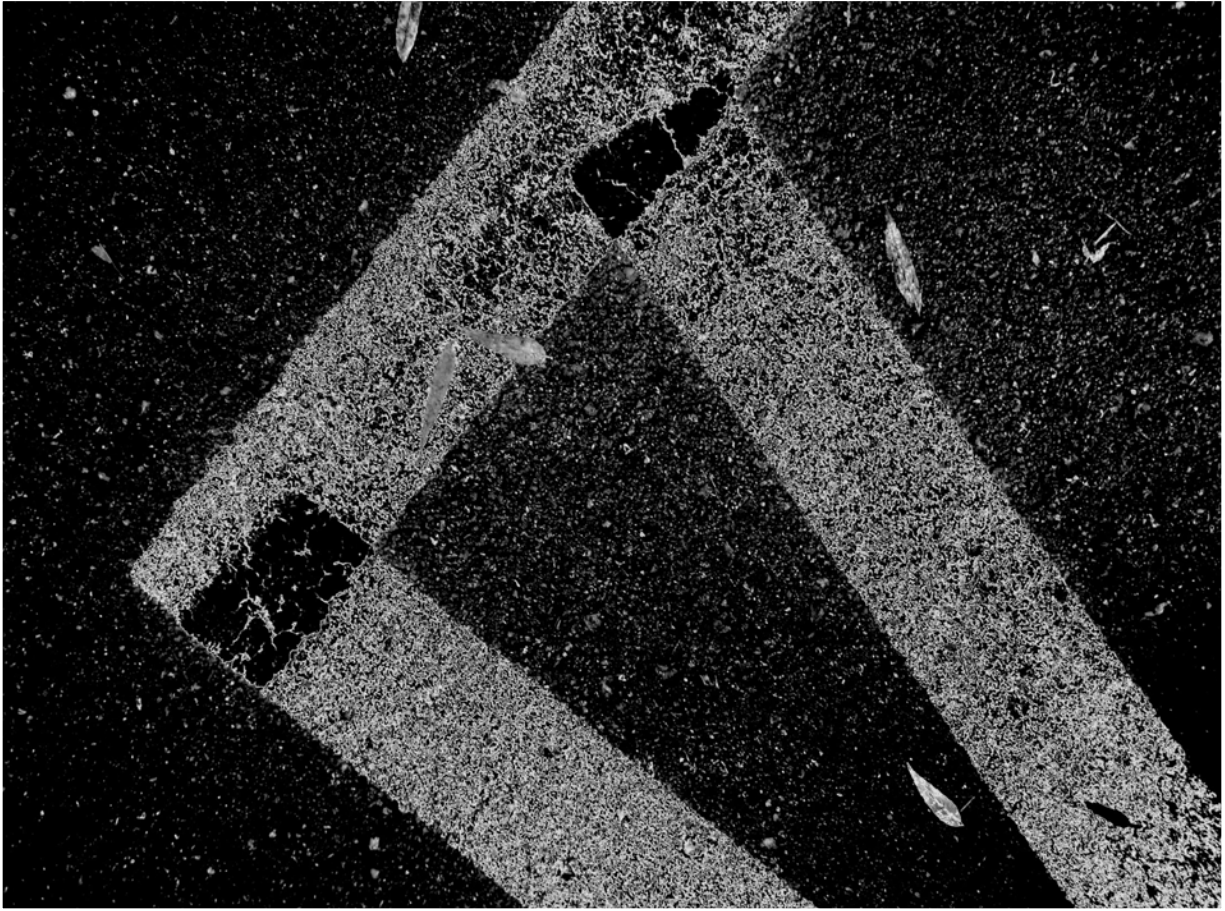
AMANDA ELLIS

In the absence of apparatus
I hear the footsteps of my ancestors.
Whispering moccasins echo,
Resonating along lushly overgrown trails

Will we remember what we have lost?

The return of stillness to nature,
Triumphant in the gap.
Greenery our only salvation
Until the diggers return.

Will the birds still sing so sweet?



Linedancesol
DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Worthy of Panties

EMALISA ROSE

i sent you the polished ones..those more
refined, those you can take home to mother,
the ones with the tees and the eyes crissed
crossed and sanitized.. properly dressed -
the ones i'd put on my panties for

words just for your eyes...sans the stencil
stamped duplicates that i've whored all
through the internet..with their skirts up,
trying to get a stint at the elite of the
poem journals...you'll get the prim and

and precise..the generic with the served up
sedation of ad nauseum cloud language..the
poster child musings of new fangled poets

but they'll get the thorns, luscious, lascivious
with a side of my spleen.

Metamorphosis of a Tradition

AIDA BODE

1)

It's Sunday
thirteen billion years ago
and today, too.

My grandmother
is all dressed up for status quo
and I am a haiku

Of visits
to the cemetery where weeds grow
burning dew

off the face of dawn
yet, my grandmother walks slow
and I have a clue

we have a few
more graves to weep over.

