• Spring/Summer 2021 •

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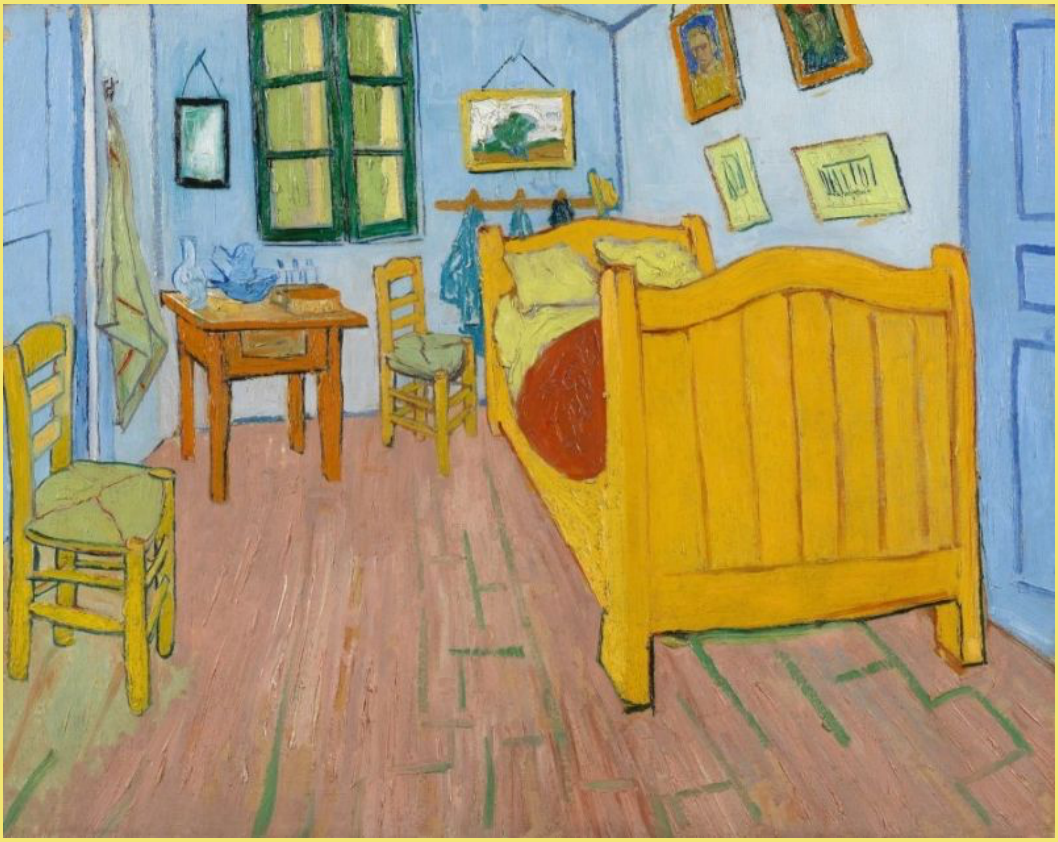

Sangam | Literary Magazine

A. Baird • D. Barrett • C. Buckley • S. Bosco • S. Campiglio • M. Carrino
S. H. Case • M. Crow • B. Daldorph • J. Grey • B. Gottschalk
D. M. Jaffe • D. Konitzer • J. Krumberber • R. Lutman • K. H. Machan
G. A. Mazis • C. Mehta • G. Moglia • T. R. Moore • J. Tarwood
S. Scholl • W. Swist • A. Whittenberger

Sangam Literary Magazine

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For more information on Van Gogh's *The Bedroom* please see the Art Institute of Chicago's exhibit page https://www.artic.edu/artworks/28560/the-bedroom, featuring the subsections titled "Publication History," Exhibition History," "Provenance," and "Multimedia."

*A special thanks to Associate Editor Robert Calmes, M. A.,
for his additional editorial work on portions of this issue's fiction segment*

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Sangam Literary Magazine

Sangam features and represents works by established as well as emerging writers, irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. In this way, *Sangam*, a Sanskrit term for **joining together**, is, in fact, a coming together for all.

Sangam publishes in the fall and spring of each academic year through the Department of Languages and Literature at Southern University and A&M College's flagship campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As Louisiana's largest Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Southern University is located in a bend of the Mississippi River, a locale with important literary significance, most recently home to Louisiana's Poet Laureate, John Smith, who is among its Baton Rouge campus faculty.

Masthead

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Returning / Receding?

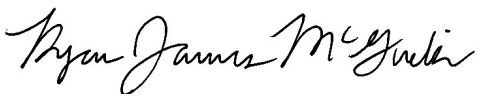
Spring/Summer 2021 Introduction

Regarding the history of the performing arts, the theatre and the plague unfortunately share a past. Consider the wave of bubonic plague deaths in Elizabethan England. In August 1603, "desperate London authorities were reporting more than three thousand deaths a week," prompting playhouses to close their doors to the public.[1] When deaths began to wane, live theatre returned and once again became part of London's gritty and expressive aesthetic. But just as quickly as playhouses reopened in April 1604, "with the onset of warmer weather" the plague returned over the summer and playhouses closed again in September that same year.[2] Of course, we do not live in seventeenth-century London and, instead, are surrounded by modern medicine and telecommunications unmatched at any other point in human history. Nevertheless, since the spring and now as we enter the fall 2021 months, we continue to experience our own shared complications. As of late, competing vantage points and strong feelings continue to populate our daily lives. With new health debates over public policy, revised and rewritten safety measures, and the accuracy of our informed sources, everything from medical experts and organizations to our elected politicians remain under scrutiny. It might be accurate to say of the national cli-

[1] James Shiparo, *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 23.
[2] Ibid, 23.

mate, which includes an existing **COVID** vaccine alongside new variants of the virus, that there is a lasting fear of receding back into another holding pattern reminiscent of 2020: business and institutional closures, daily life by virtual communication, and the range of debates (and dismissals) to take protective measures, including the all-too-familiar malaise of masks, social distancing, sheltering in place, and mandated curfews. For those blessed and privileged with a life invested in the arts and letters, taking public safety precautions also means additional time to read and write. This upshot can seem both a comforting distraction and a new freedom from fear, one that can artfully remind us of our best selves and what is at stake if we lose connection with envisioning, manifesting, and upholding these realities.

Sangam Spring/Summer 2021 contains literary affirmations aimed to help us remain productively connected with ourselves and each other, be it through an imaginative escape or a means to directly face our indeterminate times. In this spirit we arrive at this issue's cover art, Vincent van Gogh's 1889 painting *The Bedroom*. This work is a fitting visual because it displays for us a place of repose while also serving as a reminder of the closed spaces we've all occupied to some extent this past year. Moving forward it is my hope we all have the choice of creatively spending our days in private **and** in public.



Ryan James McGuckin, Ph.D
CHIEF EDITOR, *SANGAM LITERARY MAGAZINE*

POETRY

Ansie Baird

The Purple Carpeting

When I was about seven, I asked my parents: Why are all the rugs in the entire house purple? There was wall-to-wall carpeting throughout the living room, the dining room, up the staircase and down the long hallway, throughout the four bedrooms. Why?

Well, said my father, Arthur sent us those rugs. We didn't choose them.

Arthur was something of a mythological figure in our family. One seldom caught a glimpse of him, and a certain awe permeated my parents' voices when his name came up. He wasn't god-like in the Greek sense in that he had gilded wings or could toss thunderbolts or turn men into swine. But he was elusive and seemed to have magical powers because he was marvelously generous and always absent.

I knew that Arthur sent my father boxes of silk neckties from Sulka once a year along with high black socks from Brooks Brothers, tins of curiously strong peppermints and ginger drops from Fortnum & Mason in London. But rugs? Why did he send us purple rugs?

My father cleared his throat and said: When Arthur got divorced, he sent the entire contents of his house to us. That's how we came to own this furniture.

What's divorce mean? I asked. I was too young to have heard of divorce.

He replied: Arthur decided to leave the woman he was married to so he could marry Gertrude. It's a legal document. You have to go to court. That was his second divorce.

What ? What? What did she get, this other woman? How come she didn't get the furniture?

I'm not clear on that, he said. Perhaps she didn't want it. I'm sure he gave her some money but that is not the sort of thing you ask other people.

It had never occurred to me that there were certain things you didn't ask other people. Well, this next wife, why wouldn't she want the purple rugs? I demanded to know.

Probably they wanted to start out fresh, he said, trying to distract me from the ugly carpeting. New things for a new wife. Look, we also got that large dining room table with eight red velvet-covered wooden chairs to match and the elegant sideboard and the large oak silver-chest, carved and burnished with brass door pulls and that big brown velvet tufted chair we sit in when I read to you and the small brown velvet chair your mother occupies every evening and my voluminous desk in the study with the revolving chair and all the four-poster beds upstairs in each bedroom. And lamps and crystal bowls and even the portrait of John Donne over the fireplace. Think of that.

For once, I had nothing to say. No wonder we had purple rugs. Everything had come from Arthur, like some hero from the olden days, his beneficence descending upon us out of the clouds. He had been my father's roommate at college, but we lived in Buffalo while he lived in Manhattan, which, for all I knew, was as distant as the North Pole.

Arthur lived a long life, collecting rare books and eating very small bites of elegant food. He had one child, a girl appropriately named Eve. When he died, everything he had went to Yale. By then, my father was long gone, my mother also. I was an orphan before I turned forty.

But Arthur survives immortally among us: the sideboard here at my place, the dining room table at Cynthia's, the silver-chest at Cameron's, several painted wooden chairs at Sarah's or Bridget's. There are carved end tables and ornate lamps in various houses, along with the odd footstool. Of the enormous acres of purple carpeting, I know absolutely nothing because long ago, very long ago, we left it behind in our abandoned family house when my beloved parents got divorced.

Ansie Baird

Stephanie and the Stolen Flowers

My mother was not there for decoration but damn! was she ever decorative. Chores were her definition early on, after she had tutored French for a while and before she began to paint seriously, large oil paintings of skewed bureaus and churches with dangling scaffolding and rows of birch trees angling into a yellow landscape. She was mild and endearing, cooked gorgeous dinners every evening and life went on in its awkward permutations.

One spring day it was Stephanie who asked me to come over after school and play. She lived in a brick house on Oakland Place, much more upscale than our modest frame house on Lexington Avenue but I liked my house better because it had a bannister to slide down and a rhyming address: 162 Lexington Avenue. It didn't dawn on me for years that any number ending in a 2 would rhyme with avenue. I believed our house had been specially chosen.

I was an innocent at nine. When Stephanie announced to me over milk and cookies that she had permission to pick flowers in Mr. Knox's garden next door while everything was blooming gaily, I had no reason not to believe her. So up the driveway we went to a lavish display of various blooms and each of us picked an arm-full of flowers to take home to our mothers. But someone in the Knox house must have been watching and called Stephanie's mother to report on our behavior. When we walked into her house, her mother was in a fury.

She called my mother and said I must leave immediately, go directly home, I was a bad girl to think I could steal someone else's flowers. I was stunned and speechless. I'd never seen a parent in such a rage before. I began to cry, gathered up all my things and fled from the

house, running my heart out all the way down Oakland Place to Bryant Street, then right on Bryant, running, still running down Bryant to Elmwood, right again, sobbing and running, feeling so unfairly chastised and so frightened of that other mother's wrath.

As I approached West Utica, only three more blocks to run, my book bag slapping my back and my jacket open to the breeze, suddenly I saw my beautiful mother in a pink sweater running towards me, her arms spread wide open. I'd never in my life seen my mother run before. She knew, she just knew I'd never steal anyone's flowers and she ran out to meet me, to console me. This is one of the best memories I ever had of my mother. On Elmwood Avenue, there she was.

Ansie Baird

Look Out

Joan of Arc
stone bust from
grandmother B's
mantel no
doubt 19th century
now here on
window sill
residing my
guardian
keeping
guard on
French / British
intruders any
renegades any
old soldiers
she stays calm
still in
charge looms
large
old girl so
young when
burned at
stake stay
stay awake

Ansie Baird

Waste Land, not THE

Sometimes I think
all I do all day
is drink and eat
and poop and pee
does anyone else feel quite that way
oui oui you say
as you agree

It's not just you
and it's not just
me counting
the time till it's
time to count
the pills I keep
so I can sleep
so you can wake
and you can rise
alive again what
a big surprise

it's only a leap
from awake to
asleep it's only
a space from the
land to the deep
from sand to waves
from safe to sorrow
and then by Jesus
it turns tomorrow

the breakfast tea
is hot and sweet
it isn't just me
I wait to meet
perhaps it's you
who defecate
and time intervenes
if it's not too late
cuckoo clocks sound
wooden birds sing
mocking the tweet
of melodious Spring
but we're stuck

in the muck
of our bodies'
mystique
I replace my face
with a serious grin
you polish your hair
and scrub your skin
it isn't a sin
to pretend
to be fair
we stutter and
scatter and strut
in bright air

the life we lead
defies despair
days go around
go anywhere
you must surely
concur or you
wouldn't be here

mysterious Yes and
I wouldn't be there
oui oui oui oui oui oui

Sarina Bosco

Measuring happiness in tablespoons

Days in the kitchen spent hiding behind
a film of flour, hands unrecognizable. Peeling the skins
off of tomatoes and crying. Forcing seeds
from the hearts of avocados and coaxing them
to grow on windowsills, in beautiful glasses,
as if that could somehow make up for it.

They come over and try to ignore the dirt on the floor and the
books.
They ask me questions. I hold out an orange.
Try to show them the sectioned pieces that seem so delicate
yet contained. After dinner I crack open chicken bones

and look for omens. Instead let the marrow and grease
slide down my palms. They watch me
and I want to tell them what it is like here – with the
beet greens that aren't really green, the heads of cabbages
that peel apart layer after layer, frantically searching for cucumbers
in the soil as twilight is fading. I try and I cannot.

Sarina Bosco

All of the fragile girls stayed fragile

What they don't tell you about saving yourself is that no one will
love you for it.

Here is how not to be a fragile girl:
be blissfully unaware of any men in the room, crack your
knuckles sleep with
a wool blanket even in summer, splinter bones for their
marrow rub it
on the insides of your wrists.

When men begin to judge you for your indifference, tell them that
you sprang
from your father's forehead begging for virginity. Tell
them that you
only dated hunters for the longest time

not realizing that you were the prey
and not a goddess to them
just thighs just throat

always a little too ripe.

Here's what it was like being fragile:
alone in the woods knuckled in the still-warm guts of a
deer, crying.
Agreeing to shoot the man you keep dreaming about. Your
brother unbelieving.
Still trembling all of these years later.
Sitting in the dark all throat

imagining trembling under
him, imagining

the soft kind of sweet
love that you've been trying to strip yourself of
with the same knife you use to
skin the men who came before.