2)

I remember
she left the dictionary of hollow
in imaginary church pews

The cross
was broken; fallen from the elbow
of a sparrow that flew

far away
beyond the ruins of an old credo
on a curfew

My grandmother
holds my hand in the tight echo
of old tattoos

we're walking back
leaving the dead in an escrow.

3)
She doesn't
notice the remains of god
but I knew

I saw him
under the regret of a willow
scratching blue

from the
eyes of a sky that was shallow,
untrue

I held Grandma's
hand and kept my head down
finding the cue:

god's steps and a trace
of thirteen billion years of yellow.



Altar
JACOB MOSES

Post Storm and Pre-Mania

EMALISA ROSE

It morphs on the marquise of morning, the melee of midnight masquerades as the mist on the harbor. The high noon eclectic ricochets off of the overnight opulence, etching art to the still life. Sycamores miming the dead in this three penny opera. Their disfigured debris, a chaotic confetti reversing the wreckage from this place we've detached of, as we stumble towards sanctuary. Our poetry wearing our wings through the turbulence.

A Shadowed Sky

CATHERINE ALEXANDER

In a Venezuelan farmhouse made of stone and wood, Elena skips into the kitchen in a nightie sewn by her mother. The lace on the gown's collar and pocket all embroidered by Abuelita, her grandmother.

Black beans and rice on the wood stove in a country kitchen. The fridge runs when power does.

The big house and farm go back more generations than Abuelita can count. Now there is just one milk cow, Pepita. Tomatoes in the garden, chickens in coops. A mango tree near the barn.

Through the kitchen window, Elena spies pigeons on the portico railing. Later she might be allowed to throw out bits of arepa, corn flat bread.

"Mami and Papi working?"

"Manuel and Blanca are teaching in the village as usual," says her grandmother. "How about some breakfast? Here's an orange. Shall I slice it the way you love?"

"Yes please, Abuelita." Elena bites off the fruit from each slice. Abuelita takes the peelings and creates letters on the table: C-O-O. "See," she says, "these spell what the pigeons sing. Do you hear them?"

"I hear, I hear! Can I go and watch them on the portico?"

"Don't you want breakfast?"

“Not now, Abuelita. I want to see the pigeons first.”

“Okay, but no further than the portico. I’ll watch you from the window.”

Elena slips arepa bits into her nightie’s pocket and leaps out of her chair.

“Wait!” says Abuelita. “Give them these rinds, too.”

As soon as Elena opens the door, the pigeons scatter. “Wait birdies,” she cries, opening her palm to reveal arepa bits and orange rinds.

“Just be still,” Abuelita says. “They’ll be back.”

Elena stands like one of the soldiers she’s seen in the city square, looking at him from the bus window.

Soon a few birds strut down the railing, bobbing their heads. Elena lets treats drop from her hand. The rush of plumage begins. “That’s all,” says Elena, as she closes the door.

After her favorite breakfast of rice with butter and cream, Elena wears an embroidered blouse and gathered skirt while she plays on the floor. “Coo-coo,” she says to her dollies. “That’s what the pigeons sing.”

Abuelita says, “You know, Elena, pigeons are really doves.”

“Doves?”

“Yes, love birds. White doves are a symbol of peace and love.”

ARDGADG

Abuelita takes out her quartro, a small guitar with four

strings, and begins to play a love song.

“Does Mami love Papi?” asks Elena.

“Of course. That’s why they had you.”

Abuelita’s face has deep, intertwined lines, her flesh is growing loose, but her smile brings buoyancy to Elena. “What will we do today?” Elena asks.

“First I must milk Pepita,” says Abuelita. “You stay here.”

When she’s finished, Abuelita carries a half-bucket of milk, sets it on the portico, and enters the house.

“Now we can play if the rains hold off. It’s the stormy season,” she tells Elena. She hands her a cotton bag of seeds for the birds. They head to the garden to settle under the ficus.

Birds with orange breasts skitter close. “Elena,” says Abuelita. “Those are turpials, the birds of our country. Remember I told you?”

“Yes, Abuelita.” says Elena, as she throws seeds. Soon yellow-breasted orioles join the scramble.

“And see, mi querida, here comes a dusty white dove wanting his fill. Today we are graced. Let me play a folk tune about their cooing.”

Elena looks up. “But there’s a shadow in the sky.”

“That’s a cloud, Elena. A big one. Feel the wind. Dios mio! A storm is approaching.”

“But I want Mami and Papi to come home before it starts!”

ARDGADG

“You must rush inside, little one. I’ll put the cow in the

barn.”

Elena takes off to the farmhouse. She can barely close the door against the wind. Hailstones clatter on the old roof. Lightning flashes across the sky while trees crash the portico.

Elena runs to every window. “Abuelita! Abuelita!”

Electricity sparks; the house goes dark. Elena sobs, holding two dollies. “Abuelita!”

Finally, her grandmother crashes in the door, blown forward by the gale. She throws off her wet clothes and grabs Elena. “It will be all right, child; it will be all right. Let me start the fire and light the candles.”

“I’m scared,” screams Elena. “Mami and Papi will be washed away.”

“That won’t happen. They will be home soon. Don’t worry, little one.”

But Abuelita is worried. If the storm keeps up, the road from the village will flood. The only way home for her son and daughter-in-law is through the city, where armed guards attack protesters against the dictatorship. Billboard pictures of the president and his forces show what no villager wants to see.

Millions of people have fled the country because they have no food or supplies. No one dare complain to the government for fear of torture and death. Now with COVID, the situation has worsened. But the villagers, teachers and Abuelita know little of the pandemic.

ARDGADG “Elena, I’ll make you una taza de caliente, all right?” Abuelita coaxes a smile from her nieta.

But not for long. As soon as Elena finishes her hot chocolate, she begins to sob. "I'm scared! What if my parents drown in the flood?"

"Come here, mi presiosa. Let me brush your hair. We don't even know if there's a flood. Your parents could be home any moment. The road may not be washed out."

"I want to go and find them, now!"

"Elena, we must stay here and be safe. The wind would blow you away."

Elena runs in circles while the wind blows against the stone walls, and inside the room, bringing a loud whoosh. The youngster shrieks. Abuelita distracts her by strumming the quarto. Soon Elena twirls and sings off key.

"You have rhythm in your feet that's missing in your voice," laughs Abuelita.

Elena grabs her doll in a whirling frenzy around the room.

Abuelita barely keeps up plucking her quarto. "Slow down, little love, or you'll fall down. You are getting too excited. Settle! Now, my dear, it's time for a rest. Play in your room while I clean up a bit."

After checking the fire, Abuelita paces back and forth on the only rug in the house, now trampled flat. She worries that Manuel and Blanca will take the road that runs by the square. She wrings her hands. Pulls at her grey hair. She's heard that armed guards have rifles aimed at protesters and passersby. She'd been afraid since Manuel and Blanca began teaching in the village. But if it weren't for them, village children wouldn't

learn. Abuelita warned her son about dangers that floods present, leaving travelers no choice but the road to the city. And if the torrent continues, the old farmhouse could be in harm's way.

She hears Pepita mooing; she must have broken out of the barn. All Abuelita can do is pray that she will go back to safety. Winds are too strong for her to venture out.

∞

Putting the child to bed that night proves difficult. Elena tells her grandmother that guards with guns march on the square.

Abuelita's gaze widens. "How do you know that?"

"Mami and I went by on the old bus. I saw them."

"What? You saw them? When?"

"Christmas time."

"Ay Dios Mio!"

Hiding her fear, Abuelita helps Elena change into her nightie, slips the dolly in the child's arms. "You will be all right, mi querida, I am here with you."

Elena clasps her arms around her grandmother's neck. "Will my parents be home when I wake up in the morning?"

Abuelita whispers "God will make it so. She kisses the child and tucks her in.

∞

The night is long. Abuelita pulls out a bottle of rum from the cupboard, pours a glass half-full, and plops in her armchair with her rosary. After a while, she hears voices outside—

mutterings and the clamor of tumbling rocks. Portents of nature surrounding her farm, casting a spell. One refill of rum

causes her to drop the beads and enter dreams of serpents and bird-eating tarantulas. Before sunrise she wakens clearheaded. More voices, deep and calling. She wrestles on her coat, hat and boots, ready to venture outside. Or so she thinks. After several workouts, she's blown back by the wind. Once inside, she still hears voices. She must go meet the forces. Using all her power and more, she makes another attempt and shoves the door open.

She tromps through muddy ravines and rotting tree trunks, while branches jab her arms and hail needles her face. No stars to help her navigate. Torrents slam her like a giant wave. In the distance, the barn has been sliced in half by a tree. Poor Pepita, where is she? And the mango tree? Abuelita presses both hands to her chest, fighting fear and exertion. Her movements slow and deliberate. What if she falls and careens down a ravine?

Floundering in the dark, she notices expanding shadows. What are these? Mysterious creatures haunting her? But their shapes resemble people—her people.

Through the mist, Manuel and Blanca stumble down the road, flanked by two villagers. Manuel leans forward, cradling his hand. Blanca holds one of his arms, a villager another.

“Madre!”

Abuelita hears the voice of her only son. He breaks through the line to reach his mother. “Manuel, mi hijo. What happened?”

“Just need a bandage.”

“Let me see your hand.”

“Not now.”

“What happened?”

“Later,” says Manuel.

Abuelita stifles her tears, trembling inside. “Ay Dios mio. Let’s get you into the house and you can tell me more.”

Then she sees Elena race from the house in her nightie.

“Elena!” cries Abuelita. “What are you doing out here? You’ll get soaked and catch pneumonia!”