Sarina Bosco

Chronology

the smell of mint in the dark brought out
earlier by the rain which settled over the trees and pools now
in the root systems
the white of them like bone exposed above the soil

bruised blue by the frost
living for one year and four months among the mint

old friend
we have long nights ahead of us muddling whiskey
we have long nights ahead of us where I will walk out
into the yard and be led only by your
scent because I cannot trust my heart or my head
anymore

old friend

Stephen Campiglio

Coda: Between Gigs *(Let's Cool One)*

after Thelonious Monk

In the recording studio,
the band plays well into "Ugly Beauty"
when a voice from inside the control room
interrupts the song and says, "Okay, let's do one."
Startled by the intrusion,
and then with angry disbelief,
Monk's feeling can be summed up by:
What the hell you think we're doing!
He wants to hear the playback, but it wasn't recorded;
still can't believe it as he leaves the piano
and paces across the floor,
chiding the producer for not knowing better.
Then Thelonious recomposes himself and begins again.
He hasn't lost the song, he's gained a new take,
and is also unaware that the documentary has restored the loss.

Michael Carrino

Imagine

what you don't practice might harm a neighbor
stocking shelves in the market

can i say anything in another way try some
different tone yet stay six feet away

at least in imagination wearing a mask might
conjure reveries one childhood game

you recall maybe some scary masquerade
every halloween in your hometown

every dig in wet dirt for worms any memory
to remind you to wash your hands

again remember one unrequited love yes that one
you might recall while adjusting

your mask then imagine our neighbor replenishing
the shelves i'm sure you just need practice

a quick reminder how six feet could be one kayak
imagine distance as absence truly fond

but now what can i do to have you practice
what i'm sure you can imagine

Susan H. Case

Sexuality at the Bowling Alley

We practiced flirting, tongue kissing,
shared our eyeliner. You were the only boy
we knew who dared to wear makeup,
offering a feast of fashion tips—
how to apply lipstick so it didn't smear,
how to tie a scarf.

Not inclined toward girls,
you, too, still needed to practice kissing.

This was before we learned to live
with catastrophes like dead birds and lost time.

At the bowling alley, every Saturday,
boys serious about pins and scores
glanced over to our little group,
trying to understand why we lazed about
taking turns on your lap.

Ours wasn't a high school of bruisers.
Most boys were good in math and let you be.
But you must have been so truly alone,
wearing the pretty girls like boas.

We giggled, nuzzled, drank our Cokes.
These scenes stay put in the skein
of memory. I don't know
what happened after.
We didn't think to check you for wounds.

Mary Crow

Alto Rhapsody

(A response to James Wright's "Stages on a Journey Westward")

1

I too began in Ohio
but I no longer dream of Loudonville,
or black Percherons
my sister and I rode on the Chesrown farm,
their broad withers stretching our thighs,
their bridles with blinkers.
What were they not allowed to see?

Mornings my father
in our dining room alcove clipped the nails
on his square-tipped immaculate hands
before he drove
out to the barn he'd built on 80 acres,
vision all his life
to return to childhood's countryside,
a gentleman farmer.

Vision to buy more than
the English saddle stowed in our attic
for horses he would find for us,
a revision of his own childhood, acreage
where his mother scrubbed
her hands raw washing other folks' laundry
as she bowed her head under
abandonment's shame.

2

He dangled his silence
like a green moon
over my bedroom shadows
as if to escape into the sewers under Paris:
a would-be Jean Valjean.

3

He read the story to us of
that little match girl
striking tiny flames that couldn't
warm her
as she stood on a bank of our Mohican.
Was it deep enough to drown in?
Behind her, hives of snow mounded up.
Didn't she die of cold's sting?

4

My father, a small-town boy,
shipped out with his strong hands
to become an airplane mechanic in France
for the ancient planes
men flew back in World War I,
their wings soon broken under Death
they transported.

At war's end
Dad borrowed a bike
to tour Loire Valley with its chateaux
and Old Master paintings,
stylized gardens,
then wine with dinner,
baguette with Brie.

In my dream, Father is struggling to sit up.
There's a moon-shaped hole in his chest.
He takes leave of a stable door
he'd planed silk-smooth
for the barn he built
on the land he cleared
of the farm he loved.

5

One day when I was eleven
I decided to run away
to the wild west and wide open spaces
hoping my father would
search for me.
My twin and I hitchhiked all the way
to Lima, Ohio,
horses and prairie still so many miles ahead
before we turned back,
tomboys who should have feared
night descending on our road's return.

6

Here in Colorado what do I dream of?
My father spread eagled on the window
of our house by fire,
a locomotive's roar on a bank high above us?
There were eight of us once upon a time,
but one by one we left home,
one by one we married, one by one
had babies, one by one
grew happy or unhappy.

Far, far from our Ohio home,
we can hardly sleep.
Dank hills with their oak trees and morels,

their rotting leaf meal, Mohican River
that runs through town,
and hickory nuts that lay on a dirt road
where Father and I bent down to gather them up.
Prospects of a new war tramped through his sleep—
great ships transferring our steel and coal
to enemies.
Was America over and done with?
Into what deep furrows were we plunging?

7

I am growing old
within a fold of echoes
from the dead lost in the snow-filled
failures of my nation.
A hawk shrills
at the top of my leafless cottonwood.
Next spring his mate
will lay another two eggs.

On Goat Hill
near LaPorte, Colorado,
I found tiny seashells,
white and burnished by the years;
they radiated loneliness
from the Anasazi who camped there.
At night sometimes I think I see
high above me
faint flickers of their stamped-out campfires.

Brian Daldorph

For Ray Carver

Make use, you told me,
make use, and I did, Ray, I did,
those long hot afternoons
when I could have gone swimming
at the lake or turned on the TV
to watch the Cubs against the Yankees
and gotten settled with a six-pack.
No. I stuck it out.
Grinding out that story
because if I didn't tell it, who would?
And was it worth it? Yes,
because even if no one read the damn thing, ever,
how else could I look you in the eye
and tell you that I'd *made use*?

Brian Daldorph

Decent Poetry

poetry that keeps its clothes on.

poetry that doesn't protest too much.

poetry you could bring home to meet
your parents and Aunt Frieda.

poetry that always says thank you
and seems to mean it.

poetry that listens politely.

poetry that asks for water, please,
when you offer beer and whiskey.

poetry that visits orphanages.

poetry that saves blue whales
and injured rabbits.

poetry that speaks sincerely
about growing its own vegetables.

poetry that doesn't own a car.

poetry that supports local businesses.

poetry that doesn't grab you by the lapels
and breathe fumes in your face.

poetry that smiles a lot,

doesn't fart at dinner parties

and knows when to leave.

John Grey

Civilization, You Can Have It

I'm marooned on an island, living off the land, the sea. The fruits
are delicious. The fish I catch

are the tastiest I've ever eaten.
I have shelter.
I keep warm
even in the bitterest night temperatures. No one bothers me.

I can do what pleases me, unsupervised and uninterrupted. According to my crackly radio, rescue is on the way.

I thought I was already rescued.

John Grey

Watching a Documentary on the Tuareg

They're nomadic,
riding miles across sand
on horseback or camel,
to some temporary oasis,
a brief respite under date palm fronds, a chance to drink water from
a well.

The mouths of the men
droop to the very edge
of their whiskered chins.
The eyes of the women
are as round and brown as dimes.
They are serious about their mobility. They know there's not
enough of anything in any one place

for them to survive.

I'm a stay-at-home,
as light-hearted as my comfort affords me. I go for my walks
but just through the neighborhood.
But my neighborhood is really just
that part of my house
where other people live.

Everything I need
is within a small radius.
From my kitchen,
I can almost reach out,
press the fresh peaches in the grocery store, or grab an aspirin

bottle
from a pharmacy shelf.
If I want more of the world,
there's always the newspaper,
or the internet,
or my television,
the one that transports me
to the harsh climes of the Sahara,
to join the Tuareg on their endless journey, for an hour minus
commercials.

It's real enough for me.
I sweat along with the tribesmen. I cough from all that dust.
I even imagine what it's like
to be one of them,
always on the move,
never settling anyplace.

I doubt they get to watch documentaries on people like me, curled
up on the couch,
eyes glued to the tube.
I can't imagine what it's like
to not live lives vicariously.

David Konitzer

Beneath the Grade

The stairs are weary, grey, and groan
at the inconvenience of my descent.
A thickened, agéd dampness
licks my face; sunlight leaks through blocks of glass.

Here is my past;
here is all I know.
Here is where

you loved me, distant and without touch,
propped against your bench near the concrete wall,
smoked your Kaywoodie and Carter Hall and thought.
And thought, and thought, and built this depository of
books, papers, tools, toys, dolls—
a junk drawer grown obscenely large that throbs
with answers like a hidden heart. Somewhere is
my Monster Magnet; somewhere is my box of keys.

But the furnace moans its dissatisfaction and the blocked
glass begins to dim.

John Krumberger

Rosary Society

(St. Mary's Church, Racine, Wisconsin)

it's the soul that's erotic—Adelia Prado

I see them at the nave of the church
alone in the pews after Mass—
the priest gone,
the children shepherded back to school-
their call and response over and again
reciting prayers known by heart.

I say I see them though the verb is wrong,
for they have reached an age
where they are invisible,
no longer gazed at by the world
though beautiful now
the way the winter trees are beautiful.

Hail Mary full of grace,
the Lord is with thee—
their bodies grained in smoky light,
they stay there entranced
the better part of the morning,
making slow love to their Christ.

John Krumberger

Ash

Night in Havana
at the gangster's hotel
where the gold phone
presented to Batista
by the American ambassador
is still stashed away
in an office drawer,
the verandah open
to an ocean breeze.
Every day here
another building collapses
in the city center. Beauty
crumbling, then dying,
brings you back to me.
This afternoon along the Malecon,
lovers perched on the sea wall
with only the image
of the other in their eyes.
When I spilled your ashes,
some landing on rocks,
some on water,
I feared that so divided
you'd be lost. Finally
a wave snatched you
like the hand of God,
and I watched a life dissolve,
waves receding
then indistinguishable.

John Krumberger

When I was a King

Because I was a king
no moon could adjudicate me.
I'd hide wherever I pleased,
wild-eyed, ready to pounce,
and they thrilled to it,

mother and daughter
chirping with excitement
as they rounded the curve,
daughter calling
—Papa where are you?—

while I waited submerged
in withered October leaves,
having practiced my falling
dead impersonation
for just such a chance,

the galaxy expanding
as I held my breath,
listening for footsteps,
back when the world loved us,
and we loved each other without fault.

John Krumberger

The Parlor

It is only after it is liberated in analysis that
the self begins to be articulate—Alice Miller

They come to the parlor of industry
a little afraid of hope, yet they hope.

Music flares from the bistro downstairs,
like a soundtrack to the mystery

of what we do there. And it's an honor
truly to prospect beside them,

finding the core, finding the gold,
the stories dark, sometimes for months,

with shards of memory much too heavy
for anyone to bear alone;

each impurity unraveling,
molecules breaking down,

shame alchemized to grief,
then energy and soul until one day

as light streams through my east facing windows,
I see we are all made of it,

and wonder who has shined
for me the way I do for them.

Katharyn Howd Machan

Selena Gard: Redwing, 1888

So many lilacs, dying lilacs,
heat too sudden and hard
in our town, my breath
needing purple and white
in my sudden grief.

Who am I now without the light
his laughter gave me, love
what let me find the seasons
in every garden offering
root and stem and leaf?

Let go I say *Let go of all*
That grows and time defeats.
Why make music? Why
write poems? Why let God
beg for my belief?

Glenn A. Mazis

The Body Between Us

They say the body separates as if a galactic span intrudes between
glances
intertwined limbs, desires, your hand in mine,

a frozen continent of flesh within flesh
without light.

Yet, your fingers lightly brushing my back aflame is a Shakespear-
ian
sonnet of metaphors leaping

in blood and nerves from hand to heart polysyllabic beyond any
writer's
ken.

Glenn A. Mazis

Our First Glance at the Light

The first light shaft splinters,
but not like the rays from the sun at sunset, cloud filtered, seeking
a place to rest for the night,
but instead bouncing all around the cheek, tickling feathers of radi-
ance,
fingers of white warmth,
flying under the newborn chin
promising that the orbs will soon awaken, for the first light cannot
yet be,
that first light of the beginning,
since the eye always
lingers in the dark.

But the gasp of the first breath
should warn that to be a human being, means that even air
can pierce through
to the heart, as the onrush
of life shocks and hurts.
The shaking, reddened need
of the aah that tore open a hole in the air remains woven like
an ever-spreading vine
in every wreath
of breath and sound.

Glenn A. Mazis

Matter Misrepresented

Matter has a bad reputation as stupid and lifeless,
said to fill up the souls
of the stultified.

Religions make their way
by railing against temptations somehow craftily conjured by the
    hidden
genius
of this otherwise idiot stuff.

Matter is seen as an infinity of infinitesimal machines racing
    around,
colliding, getting it right

only by sheer accident,
slipping into wondrous combinations of synchronous functions
like lighting the day
or turning into energy
or letting water fall from the sky
to speed to where
whatever needs to grow
or winding into the intricate
twirl that guide our cells
in a choreographed dance.
Yes, it is admitted, matter does
this, but it's all sevens,
dumb dice rolls.

Of course, science loves matter, declaring its tracings are the letters
    of a

numbered language efficiently removing
all blurry things like love
or beauty from the midst
of its Spartan equations.
Science recruits little soldiers
in perfect formations
to be its messengers,
yet never notices beneath
the starched uniforms
it has a regiment of palimpsests.

Accurately expressing how atoms become love requires racing
pulses,
holding hands, sharing of food
and lying down together

in electrifying bursts,
or else what burns
in their marrow is mistaken
as the arson of billions
of malicious imps
who steal our souls
when we give our hearts away...
Matter is a cosmic calligrapher transcribes every movement we
make in
colored bodies
of every shape
while keeping a steady hand draws filigrees in our brains recording
the
paths of each feeling and thought
within us as also within
the circle of the world.

Glenn A. Mazis

City Walking on a Hot August Night

Even the sidewalk exhales
as the leftover heat of the day
returns to the sky, lifting without body above trees to push stars
higher into their constellations.

The diffuse light left over whispers from trees and grass who can
no
longer speak after the day's heat

forced a stoic silence.

Unspoken syllables suspended in oppressive air
swim in lingering energy filling the night

with a snaking glow.

Sounds of our feet
on sidewalk simmer
not scrape as moving
summer things melt and merge in the late air.

Finding a way out
of the hard stare of afternoon its hands all over our bodies we wel-
come
the cool distance of respecting stars.

Greg Moglia

Risk

I buy clothes the way I live. I circle them. Measure them once,
Twice. Come round again. Feel the texture. Try it on.
Does it hide the slumping shoulders, hint of thickness at the waist
I need to appear perfect

Part of a code, a code from Dad—the lifelong postal clerk
On the way to the bank I take my aging father's hand.
A discovery. Rarely have I touched his hand.
Finally I'm the parent for a time

He has never really needed me.
Never said, Wow, you did great
Instead, my every gain became his story
Until his story became my story.

Once I asked Dad, have I been a good son?
He said *I guess so.*
Then he said *I have trouble expressing how I feel*
Was my father somehow scared

He'd say *Life's unfair to the little guy.*
Never saying who the little guy just happens to be
But always adding in his talk
Be careful, be very careful with everything

Thomas R. Moore

Surveillance Cam Footage

A boy climbs a palm, snaps off a branch, descends, and weaves a basket.

At the bar, hands trembling, he says, *Hold tight to both ends of the handkerchief.*

The heifers thrash and yank the stanchions at first milking.

A Kiwi leaps off the *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*.

On October 26, the Shah's birthday, resplendent carpets hang out of windows.

Dark-haired Armenian girls circle-dance at the *Kara Kilise*.

During Ashura, men beat their chests and backs with blades.

At Sommières the air is rosemary.

On the façade of Nabokov's childhood home someone's chalked a butterfly.

During the night termites eat the Monet calendar off the wall.

A monkey hurls a bowlful of purple borscht against the kitchen cabinets.

A rat slinks along the top of a partition *Mon Dieu*! at a French restaurant in Bamako.

In the cardiologist's office she presses my carotid artery and says, *This will tell us more*

J. Tarwood

Lockdown

Water boiled, coffee pressed, then upstairs for life on screen.
A rooster brags, a minaret proclaims, hounds raggedly chorus
lackadaisical wraith. Meanwhile, my fingers tap quick
opinions about distant news as if there were something
we could do. Wind howls its wow, so much to say,
yet who listens? Everybody's elsewhere. Dawn edges
dark aside as I shut down the faraway. Silence
can be voluptuous.

Sharon Scholl

Crematory

My love is burning down to ashes.
I don't want to know how it happens, don't want to picture that
devouring. Worm or flame,
there is no graceful way to go.

We don't evaporate like puddles on a summer sidewalk.
We broil, pop, leak and blister, until we rest like sanitary gravel,
dust upon the furnace floor.

Collected, boxed and labeled, we are given to our grievers
who spill us to the wind, on seas, somewhere on the comely earth.
We slip through their fingers

and in time, through their minds.

Sharon Scholl

Change

Fall comes whistling softly
like one who wants to be felt
but not yet seen. It's like holding and holding a door ajar,
hoping the cat will choose in or out…

After long, sweaty months
with night settling in by ten p.m., dawn knocking us awake,
a flash bulb at six a.m.,
the long dusk folds its gray curtain, shaking out cool morning mist.

Time that held its breath
for days while heat rose in waves expels it with a sudden wind
that causes windows to fly open, houses to inhale, cough out mildew.

We shed a season's lassitude, gearing up brain and bones
for some slow forward movement. We are on the verge, perched
between skin and sweaters.

Wally Swist

Miniature Camera

for Tevis Kimball & Marsha Peters, December 2020

It's Lilliputian lens
opens wide as does an archive of memory
of one refined image
after another of the many

memorable times of those years
in Providence: the arty lofts
and stylish restaurants, with potbellied
stoves, that still warm us;

those casual Newport tea rooms
and plush seaside inns,
whose names we may have
misplaced, but whose set of keys

felicitously open any mnemonic door
we would have entered together,
whose sunny dispositions
continue to grace the hallways

of memory, and whose bright
reflections of the design
of Art Deco tiles perpetuate
and consistently pique me into savor

of not only who we were
but who we are, soaring
as that red-tailed hawk
hovering over the campus pond,

morning light filtering
through that rouged band of feathers,
all those years of friendship
spanning more than a half century

caught in the shutter click
of a single instant, which appears
to only clarify, as does the hawk's image
rising to the zenith of the day moon.

Allison Whittenberg

AA *(Artist Anonymous)*

Loud music filled the room, making it hard to hear anything else.

Pass the cappuccino.

I had another brain surge this morning—it wasn't a pretty feeling. Then it all started coming back to me in big red chunks.

I could feel it happening, damnit, and I got all whacked and surrealistic, reverting back to me from myself. Contemptible precariousness surfacing once more and, if I could, I would take a whip and chair out to my imagination and kill it—dead.

But the music of my voice moved through my ears mellifluously,
making my senses yield.

Hadn't I gone to this movie before?

It won't go away this satanic appendage, and I keep biting my hide, searching for metaphysical fleas.

The right side of my brain keeps hurting. Ghost pains?

A Bogus façade peels like sunburn.

And I do feel optimistic now and then (more then).

Is there no refuge where I might towel off, emotionally?

It's a fate worse than life.

Pass the cappuccino.

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FICTON & CREATIVE NONFICTION

Dave Barrett

A Compass Rose

(An excerpt from the novel *Executives of the World*)

When Jerry returned to the El Sombrero January of that year, Republic and the Inland Northwest was experiencing record snowfall (over 100 inches by the end of the season). The highways had been bone dry until the Greyhound he was riding reached Boise, Idaho. By the time the dirty dog reached the rolling hills of the Palouse south of Republic, big fat swirling flakes were falling out of a blackened sky, and it had taken five hours to travel the last 100 mile stretch from Pullman to Republic because of the blizzardy conditions.

Jerry realized just how dire conditions were when he observed three snowplows in the ditch on the outskirts of Republic.

"This your stop?" the driver asked as they pulled into the downtown Republic station.

"Is!" Jerry answered, shoving the quilted-flannel shirt he'd rolled up for a pillow back in his pack. "My old stomping grounds!"

The Greyhound depot was on the rough west side of Republic: next door to the Sunburst Tavern and two blocks away from the Union Gospel Mission. Half the brick buildings on this side of town were boarded up, awaiting the wrecking ball.

The driver—a large friendly man with close-cropped red hair and a Compass Rose tattoo on his right forearm—wished Jerry luck. The bus had been more or less empty of passengers from Boise to Republic. Jerry had sat in front with the driver, and they had talked about many topics, including climate change. Before Jerry left for Austin, Will had given him his dog-eared copy of Bill McKibben's THE END OF NATURE, and Jerry had tried to explain McKibben's idea that the increase of carbon in the atmosphere was altering

weather patterns around the globe, causing record snowfall and record drought the likes no one had seen before.

"Interesting notion, all right!" the driver had replied. "But all this white stuff seems to beg just the opposite, kid."

Jerry knew if Will were with them, he would have continued to argue back and explain McKibben's idea better. But Will wasn't there, and Jerry had simply let the matter slide.

He wished the driver well as he exited the bus and told him to stop by the El Sombrero sometime for a margarita.

"On the house!" Jerry said.

"I just might, kid. Thanks!" the driver beamed.

Ben was there to meet Jerry at the terminal. It was six in the morning, still dark, and the storm gave an otherworldliness to the scene so, years later, Jerry's impression of his father was as though he was in a dream. Ben was standing outside at the baggage claim in his black galoshes, a thick green parka, smoking his eternal Marlboro. (Jerry's earliest memory was of his father blowing cigarette smoke rings in the living room of their old place in South San Francisco.) Ben had often claimed "the coldest place on earth was the corner of Portage and Main in downtown Winnipeg"—his father's birthplace. And Jerry smiled inwardly at the notion that his dad was a living breathing personification of rough and tumble Winnipeg in every way imaginable.

"How goes it, dad?" Jerry said.

Ben just grinned, and then asked Jerry if he was hungry.

"I haven't had a bite since Pendleton, Oregon!"

After a breakfast of greasy eggs and bacon at the nearby Coach House diner, Jerry and Ben got into the ancient Chrysler Gran Fury and drove slowly through the snow thick downtown streets to the El Sombrero on the other end of town—Ben commenting that the piles of snow and medians tall as a man made him think of winters back in Winnipeg.

Jerry helped his father shovel the front walk of the El Sombrero and the rear lot behind the restaurant. Ben had recommended Jerry stay at the Ailing's house on the Republic Northside, but Jerry had

protested he wasn't "a kid anymore" and "needed the space" and would rather use the empty second story above the restaurant as his dwelling place. (Ben had been allowing Jerry and Will to use this space intermittently the last few years as they came and went from their travels.)

"Suit yourself!" Ben had replied. "But stop by if you need a shower or shave—and say hello to your old mother!"

"I will, dad!"

Ben crouched down in a boxer stance, feigned a left jab to his son's jaw, and then gave a real playful punch to Jerry's right shoulder after Jerry let his guard down.

"Never let your guard down, kid!" Ben said.

He gave a key to Jerry for the upstairs and told him if he lost it, he'd "break his neck."

Jerry promised he would not.

Somehow, someway, he never did.

Christopher Buckley

4 Benches, 14 Orange Trees

(Mahón, Menorca, 1994)

I'm watching the men on these 4 back–to-back slat benches, beneath 7 pairs of Valencia orange trees spaced so a green atmosphere infuses the 2 pedestrian streets joining to make the square in Mahon. It is instructive, and, to some degree reassuring—they've known each other since they could first sing out down these stone streets, though in truth they look as if they've always been old, as if they remember the Carthaginians and the Moors coming across the water. And listening to them I hear what could be a bit of both tongues spun in the choppy syntax and swallowed vowels—undercurrent of Old French, North African—Catalan cutting Spanish down to size. Their rhythms and repetitions make a music out of morning—4 or 5 crowding each bench, on the edge, facing 1 who stands to lecture commanding a rhetoric that appeals to clouds and who is supported by the fierce birds of his hands….

They have given up cigars, have listened darkly and at length, no doubt, to doctors, something the younger men here dismiss, lighting up in banks, bodegas, restaurants, buses, jewelry stores—at all times and everywhere asserting themselves in smoke and neglect as if life and death did not apply. Not these old ones. They are content now cherishing this little place to congregate, congratulate each other on the weather, a lack of wind, on continuing to breathe—comfortable in the citrus-scented hours. They did their work, that's done—hands thick as slabs of bacon tell you that.

And work, I think, is not the subject; they have moved to art—the democratic crafts of greeting, praising the day in 5 salutations. They love to stop someone and grasp both hands, pat the shoulder until the litany is complete. The same when one of them leaves for

his afternoon's soup and squid—waves and salutes sail across the square, "*deos*" for "*adios*" or half a dozen other ways to sing goodbye. They've paid the price of the fields or the sea in full so that they may indulge their notions of gentlemanly apparel: cardigans in green or brown, rayon dress shirts, ties in muted stripes, pressed flannel slacks with cuffs, beige or bark-colored caps. You'd swear each was doing well in business for himself on a small Main Street in Ohio in 1958.

And if an orange falls, they ignore it and go on gesturing to heaven or the empty sky, or empty heaven—go on filling the square with their half songs and agreements, proclaiming the dozen truths everyone should know having arrived at this station in life—evidenced by such sartorial splendor. A collective pride does not allow stooping to windfall fruit.

All morning they are here, doing nothing for as long as the air holds out, happy despite a good part of everything behind them, down that dust-worn road where daylight catches on the air and smudges out a bit of the blue, where once the heavy carts cut ruts across this flat tabletop of stone. They know that the road's end is out there—they hear the rag man with his cart coming and quickly close their shutters on the street and his calls, returning to the dim kitchen for another coffee, to the small courtyard where one canary is still singing for the sun.

At the end of these trees, a streetlamp is a white halo against the sky, but I'm not sitting beneath it working out the square root of wisdom nor have I arrived here in my comparative youth ready to help rebuild a land of handset crumbling walls. No, I go unnoticed in my jeans, and sport coat from the charity shop across the way. I could be any one of the locals not at work this day, or taking the 11:00 break for café and *ensaimades*, so casual is a business day anyway which pauses over 3 hours each afternoon.

I'm taking account of half of my life is all, grateful for the time to try and even out a stressful rhythm in my heart, grateful for all this air to breathe slowly, slowly, back and forth by the sea…the sky's

clean slate in front of me, the disinclination in the atmosphere to figure out final sums. I'm reminded of friends far to the west who still meet 40 years from childhood at the breakwater to fish where a line has no chance of reaching past the waves—talking, as they used to say, just to hear themselves talk. Mechanics, lawyers, bread truck drivers—all that's beside the point now. 20 years in academia and a bit late in the day I see there is no job important enough to ruin your heart for by middle age. To be happy now, I need only look 3 feet above my head to the fruit hanging half gold half green, or a little higher to the constant sun and keep breathing out as evenly. And this close to Spain, I want to see Murillo's "St. Francis in the Kitchen of the Angels" and know again what it takes to feed a soul on only mist and stone. I am trying to take a little lesson from these leaves blown both ways and coming back calmly to themselves.

* * *

But damn, Burt Lancaster has died! I leave the country once every 10 years and this is the kind of thing that happens. ZAM, just like that. I saw the headline in a Spanish movie tabloid only this morning, walking into town, outside the *Tienda de Noticias*: *BURT LANCASTER MUERTO*. Not a clue. He must have had some good years left? But who ever knows all the factors working against you—silent as air in an island cove no one is breathing? Look away for a minute and things go sailing over the edge.

How does it all add up? For example, the coats in the charity shop here in Mahon are the same ones found in Fresno or Philadelphia—world-wide someone's got his hand in it all, keeps an eye out, has distribution, contacts, business associates, knows who does tweed in Ireland, serge in Toledo, decides about the brown polyester pinstripe, the grey worsted with large red checks, the houndstooth, the gabardine, and how everyone without real money will have to sport these mild atrocities new and second-hand for the next 50 years.

So, who was taking care of business then when Burt went out? He never flinched. And lightning, fire, thunder, who ever grinned

that many teeth as completely in malice, knowledge, or reckless joy? And hell, Burt had religion to boot. To believe in the longevity of desire, you only had to hear him—in his 60s then—in *Atlantic City* reciting the ritual of Susan Sarandon's bathing, the rinsing of arms, breasts, and neck with soap flakes and lemon after her shift at the seafood bar. There are people who'd bury bodies under football stadiums for that kind of eloquence and beatific fervor. In *1900* he didn't hesitate 1 second to put his 2 bare feet squarely into that cow shit in the field to make the scene between the patron and the peasant girl work. With reason and patience, he taught a kid to cook garlic shrimp, a sparrow to have the fortitude of a prize fighter. On the beach in black & white he loved Deborah Kerr as no one ever would again. I even bought him in the bad westerns and war films which were all, in the 50s, Hollywood decided we would watch.

Who can we look to now to stick his chin squarely out at fate and duck its long left hook? Tom Cruise? There was Tony Quinn who had enough charisma in one hand to give a story life or a life a story by just raising that hand carefully to the sky, knowing what a dicey thing a soul can be. He had the power but not the glory according to the number crunchers, not the rating to land a leading role. Word was, he tried to get a film off the ground on his own—Tolstoy at the end where he finds religion, or rather *is* religion—starting his own church, going about the countryside on a train, his car turned into a chapel, coming to the window in the white tunic weighed down with gold thread, mystical until death, as the snowfall light spinning over the black firs. Burt began in film noir, in *The Killers*—he knew what was coming for him, but was clear, sure, calm, and always came back.