Blanca, drenched from the storm, dashes up to shield her daughter from the rainfall. Lifting her up, she says, “Here, my beautiful child, get under my coat.”

“Is Papi hurt?” asks little Elena.

“Not to worry, darling. We’ll fix his hand.”

Once in the house, they peel off their wet clothes, piece by piece. Watery mud and silt falls on the floor. Abuelita rushes to revive the fire from the coals. The Venezuelan sun is just rising. She hears her chickens chatter. The rain stops.

“Madre!” says her son. “Let me tend the fire. You sit.”

“Not until I see that hand.”

“I already rinsed it. One soldier knifed me, but it’s a clean cut and not bleeding. See?”

“I must wrap it properly.”

“Mami, we need to take care of the villagers first.”

“Of course, my son.”

Abuelita and Manuel dress the villagers’ cuts from knives and slashes from whips.

“Now my son, tell me everything”

“Okay, Mami. I’ll start from the beginning. We took the road to the city to check on you and Elena. Four fathers of our village students insisted on coming to protect us.”

“How could they protect you?”

“They said they would cover us. I didn’t think they could pull it off. But they did. Now two are missing.”

“Ay Dios. Did they get shot?”

“I pray not. There were thousands of protestors and security forces in the square. I didn’t know what was going on. Guards attacked with knives, whips, and rifles. And some National Guard vehicles ran into the crowd, killing anybody in their way.”

“They are murderers!”

“Not only that. Police on motorcycles fired tear gas into the crowd. We could hardly breathe. Where Blanca and I huddled, the fathers of our students kept fighting back, despite tear gas and rifle shots. We started running, yelling for the villagers to join us. But they wouldn’t. Finally, two caught up with us on the road home.”

“Gracias a Dios,” says his mother.

∞

In one bedroom, Blanca towels Elena’s hair, and dresses her in warm clothes. The child begs for una taza de caliente. “Coming up,” says Mami.

They all congregate around the table where Abuelita has set out the rice and beans. But no one seems to be hungry. Manuel, with his good hand, pokes in the cupboard for the rum bottle.

“Mami, you been nipping?”

“There’s another bottle behind it, son.”

Manuel laughs and brings both bottles to the table.

He addresses the wounded villagers. “I worry about the other two? Were they behind you?”

“For a while, but they disappeared. We pray for their fast return. May God hear our prayers.”

“Let’s pray,” says Manuel. Afterwards he lifts his glass. “Here’s to the fathers who protected us. We owe you our lives!”

“No!” says a villager. “You teachers saved our children. They can now leave our poor village because they know letters, numbers, and more—unlike their parents. You and teacher Blanca son heroés! The other teachers always left because of little pay and crime in our village.”

“You are too kind. Blanca and I are honored to be the village educators. May the blood on the road may someday be our leader’s! Now let’s rest for a while.”

Villagers sleep on the floor. The family scatters in other rooms. Abuelita hears her cow. She races to the window, but no Pepita. She slips out the door and heads for the barn, half of it still standing. Inside, the two missing villagers are huddled around the cow.

She runs to them and gives Pepita a hug.

“Why did you not come to the house, amigos?”

“Okay here.”

ARDGADG

“No! You are hurt.” She helps them up and on the path

home, past the standing mango tree. The cow plods along for a while, then turns back to what's left of the barn.

Pigeons and orange-breasted turpials follow, watching the scene unfold.

Abuelita and the villagers trudge into the old farmhouse. The family is up and called to action. She collapses in her armchair.

"Es la voluntad de Dios, it's the will of God," says Abuelita, dribbling tears. "You all have escaped the regime forces. My precious Pepita will give us milk. I hear my chickens squawking in their coops. Even the mango tree still stands."

Manuel leaps up. "And I will rebuild the barn!"

Elena skips into the room in her nightie, completes a perfect pirueta, and climbs in Grandmother's lap.

Abuelita smooths Elena's wispy brown hair. "How beautiful, my treasure. May you always be safe."

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Bosnian Lullaby

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Ears bleeding,
pricked
by the reverberation of tanks firing,
cultivating virulent weeds
among children's somersaults.

Blighted,
high pitched voices
enunciate imprecise screaming,
nocturnal serenades
between mortar rounds
between sniper shots.

Death drains
from fathers' souls
what no I-V can restore.
Death crushes hearts that pound
almost inaudibly,
within barren shells
that once were mothers.

Balancing Act

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

We are often sealed snugly within
the envelope of busyness; we strive
to accomplish another this or that.

We are urged to admire those who
rise above their peers, those whose
lives seem so ablaze with purpose.

But, I wonder if we should value such
readiness to fling oneself so readily
into each maelstrom of doing what

presents itself, often without sufficient
introduction. I find that I admire those
who insert sabbaticals into their lives,

the ones who insert rests into their
musical scores, those who pause
to reflect on the light as the sun climbs

above the tree line or the slanted gable
of a roof. When at rest it is easier to notice,
to ponder—to take into account.