* * *

Looking around each day, I have to say there is still life ahead—ample perhaps, gregarious, or serene at a simple level, as these old and modest men in Mahon—all who have outlived Burt Lancaster—demonstrate, who do not need these lovely oranges from the trees of Valencia. If I put the pressure and ambition behind me, I could well make do with an orange for each pocket of my coat, a free, small

space to breathe, figuring I have maybe 40 years left if I retreat to the provinces, drink, and eat with moderation the fruits of the earth, thereby remaining on the earth.

Counting, that's what I've been doing. Obsessive, spinning like this globe, heart in a cage. Type-A, trying to read every schedule of the air get there first or finally. A pocket full of paper confetti, that's all—throw it into the wind, walk calmly down the streets, along the shore. And what was it that took Burt? Too much work, high/hard living, stroke or heart? Sure, all of the above. Star exploding, nova in the small galaxy of the cells, which, for all practical purposes is where all those stars are anyway. Flash. Then, against the dark, that nothing that every bit of worry finally amounts to, plays back—reel to reel—a life as you know it in time before the blind and seemingly unmarked distance dissolving beyond these trees.

Brad Gottschalk

Free Music

Every year on the summer solstice, my hometown holds a festival called Make Music Madison. Throughout the city, musicians play in outdoor venues big and small, in parks, up and down State Street, outside restaurants and coffee shops, and in yards and garages. All of the performances are free, and anyone is welcome to host, attend, and perform. It's a beautiful, DIY, inclusive endeavor. And while it's been years since I've been involved in anything remotely related to the music scene here, on each solstice, I make a point to clear the day and visit as many venues as I can. This year, though, an old friend of mine, Rick Weingarten, was bringing in some acts to play at his house, and he wanted my help for set up, crowd control, and stage management. According to Rick, I was a last resort; none of the other people he had asked to help were available. I was a bit hesitant, mainly because over the years our musical tastes have diverged, I wasn't sure I'd like the acts he'd bring in, and spending the afternoon there would limit the time I would have to wander the rest of the festival. But in the end, I agreed to help, because I think Make Music Madison is a tradition worth supporting, and unlike me, Rick still has a presence in the local music scene. Though he doesn't play anymore, at least in public, he has a show on WORT, the community radio station, where he hosts local musicians for interviews and live performances. He is, in fact, a bit of a local celebrity, and I had no doubt his back yard concert would draw a crowd.

June twenty-first was a beautiful day. You can never tell what you're going to get in Wisconsin in late spring, so we were all relieved. It had been cold and had rained almost every day the week prior to the solstice, but on the twenty-first, the sun came out, and the temperatures held in the mid-seventies through the whole day.

At eleven a.m., I made my way over to Rick's place. He lives in an old bungalow at the end of Spaight Street on the east side, two blocks from the lake and the mouth of the Yahara River. It's a beautiful house with brick and cedar siding, a gabled roof and square pillars flanking an enclosed porch. I parked and went straight to the back yard. The large rear deck that would serve as a stage was a recent addition. It had thick, square cut balusters painted white and maroon that were supposed to help it blend in with the house's art deco style, but it still looked out of place. Rick wasn't there—he'd gone to collect the chairs he'd rented, but Sandy was on the deck, setting up a PA system that one of the bands had lent to Rick for the event. While she connected the amp to the mixer, I ran the lines from the microphones and plugged them in. Then I collected the table from which we were going to hand out soft drinks from the kitchen, carried it outside, and set up in the back away from the deck.

The yard was shaded by a couple of maple trees and a pagoda dogwood. In one of the maples four crows were making a racket. A lot of people don't like crows, but I think they're fantastic—one of the most intelligent creatures on our planet. When I was younger and used to ruminate over such things, I thought that humans were born blank slates and had to learn to do everything through study and practice while animals behaved by instinct. Fledgling crows, though, live with their parents for five years, learning how to do things just as humans do. Crows make nearly three hundred sounds, each with its own meaning. They learn to do complicated tasks, use tools, and can remember individual human faces for eight years. I guess the point is that now I suspect the difference between human and animal intelligence is one of degree, not kind.

I was still watching them when Rick returned with a pickup truck full of chairs. I helped him unload and set them up in neat rows receding from the deck. Sandy and I brought out jars of iced tea and lemonade and set them out on the table. Rick went to the garage and returned with an easel and a large chalkboard with the day's program written on it in colored chalk, decorated with cartoons of guitars, people, and animals. He had nearly a full day of music planned—five

acts, each an hour, with a half hour break in between each one, starting at noon and going until seven. I read over the names of the bands; none of them meant anything to me until I got to the last one. Francis Pettis. When I read that name, I felt the ground fall out from under me. I may even have started as if I were dreaming of falling then suddenly awoke. Rick was on the deck, tapping the microphones. I fixed him with an angry look, and eventually he made eye contact then turned away quickly. He hadn't told me Francis would be playing. He must have guessed I wouldn't have agreed to help him out if I knew, and he was probably right.

When you get into your fifties, your history is a constant companion. In the mid 1980s, Rick, Francis, and I were in a punk band, the Splatterlines. At that time, the punk scene in Madison was fairly small, but growing fast, aided by a bar, O'Cayz Corral, that had opened in 1980. O'Cayz was a former country joint filled with wagon wheels, old barrels, and rough wood tables and chairs that lent a somewhat heavy-handed dose of irony to the atmosphere. It wasn't exactly CBGB, but it gave punk rock a Madison home. We were still in high school when it opened, but with some fake IDs, we got in pretty regularly to see bands like Honor Among Thieves and Big Black. Three years later, we opened for Jack of All Trades, though we didn't get paid. We kept the band going all through our college years, and though we never got beyond the clubs in Madison and Milwaukee, we collected a few fans and eventually did get paid, at least for some of our gigs.

Francis played guitar. He played chords I'd never heard before. Sometimes he used the old Townshend trick of leaving out the thirds, but he also had dissonances like Stravinsky—minor sixths and sevenths together, sevenths without the third, minor ninths, and they sounded big, like four guitars playing at once. His hand looked like a giant spider crawling over the fretboard. He never took a solo, most punks thought that would be selling out, but he could turn a chord progression into an event.

Rick played bass. He had a precision you don't hear in punk bands very often, and he and I could carry a whole song with only a

couple of chords from Francis, but he never showed off. I was lead singer. I could play guitar, too, but for some reason, I always got nervous playing in front of people. I had no trouble singing or bouncing around the stage like a monkey on uppers, but when I had my hands on my ax, I just froze. Our drummer was Mark Engle. He left town a few years after we all graduated, and I lost touch with him. If Rick is still in touch, he hasn't mentioned it.

You can't separate eighties punk from Reagan's America. Things seemed to be completely falling apart then, the whole country a post-industrial wasteland. Madison was not yet a wealthy city. Capitol Square was deserted on weekends, a bleak, windy no man's land, the main commercial areas looked run down, and empty shops stood empty for months. The union busting, the cold war turning hot in Central America, mutually assured destruction right around the corner, AIDS, our support of brutal dictatorships in the name of fighting communism, the economic sell off of middle America, apartheid in South Africa, and just the complete callous indifference to so much human suffering all felt so overwhelming, but at least we shook a fist at the whole mess, refusing to accept it.

We all stayed in Madison after we graduated, but we were all working full time, and it got harder and harder to get together to practice, especially for Francis, who was teaching high school and didn't have the energy for anything else. We managed to play a few times, but in less than a year, attrition dissolved the band.

Francis must have eventually gotten control of his job, because he's the only one of us still playing music. But for the last twenty years or so he's been doing that mopey singer- songwriter stuff. He plays fingerstyle now, won't touch an electric guitar, and shows off his technical skill whenever he has a chance. He never would have considered that with the Splatterlines. I wouldn't say he's not a good songwriter, but his stuff is generic, and when politics find their way into his work, it's always some whiny sentimental melancholy with no anger at all. In an interview on Rick's own show, he said what we played was noise, not music. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. I tried to stay in touch with him after the band fell apart, but

he made zero effort, and eventually I gave up. Years later, I was watching him at the High Noon Saloon with Rick. It was Rick's idea; I didn't want to go, but he offered to treat both cover and drinks. Halfway into the show, he called Rick and me up to the stage and introduced us as his bandmates from the Splatterlines. I realized then that he didn't really care about me at all, but he didn't mind using me to conjure up the cred that came with his punk history.

I had been looking forward to hanging out with Rick and Sandy. Unlike with Francis, we'd stayed pretty tight. I thought I might even be able to drag him along to see some other music after his venue shut down. If Francis had been first on the program, I just could have left for an hour and come back. I suppose I still could have done that, but the end of the program is generally when trouble happens, if it happens, and I wouldn't have been comfortable walking away for the last hour.

The first band was a bit too emo for my taste, though they had a couple of good songs. I don't understand what's going on with music today—it's all so bland and safe. If "Holiday in Cambodia" were released now, people would probably complain it was insensitive to Cambodians. The next two bands were roots music, what used to be called folk before folk meant a guy with a guitar singing about the rain. They were okay. I guess this kind of music is more appropriate for a backyard concert than the stuff we used to play. Right after the fourth act started, one of the microphones went dead. Rick and I got on stage and looked at it, but we couldn't figure out what was wrong. Rick found a replacement in his garage, but the delay put the band behind schedule. It was a live karaoke act; people from the audience got up and sang, and that at least was amusing, though their song choices were universally uninspired.

Finally, Francis took the stage. I asked Rick if he had any booze in the house. We weren't serving alcohol to the audience, just lemonade and iced tea, but I needed a drink. The door to the kitchen was behind Francis, on the deck, so I went around to the front of the house and walked through the living room, poured a bourbon, and sat at the kitchen table. From there, I could hear Francis singing:

Down the river valley
Where the water runs so deep
Ghosts of paddle steamers
Sing Laveau to sleep

I tried to remember being in a good mood at the start of the day. I helped myself to a second bourbon. Through the kitchen window, I could see his torso, the neck of the guitar, his gray hair in a ponytail falling down his Hawaiian shirt. Finally, Francis announced his last song. As it ended, I heard yelling from the yard. I set the glass on the table and walked out and around the house to the back. Some guy my age in a tie-dye t-shirt stood up in the middle of the audience, wobbling drunkenly and holding his fist in the air, screaming. A woman with him, also in tie-dye, stood up next to him, and she started screaming too.

"Play 'Rags to Riches!' Play 'Rags to Riches'!"

It was one of our songs. One Francis and I had written together. I couldn't believe he fucking remembered it, let alone would play it after spending an hour singing about lost loves and the moon. Francis had a crooked smile on his face. He plucked through a dissonant arpeggio and started singing. I hardly recognized the tune as it wilted under the folksy fingerpicking, its rough edges smoothed into a bland ballad.

I come from a town where the streetlights never shine
The steel shutters lock, and the useless sirens shrill
Now I've made my bones with the cannibal gourmets
I live in steel and glass in a tower on the hill

The first verse ended, and he went into a bluegrass style solo. It was clear he'd worked on this, or maybe the solo was lifted from another song. The two who had been yelling sat back down and seemed unlikely to cause any trouble. I drifted away from the chairs, went around to the front door and back into the house.

I wanted to leave, but I didn't want to leave the cleanup to Rick and Sandy. I did wait until everyone in the audience cleared out, though. But when I went back out to the yard, Francis was still

there. He walked up to me with the most idiotic, beatific smile I've ever seen. He actually held out his arms like he wanted to give me a bear hug. I just stared at him for a minute then shook my head. Francis sat down on one of the lawn chairs and folded his arms over his chest.

"Whatever you need to say to me, say it," he said.

"You're telling me you don't know?" Deliberate obtuseness was a specialty of his.

"There are so many possibilities," he said.

"I can't believe you played that song," I said.

"Why? It's just a song. And it was a request."

"You turned it into a joke. It sounded ridiculous, like some Jethro Tull wannabe."

"Oh, come on. What was I supposed to do?"

"You could have said you didn't remember it, you could've said it would sound like shit on an acoustic guitar, which is true, by the way."

"Jeremy... they were *fans*. They remember us. How often do you think someone asks me to play a Splatterlines song? Not more than once every other year."

"And you play them? I thought you said our stuff was noise, not music."

"I never said that."

"You said it on Rick's goddam radio show."

I waved at Rick to join us. He did, moving slowly.

"The last time you interviewed Francis, he said our band was noise, right?" I said.

Rick rolled his eyes. "I really don't remember."

"You also said you didn't want to talk about the band," I said.

"I do remember that," said Rick.

"I said that cause I didn't want us to be two old geezers reminiscing about the old days. The radio audience doesn't deserve that," said Francis.

"I don't know why you two can't just stay out of each other's way," said Rick.

Francis looked at the ground.

"Are you saying you never want me to play a Splatterlines song again?" he said. "I mean, we wrote a lot of them together. Legally, you could—"

"Legally?" I said. "Are you serious?"

"I get paid to do this, so I have to think about that kinda thing," said Francis.

"Whatever," I said.

"All right, all right," said Francis. "So... what?"

"I just don't want to have to hear them," I said. "And thanks for that, Rick."

"Yeah, you know, Jeremy, we can probably manage here," said Rick. "You can catch some more of the festival. I know you wanted to do that."

His expression was unreadable; I don't know if he was pissed off at me or if he felt guilty for putting me and Francis together in the thorns.

"I can give you a hand," Francis said to Rick.

I went out to the front of the house, walked over to Rutledge, and crossed the river to Yahara Place Park. A little brass band was packing up their instruments while a small crowd drifted away, scattering like dandelion seeds across the grass, glowing in the slanted evening light. The lake was dotted with kayaks and sailboats, and a dinner cruise was headed for the dock by Machinery Row. I sat down on an iron bench near the water's edge and waited for the day to end.

Daniel M. Jaffe

One Year After

"*Los muchachos acaban de llegar*," says Yilda, 77, into her cell phone. 'The boys just arrived.'

'The boys' refers to me—I'm turning 62 today—and Leo, her baby brother and my husband, who's 58. (I'm such a cradle robber.)

It's their sister, Irma, 69, on the phone, calling to say that she, her husband César, and their daughter Yil Enid will be late joining us for lunch at Yilda's in San Juan because the highway from their mountain city of Corozal is blocked off—all they know is that smoke's billowing from the U.S. federal prison on the side of the highway. Fire? Riot? Who can say? So often in Puerto Rico, there's no official explanation, or if one's declared, everyone's skeptical. Conjecture becomes rumor. Supposition becomes truth unless and until eye-witnessing confirms otherwise.

Whatever the reason, the highway's closed, so they're winding their way through Toa Alta's mountainous back roads. We don't worry because Yil Enid, in her 30's, is driving.

During the weeks after last year's Hurricane María, even though FEMA personnel and the U.S. military bemoaned the impossibility of conveying essential supplies to the island's isolated interior, Yil Enid regularly drove food parcels through back roads from coastal San Juan to her parents in Corozal up in the interior mountains.

As Yilda and Irma continue chatting on the phone in Spanish, which I understand moderately but by no means fluently, I think about being referred to as a muchacho now that I've finally achieved eligibility for Social Security. Now that I wear a bushy white beard to distract from the absence of hair on my head. Now that arthritis makes my fingers wince as I struggle to open a Tylenol bottle. "Los muchachos" feels as patronizing and disempowering here in San

Juan as it does back home in Santa Barbara where some women friends also refer to us as "the boys." Those same women friends who, with feminist consciousness, would vociferously object to being referred to as "the girls." Oh, well. I remind myself the term is a sign of affection both from those friends and from Leo's older sisters; affection must trump my macho ego.

We last visited Puerto Rico four years ago, after Leo's-Yilda's-Irma's brother (also named Leo) died from yet another heart attack. We've traveled here now to see for ourselves how my in-laws are faring a full year after the two devastating hurricanes of September 2017. Immediately after the first of those hurricanes hit, Yilda's husband, Georgie, died. Without the barest chance to recover from shock and grief, Yilda had to flee San Juan to Irma's safer home inland in Corozal so as to weather in relative safety the approaching Category 5 Hurricane María.

During the first weeks after Hurricane María struck, as we watched news coverage of the devastation, Leo kept sitting before our Santa Barbara television in shock of his own: "There's no greenery. I've never seen my island without greenery." His lush tropical island suddenly looked denuded, post-apocalyptic, the stripping of flora serving as metaphor for inconceivable loss.

On CNN, we watched repeated replays of San Juan's mayor, Carmen Yulín, begging for help because "We're dying here." People in shorts and t-shirts waded through rivers to reach food supplies, stood under broken hillside drainpipes to collect drinking water. Bed-ridden elderly huddled beneath soggy blankets as residual rain dripped from holes torn through their bedroom roofs. Reports of diabetics being unable to keep insulin refrigerated and of kidney patients unable to obtain dialysis, all because electricity was out everywhere. (Weeks later, Leo's oldest surviving aunt, a dialysis patient in her nineties, was flown to Atlanta for treatment, but did not survive the trip.)

At some point we saw CNN helicopter film footage taken over Corozal itself—could we figure out which was Irma's and César's

house? No, impossible. We simply saw torn-off rooftops, shredded buildings, rubble in some areas, solid buildings in others.

For weeks, Leo telephoned and sent emails several times a day, unable to get through. Had his sisters and their families survived? Did they have food and water? Were their houses still standing? Leo spent his nights stone-faced before the computer's internet screen where he scoured for any shred of news. He barely slept.

Finally, Yil Enid posted a cryptic message on Facebook: "We're okay." Leo practically clawed at the computer screen in an attempt to dig up details. Then a brief cell phone call from a San Juan nephew (one of Leo's late brother's sons) who, after much hunting, had found a still- functioning cell tower. Gradually, more Facebook posts from Yil Enid and others. Piecing shards together, we learned that this time, everyone had survived. Yet it would be months before Leo could hear his sisters' voices for himself and learn: Irma's house in Corozal stood undamaged; but after Hurricane María's two terrifying days had passed, and after sufficient debris had been cleared from the roads, Yilda insisted upon returning from Corozal to the house in San Juan she'd shared with Georgie for forty-fifty years. Besides, she needed finally to arrange for his cremation.

In ensuing months, Yilda refused Irma's invitation to return to Corozal to stay with them while San Juan's devastated infrastructure was being repaired. Yilda also refused our invitation to come stay with us in Santa Barbara. Instead, Yilda made essential repairs to her roof and windows, but ignored the torn-up pergola roof in the back yard. Nor did she address the mold that is still to this day eating away the wallpaper in her dining room, filling the entire house with a musty smell, the result of months in the wet tropics without electricity to run fans or air- conditioning.

She lived without electricity or running water for more than half a year. I whine if a neighborhood transformer blows and I lose an evening of TV entertainment, or if I have to wait a day for the plumber to come snake a drain before I can use a sink or toilet again. No electricity or running water for over half a year. From grief and despair, as well as from the island's initial, post-María food shortage,

petite Yilda lost twenty-two pounds. Her bones started showing through.

How Yilda yelped with joy, she's already told us, when the postman delivered our care package of dozens of otherwise unavailable batteries and a hand-crank radio with cell phone charging function. (Living in California fire and earthquake country, we know of such things.) Now Yilda could charge her cell phone and keep in touch with family, could listen to the radio, could use a flashlight at night in her two-story house where she'd been groping about in pitch-black darkness or with candles, alone for the first time in her life.

Leo and I knew all this before we arrived at Yilda's today. No need to speak of it again. Today's a joyful gathering.

As we wait for the rest of the family, Yilda hands us sweet green grape clusters in lacy- patterned green Depression glass sorbet cups. I mention that I've been collecting the same green-hued Depression glass, starting with a cookie jar and pitcher I inherited from my grandmother. In antique stores, I always look for matching pieces—I've acquired a cake plate and coffee cups and saucers. "Each set of pieces has a different pressed design."

"How I love when someone else collects like me," says Yilda in English. She attended Bryn Mawr over fifty-five years ago, made a customer service career with American Airlines, speaking English every day. "Okay, the green glass all gets Dan's name," she continues, meaning for after she dies. So, the subject is on her mind.

I tell her to stop being foolish, but at the same time I think how lovely it would be to add these beautiful pieces to my collection. Not for the sake of the collection, but as memory trigger of Yilda, of her affection. But still, the subject's morbid and makes me uncomfortable. "They'd break in shipping," I say dismissively.

"Not if they're packed well," she says. She's serious. I choose not to belabor the topic.

Yilda shows us her other green glass pieces in the glass-fronted, black-wood china cabinet, then reminds Leo that the cabinet had been custom-made for Leo's parents. As if he needs reminding. I see the memories in the moistness of his eyes, in the gentle caress of his

fingertips along the shiny waxed finish, in his silent melancholy smile when Yilda suggests shipping it to him "after."

Yilda takes our now-empty grape cups from the dining room, disappears into the kitchen, and before she reappears, Leo points at an ornately carved wooden box tucked into one of the china cabinet's niches. "Georgie?" he whispers.

Yilda, Irma, and Leo shared a father, Don Leo, but had three different mothers. Although raised in separate households, they identify as siblings, never use the word "half" in describing their relationship. Yilda's the eldest. Don Leo divorced Yilda's mother after he fell in love with his secretary. The new wife died giving birth to Irma. Don Leo was so distraught that he locked himself, eight-year-old Yilda, and Irma's mother's corpse in his marital bedroom for two days, not permitting Yilda to leave, allowing only food in. Finally, one of Don Leo's sisters convinced him to release Yilda, whose voice cracks and eyes tear up today as she tells us this story of that sixty-nine-year-old horror. I think of the parallel: Don Leo grieved beside a corpse while locked in his bedroom; Yilda grieved beside Georgie's ashes while confined in her house without electricity or running water. Lesson-examples from childhood can last a lifetime.

Yilda wipes her nose with a tissue, continues the story: after escaping her father's locked bedroom, eight-year-old Yilda realized that with all the grief and chaos, nobody was paying much attention to newborn Irma. Yilda went over to the crib and declared, "She's my baby." Yilda has shown her motherly love ever since. No wonder the two sisters are so close. No wonder, after Georgie died, Irma offered to build an apartment on her patio in Corozal for Yilda. No wonder Irma's daughter, Yil Enid, named after Yilda, served as Yilda's lifeline to the outer world after Hurricane María.

A couple years after the loss of Irma's mother, Don Leo married Doña Maruca, who then bore three sons, Leo being the baby. (It was the oldest son who died a few years ago. The middle son lives in Tampa.) Yilda tells how, when she was a girl, her mother instructed her always to show respect to Doña Maruca, her father's newest wife. In turn, Doña Maruca welcomed both Yilda and Irma into her

home as often as possible, emphasizing to her sons that the girls were their sisters. Familia.

Yilda shakes her head to clear it, smoothes the maroon tablecloth she's laid out on the dining room table, touches the dark-flowered placemats and fine white china with floral trim. "I love setting a table," she tells me.

Irma, César, and Yil Enid arrive. They bustle in carrying various bundles in plastic bags. After a round of hugs, they all walk straight through the kitchen and out to the back yard patio. I stand and call out eagerly through the open kitchen window, "¿Puedo ayudarlos?"—'Can I help you?'

An emphatic chorus of "¡No!"

I look at Leo, who's wearing a Cheshire cat sort of grin. He shrugs. I know they mean well, not wanting me to bother, but I'd feel a greater sense of belonging if they gave me something to do. If I were Leo's wife, rather than his husband, would they still be treating me with such formality after all these years? I tell myself to stop being so sensitive. Haven't they always shown me kindness?

Leo and I met in the summer of 1993, he a literature graduate student, me a lawyer-turned writer. In the summer of 1994, he brought me to Puerto Rico for the first time, introduced me to Doña Maruca as his "friend," the first one he ever brought home from Boston where he'd been studying for eight years by then. Unfortunately, Leo's father had died several years earlier, but I was able to meet Leo's now-late brother, who happened to be at Doña Maruca's house when we arrived. The sisters didn't make a point of coming by to meet me at that point—after all, I was just "a friend."

Doña Maruca offered such warm hospitality the week we stayed in her home. She even fixed me a labor-intensive, vegetarian serenata—serenade—of seven root vegetables, each requiring a different cooking time. She'd gone to the trouble because, knowing that I was Jewish, she wanted to be sure not to offend by serving the Puerto Rican staple of pork, nor did she wish to make me self-conscious by

asking whether I'd eat other meat. Her vegetarian meal was sensational, and when I requested seconds, she said in English, "So, you like it? That's good. That means I won't have to kill you."

We all shared a laugh, and I felt my first genuine pang of affection for this dear woman.

One afternoon during that visit, Leo needed to see some people in Old San Juan, so I spent a couple hours poking around the gem of a historical city on my own—cobblestone streets, pastel-colored stucco buildings with wooden balconies, humongous Spanish fortress walls restraining crashing waves. In my meanderings, I came across an artisan shop and bought Leo a small sculpture of the Three Wise Men. He'd explained to me their importance in Puerto Rico: just as the Three Wise Men represented different races, so today's Puerto Ricans descend from Africans, Europeans, and Taíno Indians. I presented him the gift later that evening, he showed Doña Maruca. She said to me, "So, you understand us." I think that was her moment of seeing me as more than just another gringo. Before I left, she gave me a favored Puerto Rican handicraft, a casita, a ceramic miniature representing a typical, Old San Juan housefront, replete with gauzy window curtain and beaded front fence. This memento stands on one of our living room bookcases to this day.

Doña Maruca visited Leo in Boston several times after that, and even though Leo and I were not yet living together, I spent much time with her. During her second visit, I hosted a dinner party for her in my condo across town. I invited several of our friends—three straight couples who naturally treated Leo and me as the couple we were. After that, Doña Maruca and I took to corresponding periodically, even sending each other holiday gifts, like a blue silk scarf I sent one Christmas. Did women in tropical Puerto Rico wear decorative scarfs? I figured that she could always just pin it over a shoulder on one of her tasteful dresses.

Leo and other gay Puerto Rican friends had always explained that family could accept a gay relationship as long as it wasn't labeled. But the moment it was defined, then the family would feel culturally compelled to perform Catholic disapproval and outrage.

So, Leo never offered his mother a label for my role in his life, and she never asked.

Nevertheless: at the beginning of her third visit, Leo picked her up at Boston's Logan Airport and drove her to his apartment in Somerville. As she was unpacking in a bedroom, I arrived, used my key, walked into Leo's apartment, and called from the doorway, "Hola, Doña Maruca!" Before even seeing me, she called back, "Dan, come here. I want to show you the new dress I bought!"

She wanted to show Leo's male "friend" a new dress? Ah. Clearly, she understood.

Just before New Year's 1997, Doña Maruca suffered a heart attack, complications, and surgeries. Leo flew down to be with her in the hospital. Once she seemed stable, he returned to Boston as his teaching quarter in his new professorial job was beginning. Soon after, she died. Leo returned for the funeral and told me that, for the viewing and burial, so as to cover all the surgery scars in her upper chest, they dressed her in the blue silk scarf I'd sent her. *Mi suegra*.

In 2001, Leo accepted a teaching position at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in both the Spanish and Theater departments. Soon after we moved, while I was at home alone, the phone rang, I picked up, and someone started speaking Spanish. Startled, I bumbled a Spanish explanation that Leo wasn't at home. The speaker switched to English. It was his sister, Yilda. The first time we'd ever spoken. I stated my name, wondering whether Doña Maruca had mentioned "Dan from Boston." Dan who was now answering Leo's phone in Santa Barbara. Should I label myself as Leo's "novio," 'boyfriend?' As his newly registered domestic partner under California law yes we're a legal couple now I'm sorry if that's a shock but you'll just have to deal with it?

Yilda didn't put me on the spot by asking who I was. Rather, she warmly engaged me in brief conversation, then closed with, "It's very nice to meet you. Very nice."

"Likewise, for sure."

A few years later, Leo and I returned to San Juan to see the production of an award- winning play he'd written. How proud I was.

One evening, he told me that some of his relatives, including Yilda, would be in the audience. Leo and I sat in the back of the auditorium. During intermission, he went up front to the row where his relatives were sitting, but I stayed in my seat. I watched him speak with a small older woman, point back at me. Yilda came over and introduced herself. She remembered our having spoken on the phone a couple years before. I emphasized how much I missed Doña Maruca and our correspondence. Yilda smiled, pressed my hand between both of hers.

Yes, everything was clear, and everything was fine.

After that, I visited San Juan a couple times more, visited with Yilda and Irma, celebrated a Thanksgiving with their now-late brother and his adult sons. After that, the late-brother's daughter, Gretchen, and her husband flew from their home in Florida to visit us in Santa Barbara. A year later, in August 2013, as Leo and I stepped out of the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, he telephoned Gretchen to announce that we'd just been legally married. Ever since Georgie died last year, Yilda and I've been corresponding via email.

Reflecting on all this strengthening of relationships over the years, I have to admit that today, sitting in Yilda's home, I'm a little surprised—no, I'm a little hurt—at being denied the chance to help Irma and the others set up on Yilda's back patio whatever they're setting up. After all these years, why are they now treating me like some guest, keeping me at arm's length?...By the way, given that the dining room table's already set, what are they fussing about on the patio?

Finally, they all march into the kitchen and declare that Leo and I should now step out to the patio.

Fine. Whatever.