ARDGADG

Coffee, Black

EMALISA ROSE

a nod and a half smile will
suffice for the prelude...our
stories all click with an air of
the sameness, yet the difference
is palpable

for some, it's prewritten off the
family lineage...some from a fluke
born to the half moon, in lieu of a
wiser choice...sense being tossed
to the roadside

i'm batting first today...i tussle my
blondes and blot my red lipstick

Tom puts out the coffee...for most
it's straight up and black..i go for
a swizzle of stevia

but first we join hands and murmur
a prayer for all people...all of us
here for the greater good.

Storm Sisters

CHITRA GOPALAKRISHNAN

Vimla and Kanchan's world in the old part of Delhi in northern India is one where the streetscape is continuous and the street ecology complex.

Theirs is a universe of a long, dense warren of narrow, pot-holed streets with no sidewalks, irregularly shaped blocks penetrated by yet another large yet indeterminate number of alleyways with no separation of homes, religious, educational and public buildings, shops, warehouses and storage facilities or pedestrian movement or animal and bird wanderings, be they cow, ox, buffalo, horse, camel, donkey, goat, dogs, monkeys, pigeons, crows and chickens, or vehicular movement, be they trucks, buses, minibuses, cars, vans, auto-rickshaws, motorcycles, motor scooters, electric bicycles, bicycles, cycle rickshaws, hand-powered tricycles, hand carts and a range of sometimes unrecognizable contraptions.

The entire living, breathing space in their vicinity is festooned by a web of lurching, black, overhead wires that hang crisscrossed, canopy-like, to provide cabling for electricity, telephone, television and broadband. A bystander can never tell which wire is for what and it often makes for intriguing mind games among such newcomers.

This sphere's disorderly, highly unstable rhythms beat over the 24-hour day of these two women as it does their seven-day cycles. The shrill calls from hawkers, incessant, discordant blares of vehicle horns, aftershocks of vehicular movement and sudden

releases of the stored energy of street dirt in the form of dust spirals rattle the structure of their home continually and this combined, noisy disarray seeps into their homes from the cracks between their windows, the slits beneath their door frames and through their various body orifices to settle immutably into the interiors of their home, their lives. Their curtains, cutlery, utensils, television, fridge, washing machine, furniture, doorknobs, the vases of plastic flowers and their inner selves...all...bear marks of this intrusion.

The women are two stay-at-home brides in their twenties, married to two brothers, their lives and shared experiences have not bound by love or choice but by an accident of geography. That of an arranged marriage where co-habitation within a home of two-bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room has become a habit, an obligation, a necessary way of life. The walk-in and feeling-through of each other's daily lives happen irrespective of consent.

While the Delhi administration worries that public tidiness in this vigorous area might indeed be impossible, both these brides angst over their ambivalence towards each other and to the finely wrought network of family relationships of an extended family, of grand uncles and aunts, uncles and aunts, cousins and nephews, and an assortment of other relatives, all of who knock elbows with them by living in back-to-back habitations attached to their home. This crush of in-laws are meant to be treated as their own, or more than their own, especially as the parents of their husbands are no more. Social norms say so.

Both Vimla, petite, fair, light-eyed, high cheek boned, with over four years of matrimonial experience, and Kanchan, tall,

strapping, relatively less-fair, curly haired, with a two-year marital record, stop, reverse, squeeze and invert but most often just relentlessly push forward in their no grid-plan universe. They have seemingly perfected the art of adjusting their movements and expectations to somehow get through their lives by growing into a peculiar routine of crowded aloneness.

Not quite it seems. As is evident on this day.

An unstructured, unmediated personal confrontation that occurs over what is to be cooked, breaks their carefully-preserved veneer of civility, their endeavors to contain their pukka, unfeigned emotions from erupting, their feelings of malice that effervesce and spume inside yet are repressed from finding their way out in gesture, word or action.

The always sweet, smiling and serene masks of tolerance of these two home-bound women come off with finality for the first time as their frustrations against one another, their husbands, their relatives and the world around them begins to discharge without restraint. Their nudging, pinching, fledgling arguments turn into a full-fledged battle, the rictus of hostility stretched across their faces.

Why this day? Why this issue? One cannot be sure. Maybe their tempers were already frayed while dealing with their husbands. Maybe it was the heat. Maybe they had come to the end of their endurance with one another and with everything around them. One will perhaps never really know.

“We will cook kurkure bindi, pindi chole, jeera rice and boondi raita for lunch,” declares Vimla firmly, keenly aware of Kanchan’s petulance since morning. Her face has the swell of

resentment. Kanchan rebuts with inflamed passion, "My mind is set on alu mutter, paneer and salad."

"What about the half-a-kilo of chickpeas I have soaked overnight for the chole going waste? The arithmetic of frugality is way beyond your understanding and you know we cannot serve it for dinner as it causes flatulence in our husbands," retorts Vimla. "It is always your word against mine and I cannot keep deferring to you and your rigid cooking techniques simply because you are the elder daughter-in-law. I wake up every morning feeling nothing but resentment for you," reiterates Kanchan.

"You really did not know anything when you arrived here. You could not slice vegetables the way they are meant to be, preserve pickles or paneer, season dishes with the right spices, fold clothes, keep your room clean or even please your husband. Your food tasted like offal thrown along the way and I had to groom you into everything. You have also been disrespectful to our relatives on several occasions and have broken family rules without thought or regard." A proprietary thrill runs through Vimla as her verbal stabs that aim for accuracy deflate Kanchan. In this second, she is proud of her sharp and certain mind, one that is almost like a lawyer's.

Anger peels back commonsense in Kanchan. She is tempted fiercely to knock Vimla to the floor, pin her down and draw blood. She is far stronger physically. Instead, she hits back with her opinion, with as much lethal effectiveness that she can muster, and a withering look. "I arrived with better dowry and manners than you and from a family far more civilized than yours. If I don't say much it's because my better education won't let me

demean myself or you. But you seem to have no such sensitivity. And, as for our in-laws, I am far more generous towards them than you are.”

In the next hour, their arguments expand shrilly onto two sets of hope. Into dueling dialogues on clothes, space on the clothesline, jewelry, bathroom cleaning routines and choice of television serials. Their outbursts with chaotically flying elements, where good manners are deemed optional, push back and forth, sideways and upward, in anguish and anger, and make each of their language meaner and grubbier. A part of the seedy street walks into their home and finds a place on their slick tongues.

Even as their eyes and words are trained on each other, their sari pallus come untucked as do their carefully oiled plaits. Their bangles jingle, their bindis bob up and down on their sweaty foreheads and their pulses speed. The fabric of their daily lives weighed down by this turf rivalry and emotional turmoil, its fury, leaves them disheveled and unguarded.

As their residual anxiety from the underside of their lives begins to drain, an ominous, stony silence comes to stay until Kanchan breaks into tears. Sudden, gulping, sobs that overtake her making it difficult for her to breathe. She begins to choke. Seeing this, Vimla panics. She rushes to the kitchen, pours a glass of cold water in a glass from their groaning fridge and forces Kanchan to take slow sips from it. She manages to calm her down and shushes her sobs with soothing sounds.

When a modicum of calm settles between them, when Kanchan's head rush clears, a sense of déjà vu descends on Vimla.

This, she realises, is a replay of a similar scene that occurred between her and mother-in-law before Kanchan entered their home. Her widowed, mother-in-law had similarly won a vitriolic argument and she was soothed in the very way she is soothing Kanchan. As she trades this experience for the previous one, she sees herself distortedly reflected in Kanchan.

To a still whimpering and hiccupping Kanchan, she says, “During the day, Ma and I, very much like us, daily lived in the space left behind by her two sons when they went to attend to the shop. We were amiable on a few days but mostly quarreled where all I could see were her strong opinions, straight-talking and fearsome anger. When she damaged her back and shoulder and I became her caregiver, she came to be more forgiving of my ways. Her indulgence and recognition of my skills advanced us gradually and gently to a place of love, compassion, mutual respect and understanding. She said she understood how many of my ambitions, my desire to be a teacher, for one, I had given up to fit into her family, its ordinariness, its unnecessary routines and empty hours and she said she could see how alone and abandoned I felt on days.”

Taking a deep breath, Vimla looks at a photo of her mother-in-law on the wall and continues softly, “In return, I saw what an exceptional woman she really was underneath her unremarkable exterior and how she was full of stories similar to mine. Tales of confessed dread, of crisis of confidence, and of desire, her yearnings almost mirroring mine. Towards the end, she often spoke of the excessive, unfair and deeply ingrained expectations placed on mothers, perhaps she was just talking of herself or perhaps it was her way of obliquely consoling me as

I was not been able to conceive then as I am unable to do now. And maybe motherhood will happen one day for me, maybe it won't but what is important is that she did not rile me about it. Instead, she bequeathed to me her recipes, jewelry, her saris and the secrets of how to preserve them, and her complete legacy with love. When she knew she was dying, she would often say to me ruefully, I wish we had come to this place of understanding much earlier. We have wasted so much time. I see her ever so often in my dreams."

Vimla pauses to gulp some water from the bottle she has got for Kanchan and then carries on speaking. "The coincidence of our situation could be the universe's plan or merely gratuitous randomness but it occurs to me that we are at a stage when we need to arrive at a balance, quieten our fraying nerves. We are both scared of our emotions, of putting them on show, of facing up to their inconveniences, absurdities, distortions and pressures and so we forcefully rein them in. Yet if we let them surface and show our imperfections to one another, we could come by life-changing emotional revelations and recognitions. I am aware that you, like Ma, do not bring me down with the issue of my infertility and I want to nurture you as she did me and pass on all the learnings I have had from her."