My glance first takes in the back yard, as lush and green as ever with grass and shrubs, palms and even (I think) a leafy plantain tree. An instant later, I see: a Happy Birthday banner's been strung up between posts of Yilda's hurricane-broken pergola, with purple balloons, a purple tablecloth-covered table, plates of highly prized munchies—garlic-flavored plantain chips and crunchy *chicharrones* (pork rinds)—a bottle of César's famous moonshine, and a white-

frosted birthday cake topped with a unicorn candle ("it's all they had," Yil Enid will apologize in a few minutes). Beside the cake stands my birthday gift, a photograph taken a mere two days earlier when we all gathered at Irma and César's home in Corozal. Set in a beautiful wooden frame inlaid with copper wire curlicues and flowers, the photo is of the family, me included.

I oooh and aaah loudly, so they can all hear through the open kitchen window. Beaming broadly, Leo comments on every item.

The others come out, I go over to Irma, hug and thank her. She replies, "We do this for every family birthday."

A mix of joy...and private embarrassment at my prior doubts. Sitting under the torn-up pergola—broken slats still dangle down a year after the hurricanes—we snack on the munchies and Yilda's serenata de bacalao (a cold salt-cod salad with hard-boiled eggs, green pepper, and onion served with slices of toasted French bread). The women return to the kitchen to prepare the main course while Leo, César and I sit out on the patio. Apparently, traditional gender roles transcend culture and orientation.

César pulls yet another gift out of a bag, hands it to Leo. It's a hollowed out, half seed pod the size of a coconut that's been painted with a red-white-and-blue Puerto Rican flag and the name "Corozal, Puerto Rico." He explains that dozens of these were prepared in the months after Hurricane María as thank-you gifts for the men who finally restored the city's electricity. A historical memento from a grateful people.

César fills liqueur glasses with his almond-coconut moonshine. "¡*Qué rico*!" I exclaim, 'How delicious!'
"¡*Con calma*, Dan!" cautions Yilda through the kitchen window, a playfulness in her voice. "¡*Con calma*!"—'Go easy!'

Yes, the drink packs a wallop that I quickly feel as I hold out my glass for seconds. César proudly explains that he recently made several batches in various flavors from all different kinds of fruits in his tropical rainforest back yard. Plain almond, almond-coconut, mango, passion fruit, star fruit. He wants us to take a bottle back

home to Santa Barbara, is sorely disappointed when we explain airline regulations limiting carry-on liquids.

César is a salt of the earth, backwoodsy sort of guy. He is, in local parlance, a jíbaro, a mountain man from the island's interior. His accent is not urban standard: he substitutes "l" for "r," trills the double "r" at the back of the throat instead of in front against upper palate. I have great difficulty understanding his Spanish, yet I always know when any of his many anecdotes reaches its punchline because his face is so expressive with that huge smile and those wide glistening eyes. I laugh cheerfully at (hopefully) appropriate moments and he slaps my shoulder in camaraderie.

Irma comes out and sits beside him. He strokes her arm, brings her hand to his lips for a little kiss, gazes at her as if newly fallen in love. Irma will be having surgery in a few weeks, on a benign thyroid tumor that has left her exhausted. She laughs with everyone, hi-fives at jokes, even prepared us a huge meal the other day in Corozal. But she shuffles about slowly and sighs frequently, the way someone might after weeks of sleeplessness. The darkness under her eyes is more exaggerated than in the past. Is César fearful about her impending surgery?

Regardless, he regales us with stories about Hurricane María, tells how people in Corozal had to shower under waterfalls for months before municipal plumbing services were restored, how a seventy-five-foot tree fell onto his driveway. He gives a mischievous grin, so I know a good one's coming: he says that the Corozal authorities were quick at clearing streets of debris, but not at fixing the rash of potholes throughout the mountain city's narrow, snaking, two-lane roads. Barely able to contain his glee, he explains that one hoyo, pothole, in the middle of the road near his house was so huge he planted a plantain tree in it. "The city repaired that oyo right away!"

Irma joins the storytelling: fortunately, they have a well on their property, so, after Hurricane María knocked out the plumbing in town, they didn't lack for drinking water. In fact, César would haul water up for any neighbor who came by requesting. Finally, Irma and

Yil Enid had to badger him to stop: he's been on disability for years because of a back injury sustained at his job of hauling boxes at a Bacardí factory. From then on, neighbors would have to draw their own water from the well.

César proudly tells how he dreamt of lottery numbers a few years ago, played them the next day. They won him forty thousand dollars with which he bought a vacation house in the beach community of Yabucoa, on the island's eastern coast, the precise city where Hurricane María first made landfall. Although wooden houses nearby were damaged or destroyed, César's concrete house was not. "The next time you visit, we'll take you there."

Generous to a fault.

At that point it starts to drizzle. We grab everything from the table under the broken pergola and move inside. Drizzle turns to rain turns to deluge worthy of Noah. Torrential even by tropical standards. No one can believe this came out of nowhere.

Given that we're now in this year's hurricane season, I expect to witness PTSD-ish distress at the sudden downpour. But no. They think it's hilarious, and mock the local TV weatherman, who'd predicted a clear day.

Yilda points out white PVC drain spouts extending below the roofline and out horizontally away from the side of the house; they're gushing onto variegated croton plants. She says that during Hurricane Hugo, "maybe twenty years ago," her plumbing went out. She was still working back then, so she had to shower before leaving the house early. Ingenuity: she showered under one of the gushing PVC drain spouts. "My next-door neighbor, an old woman, I guess as old as I am now—" she shakes her head and rolls her eyes in an expression of can- you-believe-it? "—hung a sheet in front of her second-story window so no one from her house could see me showering." She shrugs at the normalcy of adapting, of neighbors caring for one another.

Time for lunch. We each take our dining table plate into the kitchen to help ourselves to fried minute steak with onions, white rice, *habichuelas* (beans) with squash, *amarillos* (ripe plantains) from

César's tree in Corozal sauteed in butter with a little cinnamon—amazingly sweet and soft.

The pounding of rain brings more Hurricane María stories. Yil Enid tells what happened with the major chain pharmacy that her husband, Alfredo, managed. "After the electricity and internet went out, the boss ordered Alfredo to stop filling prescriptions. They had all the medicines in stock, but couldn't record online what they were dispensing, so the boss wanted everything to stop." Alfredo suggested that they maintain a hand-written list until power was restored; then they could enter everything into the system later. His boss refused. At this point, Yil Enid's voice rises in anger: "Alfredo told his boss people could die without their medicines, and that he refused to have people's deaths on his conscience, so he'd continue filling prescriptions, and if his boss didn't like it, he could fire him." She gives a triumphant nod. "He still has his job."

Lots of complaints about local municipal authorities and the island government, San Juan's Mayor Carmen Yulín and Governor Rosselló both—political posturing, inadequacy, complacency, corruption. Blame of Washington—racist indifference.

But nobody speaks at the table about the loss of Yilda's Georgie. Time for birthday cake. Yil Enid lights the unicorn candle, I make a silent wish for my in-laws that I would like to share in writing here, but I refrain from doing so for fear that disclosure will prevent it from coming true. I blow out the candle, they sing "Happy Birthday" first in English, then in Spanish. I cut and pass around slices, we enjoy the spice-flavor of this, my newest favorite birthday cake ever.

We all clear the table, and as the women do the dishes (again with the gender roles), Leo pokes around looking at family photos in Yilda's sitting room. César and I sit and chat about the various medications we take. Yes, I've reached the age where comparing ailments and medications makes for genuinely interesting conversation. With hand gestures more than with Spanish, I describe my reflux pills, my cholesterol pills, my antihistamine. César takes out from his pocket a small pillbox, opens it, and explains in Spanish one pill after another. I understand nothing until he points to the last pill,

gets a devilish gleam in his eye, then makes a fist, bends his elbow, and pumps his forearm straight up toward the ceiling in universal gesture of erection.

I nearly choke with loud laughter. "¡César!" scolds Irma from the kitchen. "*¿Qué dijiste?*" — 'What did you just say?' César elbows me, giggling like an adolescent as I grab my stomach to hold in the guffaws. I'm laughing at the fun, at the surprise, and most of all, at the fact that this *jíbaro* has just shared a guy thing same as he would with any straight man friend. He doesn't regard me as different. He doesn't see me as any less of a man. He doesn't conceptualize me the way I always, through my own narrow-mindedness, assumed he must. I'm laughing from the joy of yet another form of acceptance in this family. I'm laughing at my own foolishness.

We lounge around some more, give advice to Yil Enid—she and Alfredo are planning their first trip to Spain. Leo and I have been, so had Yilda and Georgie. We disagree over which region's more interesting to concentrate in, Leo suggesting northern Barcelona and Catalunya, Yilda recalling adventures with Georgie in Madrid, I reminiscing about Andalusía with its Moorish-Jewish Córdoba, Sevilla, Granada.

We all realize that it's approaching 3:00 and the rain has suddenly let up. This is the cue to leave between raindrops, so to speak, and to avoid strangling rush-hour traffic. Our hotel's neighborhood of Condado will be congestion central, and Yil Enid, Irma, and César have a long drive back up to Corozal. We know all this, but we make more chitchat because we don't want the afternoon to end. No one states the obvious—this is the last time we'll see each other this visit.

Perhaps to delay the parting, Yilda takes Leo and me upstairs to Georgie's office where the bookshelves are lined with video cassettes and CD's. Leo collects CD's—maybe he'd like to take some of Georgie's as a memento?

As he pokes through them, I examine the photos on the bookshelves, pictures of Georgie and Yilda when young, when dating, when newly married. I suspect that everything stands just as he left

it. How often does Yilda come into this room? Did she have to weigh whether or not to bring us up here? Is this the first time this year that she's giving away something of Georgie's?

Leo gratefully takes three jazz CD's that'll fit easily in his carry-on luggage.

Back downstairs, with no more excuses for delay, we collectively hem and haw. I take my framed photo birthday gift and the commemorative Corozal seed pod, César takes his left- over bottle of moonshine, we all step out of the house into Yilda's metal-gated garage. She opens the yellow gate; we walk onto the wet driveway.

So far, everyone's maintaining typical good cheer. I have always been amazed at Puerto Rican resilience, at their ability to embrace life's joys in the shadow of sadness. We gringos might, at first, misinterpret this strength as a childlike failure to appreciate the gravity of suffering. *De lo contrario*: it's a technique of survival practiced through centuries of European invasion and American, of slavery, of peonage and crushing poverty, of demeaning colonial status that continues into the present day, leaving the island responsible for its own welfare but powerless to provide for it. The song lyrics, "smile though your heart is aching," come to mind.

Hugs all around. I feel like Dorothy saying her goodbyes in The Wizard of Oz. I want to show my affection, but don't wish to be maudlin. While embracing Irma, I thank her again for the birthday surprise. Her soft response, "Vuelva, Dan, Vuelva"—'Come back, Dan, come back,' breaks my heart.

Hugging Yilda is hardest. I wish we could convince her to return to California with us.

Leo puts on what I recognize to be his forced-cheerful face. "Remember," he says to Yilda while gesturing at both me and himself, "there's love here."

She nods and averts her eyes. I grit my teeth, maintain my smile. How Leo's jaw must be aching. In the car, before turning on the ignition, he says beneath his breath, "The difficulty in coming here is always the leaving." I reach over and squeeze his hand, but refrain from giving voice to what I know he's thinking: Will Irma's surgery

go well? By the time we next visit, how much will they have aged? Will they all still be...?

Yilda's jaw trembles. She's visibly struggling. Her face totally crumbles for the first time. She turns her head aside, wipes her eyes, busies herself with shutting the yellow metal garage gate. Then she props her chin on one of the gate's horizontal bars and stares out at us.

Our eyes meet. I grin and wink. She gives a little-girl wave. She mouths in English, "Goodbye, my boys." Leo turns on the ignition, backs us slowly out of the driveway. We wave once more, drive away. Trying to lighten the moment, I comment on the delicious lunch, the thoughtfulness of the birthday celebration. Leo nods, tells me that Yilda had always been the one to host the family, that today's the first time she's done so in the year since Georgie died. I say how wonderful that we could have been the catalyst.

Leo nods.

I recount César's hilarities, mention how touching it was for Yilda to part with three of Georgie's CD's.

Leo nods.

"And did you notice what Yilda mouthed to us in the driveway?" I ask. "'Goodbye, my boys'."

Leo nods again, gripping the steering wheel hard, focusing on the road.

"I guess we'll be her 'boys' well into our 90s," I say with a forced chuckle. And then, swallowing hard, I think to myself in Spanish, "*Ojalá*" — 'May it only be so.'

Richard Lutman

A Little of the Greek

No matter how hard seventeen-year-old Sue Barrett tried, Mr. Smith's phrase wouldn't leave her mind. "A little of the Greek. A little of the Greek. Everyone must be Greek once in their lives." She stood at the window of the ranch house, staring at the snow-covered prairie. It wasn't like the pictures of Greece she had seen in magazines. That Greece had been sunny, warm, and green, the place where civilization had been born. The prairie outside kept changing, threatening her.

Wind blew through the cracks around the window frames, prickling her skin. She backed away. At six o'clock she had to be back at her school for the Classical Club's annual Greek party.

"Oh, there you are," said her mother, poking her head into the room. "Your costume's ready. I've laid it on your bed."

Her mother wore heavy makeup, her once brown hair now a streaky blond. Her waitress uniform, a poor fit showed her thickening legs. Sue smelled her perfume and coughed several times.

"You're not getting sick, are you?" her mother asked. "It's your perfume," said Sue.

"Now look here," her mother said with annoyance.

"Let's not argue tonight, Mother, please. I don't feel like it." She turned away and headed down the hall to her bedroom.

"I told Mr. Lewis to give me an extra hour off today because my daughter's going to be in the Greek Party at the high school. And what do you do? Sometimes I wonder why I try to be a good mother at all. You're so hard to please. Could you hurry? I have to be back at the restaurant by nine to work the late shift."

Her mother took the costume from the bed and handed it to her. The costume was made of thin white cotton with flared sleeves. Sue

slipped out of her clothes and placed them neatly on a chair. She fastened the costume around her body with a gold belt just below her breasts and studied herself in the large, cracked mirror above the bureau. She wondered if this was what a Greek nymph was like as she stood in the hall of the gods.

"It's lovely," said Sue.

"At least I did something right," said her mother. "You'll be sure to win the prize for the best costume."

"So many others will have costumes, too," said Sue. "I won't stand a chance."

"Oh, yes you will." Her mother gave her a stern look. "You look just the Greek goddesses Alice and I saw in a book. Just like one. I only wish your father were alive to see you...."

Sue moved away from her mother and walked through the hallway her father's shape had filled four years ago. She held back the tears as she remembered his mangled body under the combine, and the smell of gasoline and whiskey.

"Stop for a moment, will you? her mother asked, reaching for her daughter's shoulder. "I want to take picture."

"I don't want my picture taken," said Sue, spinning about to release her mother's grip.

"Why not?"

"I just don't, that's all. Can't you understand that?" The flash left a yellow spot of light that pierced her brain. "I moved," said Sue.

"It won't come out." Her mother slammed the camera down. "Why can't you be nice for a change?"

"Maybe I don't want to be."

"You keep this up and see what happens." Her mother said with a touch of anger.

Sue's sister, Alice, stood quietly by the front door with their coats. Sue wondered how much she had heard.

"Do you like the way I sewed the hem, Sue?" asked Alice.

"Yes," she said. "You did a good job. It's beautiful."

Alice smiled. They slipped into their coats and headed outside to the pickup. When it cold like this Sue could still smell her father's

shaving lotion in the cab. She sat by a window, her sister next to her then stared at her mother as she headed the truck onto the highway started toward town**.** Her mother looked tired and worn out. A sharp pain of love made her almost cry. Why had she been so mean to her? Her mother never ceased to try and make a life for her and Alice. Perhaps it was her mixed emotions about tonight's party.

What would Mr. Smith do if she did win?

Silver fields and familiar half-lit farmhouses slid by the window. A cloud passed over the moon, blotting out the prairie. The radio dial smudged the darkness. Suddenly there were streetlights and dark windows.

Her mother turned a corner, and the school came into view.

"I'll see if I can't park close," she said. "It will be cold walking." the truck creaked to a stop against the irregular piles of plowed snow in the small schoolyard. They stepped out, snow squeaking beneath their feet.

"It must be zero," said her mother. "The snow only squeaks like this when it's zero or below. Your father thought it was funniest thing he'd ever heard."

Frigid air filled Sue's lungs, yet her body felt warm and safe in her costume. It was the same feeling she had when she was alone in bed, dreaming of a man like her father with hard muscles and clear penetrating brown eyes.

Glass doors reflected the night back to them. A silver light filled the outlines of Sue's footprints. Her sister made a funny face in the glass, then opened the door. Mr. Smith, her classics teacher, stood by the gym entrance, nodding greetings.

"Hello, Mrs. Barrett," said Mr. Smith. "It's a cold night."

"Yes, it is. Close to zero. The snow is squeaking."

"Three below last time I looked. Hello Sue. Have you brought your costume?"

She shook her head

"That's good. Not many of the others did. I made a few of the boys go back home for some sheets--for anything that could be used for the appropriate costumes. I don't think they'll be back, but I

can't do much about that now. I don't know what will happen to things tonight if no one cooperates. So many other schools have already abandoned their Classical Clubs."

"You'll still have the judging, won't you?" asked Mrs. Barrett. "I worked hard all week on Sue's costume. She looks like a Greek. Show him, Sue. Show him...."

Sue slowly unbuttoned her coat and gave it to Alice. A draft of wind from the open front door made her shiver. Her face burned as she felt the force of Mr. Smith's eyes. He turned away to greet another family.

"Yes, yes," he said to them. "We'll still have the judging. It's almost a tradition now. I can remember when the mayor himself was in it years ago--and he lost...."

Sue headed into the gym and the rustle of voices. The gym had been made to look like a Greek temple. Cardboard pillars stood in lines. Decorated wrestling mats covered the floor.

Students stood in loose groups, broken only by laughter or a small gesture. Three other students wore costumes. She felt the brassy taste of anxiety in her mouth. She wanted to go home away from Mr. Smith and the eyes of the other students that had her in their gaze. He had felt her knee once in the hallway, then rushed off. Her head had swum, and her heart raced.

"It's like a place I made your father take me to in Idaho," said her mother. "It was called the Parthenon. We had gone after some cows. They had Greek food, wine, and dancing girls. It was much too expensive for us, but we enjoyed it. I think we both got a little drunk...."

"Let's make our house like this," said Alice in an excited voice.

"Don't be silly," said Sue. "No one does that anymore. The Greeks have been dead for a long time now."

Her sister wandered off among the pillars.

"Are you all right?" her mother asked.

"Yes. I'm fine," said Sue forcing a smile.

"Are you sure? I can see it in your eyes. Are you sure it's nothing?"

"Yes," she said with a sharp tone to her voice. "I'm all right. We're meant to find a place on the floor and sit. Slaves will wait on us later." Her mother laughed.

"I bet they don't have a boss like Mr. Lewis telling them what to do all the time."

The fifth-grade teacher Mr. Hatcher and Mrs. Boyd the math teacher entered followed by Mr. Dickinson the music teacher. Each was dressed in the drooping folds of sheets, a crown of plastic vine leaves on their heads. Mr. Smith walked to the end of the mats and motioned Joan Thomas, a junior, to join them. She rose to her feet. Sue's mother nudged her, and she rose.

She remembered the smells of young grass that promised hope. She heard voices whispering. Eyes penetrated her blue and yellow body. Perspiration broke out over her lip, and she bit her tongue to keep from crying.

Peter Franklin, another junior rose, then Janie Myers a classmate of Sue. Mr. Smith started to circle the gym in time to the piano's notes. Somehow Sue's feet began to move. Faces blurred past her Then it was over, the piano silent. She stood above her mother, her body damp and weak.

"You were the best, Sue," said her with pride. "You just have to win. You looked more Greek than those girls in that place in Idaho. What would your father say?"

"I don't care what he'd think. He's dead. Don't you know that? She raised her voice. "Dead."

"Sue—"

"Dead. Just like you are. I hate you. I hate you."

Dozens of eyes bored into her. The front doors of the gym swung open, and a group of mothers entered with pizza and grape punch and set the boxes on a table with a large pot full of the punch. Mr. Smith huddled with the two teachers, then smiled. Sue felt a chill go down her back and looked away.

"I'm sorry that there wasn't a better participation," he said. "However, the judges have reached a decision. As chairman of the

Classical Department, it is my honor to present the prize for the best costume to Sue Barrett."

The applause sputtered as Sue rose, blushed, and looked out the large windows to the fields where she knew fires breathed red in farmhouse kitchens and stubble fields lay white in bristly patterns. Silos stood like blunt silver teeth against the deep, clear sky and the 8:10 whistling lonely across the drifted plains to Idaho.

Chital Mehta

The Mannequin

Venkat had turned twenty-six when he boarded a flight for the first time. It was also the first time he would be flying to another country. America. His dream country. It also meant that he would be leaving India, where he had lived all his life until he sat on the large, monstrous plane. His eyes were moist when the image of his aged parents filled his vision. Appa with his silvery hair and Amma with her hunched back. They shrank to the size of miniature ants as Venkat moved past the security area.

But there was also another image inside his head. His girlfriend, Renu and her plump- round breasts and her creamy thighs. He would miss all of her.

He was excited because he was flying to the land of dreams. Or maybe, the land of his dreams that included becoming a green card holder. But that was a long way off. He had just been offered his first overseas project from the software company where he had served as an offshore counterpart for five years, straight after college. The American clients had finally decided to bring him on board to Charlotte to work with him in real-time.

In India, everybody spoke about America as if the country was an alien planet, a place that can only be spoken about or watched in the movies. Only the chosen ones could fly there. The actors in the American movies were white skinned, they always ate cereal or drank black coffee, and they always kissed on the mouth just fifteen minutes into the movie.

At 20, Venkat had applied to American universities for his graduation. But Appa had Venkat sit down with him one evening for a talk. The old man's eyes were filled with sadness as if he were about to announce that his kidneys had failed and that he was dying.

"We don't have enough money for this. At the most, we'll need fifty to sixty lacs, Venky. Why don't you look for a college around in our city?"

And that's when he knew that he would have to wait for the gods to wave a magical wand. The gods that his parents prayed to each morning probably had heard about their son's only wish. Hanuman, Ganesha, Krishna, Lakshmi, and Saraswathi all must have agreed at one point.

When he announced that he would be earning in dollars, seventy times more than the Indian rupee, his parents were overjoyed. They did a quick temple tour before he was scheduled to fly. This was to ensure no evil spirits harmed him in the foreign land. Amma had even tied red and black holy threads on his wrists as she firmly believed that the threads would protect him from wicked glances and would keep him focused in life.

In Charlotte, he built a dull routine that never broke. In the evenings, he called Amma at 7-Charlotte time. By then, she had finished her morning coffee, splashed water on the front porch, made an elaborate design called Kolam. This was made by dabbing small amounts of rice powder with deft movements of her hands to make sure the lines were not too thick or not too thin. It was an everyday ritual performed by all women in Tamil Nadu to purify the threshold of their house. His mother also stored a practice notebook where she penciled complex Kolam designs which she sometimes shared with her neighbors. After this, she was usually staring at her phone, waiting for it to ring.

She wanted to know if he was eating well. She wanted to know that his cheeks had not shrunk. His meals consisted of the ready-to-eat instant meals, Indian snack packets from the local Patel brothers store, and flavored cereals. Back home, none of these things were a means of filling his stomach. Back home, Amma was up on her heels preparing fresh meals from scratch three times a day.

He missed Amma's *dosa* and her special tomato garlic chutney. But he didn't mention any of this to her for it would break her heart.

And you can't break a parent's heart when you are this far. It's brutal.

He wanted to sound happy to let her know that he was in a good place. "I like it here, Amma. It's a nice place. It's very green and the roads are always clean. There is hardly any traffic," said Venkat.

He couldn't tell her about the other good things like how you could buy alcohol easily from stores where you could step in to buy a crate of beer as if you were shopping for chocolates or apples. Or the fact that you could hold hands in public without having to worry about anybody staring at you. Or the fact that you could simply step outside without a bath which was unimaginable in India.

He shared a room in Camden apartments in south Charlotte with another Indian guy named Subbu. Venkat got along with Subbu immediately as they came from the same city and had a few common friends. They worked in the same office in the downtown area and they travelled together every day through the CATS bus service.

Work was okay but never too busy. In the evenings, they were usually free so they would hang out with other Indian friends, quickly forming a boys' group. Sometimes, they would meet up at either of their apartments and cook dinner together or simply flop in front of the television to watch Indian cricket matches as they sucked on bottles of whiskey or beer.

After a while, Venkat stopped feeling homesick and sounded cheery and chatty in his daily phone calls with Amma. But he still missed Renu who was all set to marry him in a few months. He had met her in college when they were just nineteen. They were classmates and saw each other every day for two years without saying so much as a word. In the third year, he proposed. And she said yes.

Before he left for the States, they had kissed for the first time. Renu had come to see him, dressed in a dazzling red *churidhar* that rounded her breasts and flaunted her slim waist. She was wearing too much lipstick, but Venkat didn't mind. They sat in his car for five minutes to talk when he pulled her closer to him and tasted her slimy tongue inside his mouth. It was not the perfect kiss because

they knew nothing about kissing. Still, it was the best thing. He placed his hand on her right breast, but she knocked it off instantly.

"You have to wait for more," she said, wiping his saliva off her mouth.

As he thought about her in his American apartment, he could still taste the red lipstick she had worn that day. It tasted like sweet cough syrup.

Their parents were aware of their relationship and had agreed that it would be a good idea for them to get married when he returned for Christmas vacation. They had spent endless hours chatting over the phone, excited by the prospects of their future wedding.

Fall had just started when Venkat received a phone call early in the morning. It was only five in Charlotte while life was buzzing with activity in India. She'd have to be heartless to call him at this ungodly hour.

"Renu," he said, in a sleepy tone, "It's still…."

"We have to cancel the wedding," said Renu, her voice breaking down into sobs. Venkat sat upright on his bed as he strained to hear further.

"Our parents have been fighting for everything. I don't think it will work out between our families. It's best that we move on."

"Fighting about what?"

"About the wedding customs. Your mother wants my parents to spend fifty-thousand rupees to buy me expensive saris that I will never wear. And this is just the beginning," she said as she rambled for a couple of hours about why she thought his mother was digging gold from her family.

Sure, she was right that there were problems. Indian weddings are dramatic. Love marriages come with an extra layer of theater. Their families belonged to different castes. He was an Iyer and she was a Iyengar. It was expected that there would be some problems. But he didn't believe that it was reason enough to cancel the wedding.

Later, through friends, he learned that she had found someone from her workplace and that she was already in a relationship with that person. His name was Karthik. Venkat recalled meeting him a couple of times when Renu had introduced him to her colleagues during a lunch party. He was tall and nicely built and was the same age as him. He couldn't believe how he had managed to steal his girlfriend. Then again, she had taken strides too.

Heartbroken over losing his Indian girlfriend, Venkat took to drinking. Not that he was a drinker, but he forced himself to listen to sad Tamil songs while he drank from a beer can. But the beer tasted bitter, so he switched to soda.

A few weeks later, Subbu announced that he was getting married. He moved out of the apartment because his wife was flying with him right after the wedding. Venkat scrambled to look for a roommate because paying $900 was a steep price for just one person. Most of the Indian guys in the neighborhood were either getting married or were moving to different locations. His best bet was to move to a place where somebody needed a roommate, but he wasn't ready to give up his room yet.

On the advice of a friend, he posted an ad on *Craigslist* asking for a person willing to share his two-bedroom apartment in South Charlotte for a price of $450. The following day, he received a message from someone with the username KS100 asking if he could move in the very next day. Venkat agreed instantly as it would be easier on his wallet to have someone share the rent.

He was sleepy when the doorbell buzzed. At the same time, Amma called on his phone to discuss if he would be willing to look at wedding proposals. She had sent him pictures of beautiful girls. Would he be kind enough to look and decide if wanted to spend his life with any of them? Amma clarified that all these girls were beautiful, talented, and belonged to rich families.

"Amma, now is not the right time for this. I am not looking to get married."

Venkat was in the middle of an argument with Amma as he peeped outside the window. A person was standing, wearing a black jacket and a hat.

"Must be the guy coming to move in. I have to go, Amma," he said, as he quickly put on a t-shirt and a pair of shorts.

He was surprised when he found a white woman standing in front of his door holding a small Samsonite suitcase in her hand.

"Hello, I am Katie," said the red-haired woman as she stepped inside.

He stared at her as if to be certain if she was a woman for real. He hadn't expected a woman to respond to his ad. He had merely assumed that only men would respond.

"Can I look at the room?" said Katie.

He was staring at her glossy hair that had turned into the color of beetroot after she stepped inside. She wore tight blue shorts that hugged her bottom with measured accuracy. She was dressed in a sleeveless t-shirt with a black bra underneath. Unlike Indian women who hid their bosom with a dupatta, he could clearly make out the shape of her breasts.

"Sure," he said, as he led her upstairs.

A few minutes later, after Katie glanced at the empty room that could contain nothing more than a twin bed and a night lamp, she said, "Alright, this looks good to me. I can't stand noise late in the night. Do you think you can handle that?"

Venkat nodded, still wrapping his head around the fact that he would be living with a female roommate.

Later, he learned ~~t~~hat she was a student at UNCC where she was studying for her master's degree in earth science. He had never heard about the course of study but assumed that it was something important only because he knew nothing about it.

"So why south Charlotte? Your University is in the north, right?" asked Venkat.

"I have friends around," said Katie, not bothering to explain further.

In the weeks that followed, they never bumped into each other. She usually left early in the morning and returned late after the wee hours, long after darkness had settled in. She hardly used the kitchen which meant that she ate outside most of the time. On weekends, she would carry craft beer into her room, play loud English pop, and watch Netflix shows.