"Yes didi (sister)," Kanchan agrees quietly and gratefully.

"In our cramped and meager world, we have to build bridges between ourselves, hold on to each other, share our shameful secrets, know each other's un-loveable selves, our insecurities and bring up each other's children like they are our own. That is the only way out for us as women indoors, for us as women who live in a world that does not care what we have to tell it and one that

disregards our daily humiliations, which cut deep within, but means nothing to them.”

Moving closer to Vimla, she says, “In many ways, our bonds need to be stronger than the ones we share with our husbands, who are both in many ways insensitive to our needs and our striving, supportive ways, our lives of service. They consider housework, a task that takes over our lives, as nothing. I’d love to believe that the struggle for women’s equality happens in the larger outer world but I know that this battle really takes place within homes. We must be stronger through one another and for one another so that we can climb over the false assurances of our men, their indifference, their threats and the undependability of their actions.”

“I am sorry, too,” says Vimla, hugging her. “Let’s give each other the gift of friendship, lend a sense of correctness to what we are doing but with a twist of dare and fun. Small remedies to others maybe huge for us as we each other and ourselves the permission to lead our lives our way in our small world, the power to decide what to do about everything, how to run our lives, how much freedom we can have and what attitude we need to maintain. Maybe, it will be a fight against our family yet we have to do it.”

“Didi,” says Kanchan, “I think we also need to learn together to build bridges to the outside world, a jumbled world that we are unfamiliar with. Its rules of engagement would require many learnings on our part yet we need to learn these new skills for our children’s sake, as their lives, for when they arrive into this world, will be outside not inside the home. We will fail them

if we cannot teach them how to find their way there. Let's then ride in the seat we choose, learn new things, and tell ourselves it will be fun to falter and gain together. Let's find out, didi, how it is to dream and see what these dreams bring us."

Kanchan sees a look of delight on Vimla's face. She senses she has voiced something that this has been worrying Vimla for a while as well. They have both been fretting about this privately but now with a possible way to unfold this seemingly complex tangle, a way of female agreement and unison that could very well work for each of them as an expansion of their own self, their impatience with the world around and its unknown dangers settle to a degree. A hushed sense of exhilaration takes its place.

To have someone who can walk with you and remember the travel and its small epiphanies can turn life's limitations to privileges. So to both of them, this part of the day, because of the understanding it has brought, feels like the start to another lifetime. Like a future that has arrived from the most unexpected direction.

The roar of the outside is music to their ears.

For the first time in their lives, the feel of fixed routines of their worlds falls away. "Let's not cook today and order in something fun instead," an excited Kanchan says. "Let's," agrees Vimla. "Let's throw the soaked chole down the drain."

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On The Train

ED MEEK

Wrapped in white, the dead
are brought here—instant salvation.
Babies are tied to stones,
thrown into the middle
of the river, where the current is strongest.
Pyres on the scarred ghats burn
all day, all night, hiss and steam.
If there is money, sandalwood,
mango wood, or dung-cake fires
are plentiful.
If not, there's partial cremation,
while the very poor float away.

On the day a tourist aims his camera,
a child shouts.
A screaming crowd mobs the man,
and the police drag him away.
Vultures eye the dead
as if birds too must be bribed,
as if each shrouded corpse
should be picked clean.

AIDA BODE

Aida Bode is a poet and writer, published in a variety of online and print magazines. In 2017 Aida was selected as a Pushcart Nominee by West Texas Literary Review.

AMANDA ELLIS

Amanda Ellis is a writer of settler and indigenous descent. She has had poetry published in the journals Valiant Scribe, Ponder Savant and Rabbit.

CATHERINE ALEXANDER

Catherine Alexander, Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, has published stories in 42 literary journals, including North Atlantic Review, Rosebud (two successive issues), Bryant Literary Review, Rockhurst Review and won "Jurors' Choice" in Spindrift. Paul Auster read her story, "Dancing on 74th Street," on NPR. Jorja Fox from television's CSI performed "Backyards" in a WordTheatre production. For fifteen years, she has taught fiction and memoir at venues such as the University of Washington, Edmonds College, Seattle Public Library, writing conferences, senior centers and to homeless groups. She now leads a private class in Seattle. Living in Edmonds, Washington, with her cat and two dogs, she has completed a novel, a novelette, and a short-story collection.

CHITRA GOPALAKRISHNAN

Chitra Gopalakrishnan uses her ardor for writing, wing to wing, to break firewalls between nonfiction and fiction, narratology and psychoanalysis, marginalia and manuscript and tree-ism and capitalism.

DOUGLAS G. CAMPBELL

Douglas Campbell is Professor Emeritus of art at George Fox University. He taught painting, printmaking, drawing and art history courses. His work has been published in numerous periodicals and journals.

ED MEEK

Ed Meek writes poetry, fiction, essays and book reviews. He has been published in *The Sun*, *The Paris Review*, *North Dakota Review*, etc. His new book, *High Tide*, has just come out.

EDWARD AHERN

Ed Ahern's had almost three hundred stories and poems published so far, and six books. He works the other side of writing at *Bewildering Stories* as board member and review editor.

ELLEN HUANG

Ellen Huang is an ace writer of fairy tales, children's lit, progressive devotionals, horror comedies, platonic love stories, and more. Occasionally, she burns things. She does pyrography.

EMALISA ROSE

Emalisa Rose is a poet, macrame artist and animal rescue volunteer. She lives by a beach town, which provides much of the inspiration for her work. Her current passion is birding, which she hopes to weave into her art. She works as a lunchlady in a NYC public school.

HENRY ALLEY

Henry Alley is a Professor Emeritus of Literature in the Honors College at the University of Oregon. He has five novels, *Through Glass* (Iris Press, 1979), *The Lattice* (Ariadne Press, 1986), *Umbrella of Glass* (Breitenbush Books, 1988), *Precincts of Light* (Inkwater Press, 2010), *Men Touching* (Chelsea Station Editions, 2019) and a collection of stories, *The Dahlia Field* (Chelsea Station Editions, 2017). For nearly half a century, such journals as *Seattle Review* and *Virginia Quarterly Review* have published his fiction.

JACOB MOSES

Jacob Moses is a poet and artist from Staten island, NY.

LINDA IMBLER

Linda Imbler has seven published poetry collections and one hybrid ebook of short fiction and poetry. She is a Wichita, Kansas based author. Learn more at lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com

LINDZ MCLEOD

Lindz McLeod's short stories have been published by the Scotsman newspaper, the Scottish Book Trust, 365 Tomorrows, and the Dundee Victoria & Albert Museum. She has published poetry with Allegory Ridge, Hellebore, perhappened, and more. rites critical pieces for the Times Literary Supplement, Irish Examiner, Poetry Ireland Review and other publications.

TONY REEVY

Tony Reevy's previous publications include poetry, non-fiction and short fiction. He resides in Durham, North Carolina with wife, Caroline Weaver, and children Lindley and Ian.

ZACH MURPHY

Zach Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. He lives with his wife Kelly in St. Paul, Minnesota.

MATTHEW McAYEAL

Matthew McAyeal is a writer from Portland, Oregon. His short stories have been published by “Bards and Sages Quarterly,” “Fantasia Divinity Magazine,” “cc&d,” “The Fear of Monkeys,” “Danse Macabre,” “The Metaworker,” “Scarlet Leaf Magazine,” “Bewildering Stories,” “The Magazine of History & Fiction,” and “Tall Tale TV.” In 2008, two screenplays he wrote were semi-finalists in the Screenplay Festival.

MICHAEL EMERALD

Oladosu Michael Emerald writes from Ogun State, Nigeria. He is a poet and an artist. He’s very enthusiastic about literature who gathers muse from personal experiences, happenings in nature.

PAUL BRUCKER

Paul Brucker, a marketing communications writer, lives in Mt. Prospect, IL “Where Friendliness is a Way of Life.” Active in the early 1980s Washington D.C poetry scene, he put a lid on poetry writing when he went to the Northwestern University grad ad school learn how to think like a businessman and secure a decent income. Nonetheless, he has succumbed to writing poetry again.

PRAMOD SUBBARAMAN

Pramod Subbaraman is a dentist who returned to poetry during the 2020 COVID19 lockdown in England after a long absence and has since been published in the UK and USA

STRIDER MARCUS JONES

His poetry has been published in the USA, Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, Spain, India and Switzerland in numerous publications including mgv2 Publishing Anthology; Dreich Magazine; Trouvaille Review; dyst Literary Journal; Impspired Magazine; Literary Yard e-Journal; Poppy Road Review; Cajun Mutt Press; Rusty Truck Magazine; Rye Whiskey Review; The Poet Magazine; Deep Water Literary Journal; The Huffington Post USA; The Stray Branch Literary Magazine; Crack The Spine Literary Magazine.

SUSANA H CASE

Susana H. Case is the author of seven books of poetry, including *Dead Shark on the N Train*, Broadstone Books, 2020, which won a Pinnacle Book Award and a NYC Big Book Distinguished Favorite

TALI COHEN SHABTAI

Tali Cohen Shabtai, is a poet, she was born in Jerusalem, Israel. Tali's poems express exile. She is studying her exile and freedom paradox, her cosmopolitan vision is very obvious in her writings. She lived some years in Oslo Norway and in the U.S.A. Tali has written three poetry books: "Purple Diluted in a Black's Thick", (bilingual 2007), "Protest" (bilingual 2012) and "Nine Years From You" (2018).

LENORE WEISS

Lenore Weiss is a writer, editor, and teacher who lives in Oakland Oakland with her daughter Mischa the Magnificent, and cat, Zebra the Destroyer.