Venkat wondered about her statement to remain noise-free in the night because she seemed to enjoy being noisy. Sometimes, he would find a bra or an underwear lying in the bathroom. In a few days, her stuff was all over the house.

A hairbrush. Nail polish. Hair removal cream. Once, he found a tube-like structure from the bathroom that confused him because he hadn't seen anything like that before. Later, from his Google cap research, he discovered that it was a tampon that women used during their period.

From the window, he watched the mailman depositing envelopes into the mailbox. Venkat threw away most of them that were addressed to him but were just credit-card offers. He kept one aside which belonged to Katie. Though he knew it was bad manners, he tore open the envelope to find her driving license. He peeked in to see her age and learned that she was four years older than him. He was 26 and she was 30.

His friends were appalled that he was living with a white woman. Some teased him, asking if he had seen her naked. He simply shrugged. He wouldn't be touching a white woman anytime. Besides, Katie seemed to be from a different planet. He doubted if she even remembered his face.

Come December, Charlotte turned cold, driving people to remain indoors. After the new year rolled in, a major storm broke out, affecting the south and the east coasts of the United States. The city of Charlotte that usually never snowed got its first share of snow in February 2014. Three to four inches. It wasn't much if you'd see what the north-eastern states got each winter. Still, it was enough to throw normal life out of gear. Most people were forced to stay put in their homes because their cars were not equipped with snow tires.

One night, when the temperature had dipped to less than the lower twenties, Katie knocked on his door. She was dressed in a sports bra and a pair of shorts, holding a beer can in her hand. She looked slightly dazed. Like she had just woken from sleep.

"Do you have whiskey?"

Venkat rarely drank whiskey given that he couldn't handle alcohol inside his system. He looked at the bottles of Mountain Dew and Sprite stacked in the corner. He wanted to hide them before she followed his gaze. Then he remembered that his friend, Ram had passed him a bottle when he moved to Chicago because he couldn't carry it along with him.

"Yes, I think I have some," said Venkat, as he grabbed a Johnnie Walker Scotch from his closet.

She smiled for the first time. "Would you like to join me?"

It would have been just a normal night had it not been for the alcohol. Everyone knows that alcohol makes you do things that you don't intend to do. Or maybe, it makes you do things that you always wanted to do but never had the nerve.

They were sitting on his bed, sipping whiskey, and watching a thriller series called 'The Killing' on Netflix when Venkat felt a hand running up on his thigh.

The next minute, their glasses were placed aside as they began to kiss each other hungrily while Netflix continued to air in the background. It was easy to see that this wasn't the first time Katie-had touched a man for she guided him expertly, allowing him to navigate to the contours of her body. It may have been her first time with a brown man, a fact she didn't seem to mind.

Venkat had no time to allow questions to elude him. He had missed being touched by a female. Exploring Katie's body felt like viewing himself being cast in an English movie that he had watched along with his friends as a teenager. They had always wondered how it would feel to kiss a white woman.

She let him unhook her bra so he could cup her breasts. He knelt and took a taste of her white breasts as he sucked in her dark nipples.

He let his hands travel between her legs and found that she had shaved the area around her vagina.

As they were kissing, Katie stopped him to ask if he had a condom.

"I don't," said Venkat. He had not bought a condom before as he never had been in a situation like this. Renu would have never allowed him to have sex before marriage, so it never occurred for him to carry one.

"I should have one I guess," she said, rummaging through her purse as he watched her naked frame in the dark.

When he fumbled with the condom, she took it from his hands and placed it expertly around his organ as if she were fixing a child's toy. He imagined her saying, there, let's play now.

"I can't believe you haven't had sex before," said Katie, as she resumed kissing him.

Inside his head, he recalled the times when his friends would talk at length, describing their sexual experiences with their girlfriends. There were friends who had even hired women just to experience what sex felt like. Now, as he felt Katie's body pushing against his, he realized that the stories he had heard were fake and empty compared to what he felt in the moment.

As he entered her, Venkat felt a thrill that he had never experienced before. They made love again sometime after midnight. This time, he felt more at ease as he knew what moves excited her the most.

For the next few days, it turned into a routine for them to sleep together. It was always Katie's move first. Sex occurred only if she was in the mood, and she seemed to be in mood every night. But after the sex, she was usually her old self. She never demanded anything else from him, but Venkat knew he was already falling for her.

One weekend, out of the ordinary, she invited him to Six Flags, a thrill amusement park. He was terrified of heights, so he considered refusing. But she had called him with a tone that made him feel like a puppy.

At Six Flags, she forced him to go along with her on all the wild rides. She loved these rides that churned your stomach juices and rolled your insides upside-down. He had never met a woman who was so much in control of what she loved and what she wanted. He had heard of American women making their own choices but watching Katie's exhilarated freedom made him yearn for her.

He was obsessed with her.

One day, after making love, Katie announced that she would be vacating the apartment soon. She said that as if she were merely changing her phone. She had found a part-job in San Francisco that would pay her $3000 a month, allowing her to manage her college expenses as well.

"But your university is here. How can you move to another city until you graduate?"

"Duh, don't you know about transferring credits? I can always continue my course from another college," she said, amused by Venkat's ignorance.

"Why SFO? Can't you find something in NC, instead?"

She laughed. "Dude, I am being hired as a research assistant that will pay me enough for the next two years. How does it matter if it's SFO or here?"

"It does matter to me," said Venkat, in a whisper.

"Really? You want to sulk now?"

"I love you, Katie."

This time Katie broke into a loud laugh that sounded like a sick dog barking. "Right, so now you want to marry me, is it? Please tell me you're joking."

"I want to marry you. And it's not a joke," he said believing every word.

Instead of answering, she simply threw him a pillow. He realized that she had never considered themselves to be a couple. She had wanted to sleep with him to feed her hormones. But sleeping with her had awakened a strange desire. A desire to become hers.

In a week, she had moved out of the apartment. She hugged him before leaving and behaved as if he had never confessed his love at

all. She made the parting easy and casual, never promising to see him again. Because she never would.

But life had come to stand-still for Venkat who still pined for her wet kiss. The first time he had his heart broken was at age 16 when he discovered that his crush was engaged to a family relative. At that age, heartbreak seemed like the end of the world. Like death was just a few steps away. And now, it seemed like a deep hollow vacuum.

Even breaking up from Renu didn't upset him as much as separating from Katie had hurt him.

Was it because they had slept together? Was it because she was the first woman he had lost his virginity to? That, or something about being in love.

It was all very confusing. In the coming weeks, he could smell Katie everywhere. In the shower, in the bed, in the air – a tingling baby-lotion kind of smell. Once in a while, he checked her Facebook timeline, but Katie wasn't active on social media so there was no way of knowing what was happening with her.

A couple of months later, his parents called him to talk about a girl they had chosen for him. The girl resided in Bangalore and had just graduated as an MBA student. She was just 23, too young but not too young for a marriage. Her aging father wanted her to get married before something unpleasant happened to him. Indian parents were terrified of the aging process mostly because they feared missing their offspring's weddings.

Amma sent him a picture through WhatsApp. The girl was dressed in a pink silk sari with a matching golden blouse. Her forehead was decorated with a sparkly *bindi* while her long black hair was tied behind into a long plait. She was everything his parents were looking for in someone he could spend his life with to keep the genes intact.

Things escalated quickly. Venkat flew down to Chennai for his wedding. He had already spoken with his fiancée a few times over skype before the big day arrived.

Lakshmi was dressed in a red striped sari with shiny golden borders. Her face was covered in make-up that made her look like a painted doll. He was dressed in a plain white full- sleeved shirt and white dhoti which was a customary attire for grooms during weddings. As the events proceeded, he tied the sacred yellow thread around her neck that bonded them to be husband and wife in eyes of society.

His parents were overjoyed, wishing the couple happiness but secretly hoping that they'd churn out a baby in the next nine months. For their honeymoon, they travelled to Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They held hands and strolled through clear water beaches and took hundreds of photographs. Venkat felt content and happy with the idea of spending life with a woman who was destined to be by his side and would never abandon him.

Soon after their arrival to America, he started going to his office leaving his newly wed wife to adapt to their new apartment in Charlotte. From work, he called her a couple of times every day to hear about how her day was going. Her answers were the usual – she had showered, prayed, and cooked their meals.

On weekends, she insisted that they go to the Hindu temple nearby. Though he wasn't deeply invested in religion, he seemed obliged to go along with his wife as she was a devout follower of Lord Hanuman.

Lakshmi played the role of a perfect wife. She cooked all her husband's favorite meals and was always eager for his praise -- like a dog that longed for its owner to rub and pat its back. She would wait for him in the evenings with a fresh lemonade or tea. This was accompanied by a fresh snack which was usually boiled peanuts or chickpeas, or a fried snack made from gram flour mixed with onion slices.

"You don't have to do this every day," he said, one evening, as he chewed on rice *murruku*, a crispy snack.

"I like it this way," she said, adding a few extra pieces to his plate.

She wore her silk saris for grocery shopping unlike most Indians who preferred wearing pants or skirts. Venkat didn't mind her attire,

but one day, when he stepped into the oil and spices aisle of a Harris Teeter supermarket, he watched a white woman staring at his wife as if she were a mannequin.

"Excuse me, pardon me please. What is this that you are wearing? I am just curious," said the woman, her eyes filled with wonder.

Lakshmi turned red and was about to burst into tears as she craned her neck in all directions, looking for her savior.

Venkat hopped beside her and spoke with the woman. "This is called a *sari*. It's an Indian attire."

"Oh, I see. Such wonderful colors. I have never seen this anywhere. Did you get this from India?" said the woman.

"Yes," said Venkat.

By now, Lakshmi had relaxed and was smiling along with the woman. The woman took a step further to feel the fabric of the material between her wrinkled fingers, gazing at the material as if it were a product of some historic era. She was dazzled by the mix of colors and shades and its length.

"This is beautiful. What is it called? I forgot to listen when you mentioned," said the woman.

"Sari. S-A-R-I," said Venkat, wishing that the woman would leave them alone.

"Sori," said the woman as she rolled the words inside her mouth.

He didn't bother to correct her. Instead, he smiled and moved down the aisle explaining that they had to shop for milk and fruits.

In the car, Lakshmi beamed with delight. "This is so good. I didn't know Americans were interested in saris. It must be boring for them to dress in pants and shirts all day."

Venkat threw her a look. "Why don't you wear jeans outside? You don't have to wear a sari everywhere we go."

"Why not? I bought a dozen of them from India. What shall I do with them?" said Lakshmi, her face scrunching with disappointment. Like she was asked to solve a dreadful puzzle.

"You can wear it on festive days. But for grocery shopping, you don't have to dress up so much."

"Okay."

She must have been schooled by her parents that for a married woman, it was a sign of pride to obey her husband. A disagreement would lead her nowhere.

They had not consummated their marriage. Venkat didn't feel the rush to have sex when she had first arrived. Though most arranged marriages were consummated in the first night after the wedding, he wondered if he should first know her better. But after a month of their arrival, one night, he rolled over from his side of the bed, gathering Lakshmi in his arms. She was sleeping like a kid with a gentle snore.

"Lakshmi, are you sleeping?"

He knew it was a stupid question but how else was he supposed to wake his wife for sex?

"Hmm. No. Sorry. Do you want something? Milk or water?" said Lakshmi, as she jolted herself awake, ready to take orders from him.

"Relax now, you're not a maid to do any of these things. If I need anything, I can get it myself."

"Okay," she said, appearing confused. She glanced at the bedside clock. It was 3 am.

He turned her face towards his and kissed her on the forehead. He kissed her on the lips, but she fumbled with them, not knowing if she should open her lips or keep them closed. He then ran his tongue on her neck and the back of her ears. She tasted like a salty cracker.

He could sense her shivering slightly. He thought that it was simply the cold or her hormones that were working up. He unzipped the Indian nightie that she was wearing, revealing a white bra underneath. As he proceeded further to unhook her bra and kiss her breasts, he could see her squeezing her eyes shut as she kept her fists tightly closed to the sides.

"Is something wrong? Are you scared?"

"No, nothing is wrong. I'll get used to it. You can do whatever it is that you want," said Lakshmi, as her voice shook somewhat. Like someone had held her with a knife across her throat.

More than the fear of being touched, she feared disappointing him. He had seen a flash of fear in her eyes. Venkat had heard stories about how marriages could fail if the husband wasn't satisfied in bed. Years ago, he had overheard a conversation where his mother had told his sister, Deepu, that it was important that she surrender in the bed, even if she was least interested. Apparently, that was rule number one.

"Lakshmi, I will not do anything that you don't like. You can tell me if this makes you uncomfortable," said Venkat as he zipped up her nightie and moved to his side of the bed.

"No, no, no. I am your wife. Why would I be uncomfortable around you? In a few days, I'll get used to it. This is just new to me."

He nodded but said nothing more. He switched off the lights and shut his eyes. She murmured something about sex being a means to keep the husband happy. And that she would do anything to keep him happy. And that she was sorry if she broke the rule.

"You should sleep. Now, don't worry so much about happiness," he said, as he patted her to sleep.

On a weekend, Venkat decided to splurge on a mini projector so they could watch movies on the ceiling. They picked a Tamil classic *Alaypayudhe* which was Lakshmi's favorite movie. It was a romantic drama that he had already watched at least ten times as a teenager. Still, he didn't mind watching it again as she appeared elated when he set it up.

As the movie started, he poured himself some wine. He had turned out to be good at drinking in the recent months. He picked a bottle of ale beer and offered it to her who was taken aback first.

"You know I have always wanted to try alcohol since college, but I never got the chance," she said, with a shy smile playing on her lips.

"Here you go. Give it a try," he said as he handed her the bottle to try.

Lakshmi hesitated before she went on to add. "I think I shouldn't."

"Why not?"

She smiled at first. This time it was a different kind of smile. Like she wanted to bury her face inside his chest.

"Amma told me that it was a good time to try for pregnancy in the next few months. And alcohol is not the right thing for my body at this point," said Lakshmi.

Venkat stared at her but said nothing. He gulped down his drink as if he were drinking water. He may have as well just poured water for himself after what she had just told him.

He watched her gazing at the images streaming. She laughed and chuckled at the right places as if she were watching it for the very first time. Venkat pulled his cell phone and opened the Facebook app. He searched for Katie's profile to check her activity. She had posted two pictures just last week.

In one picture, she was posing and pouting with a couple of girls. They were dressed in bathing suits. In another picture, she was posing with a white guy who was shirtless. She was touching his chest as she held a bottle in her hand. They looked delighted to be clicked.

He stared at the image for a long time.

"Oh, you must see this. The way Maddy proposes to Shalini is so sweet. It's the best scene," said Lakshmi as she nudged him to join her.

Venkat nodded and shut his phone. He turned his attention to the movie as he snuggled closer to his wife, temporarily erasing the thought of Katie out of his mind.

NOTES

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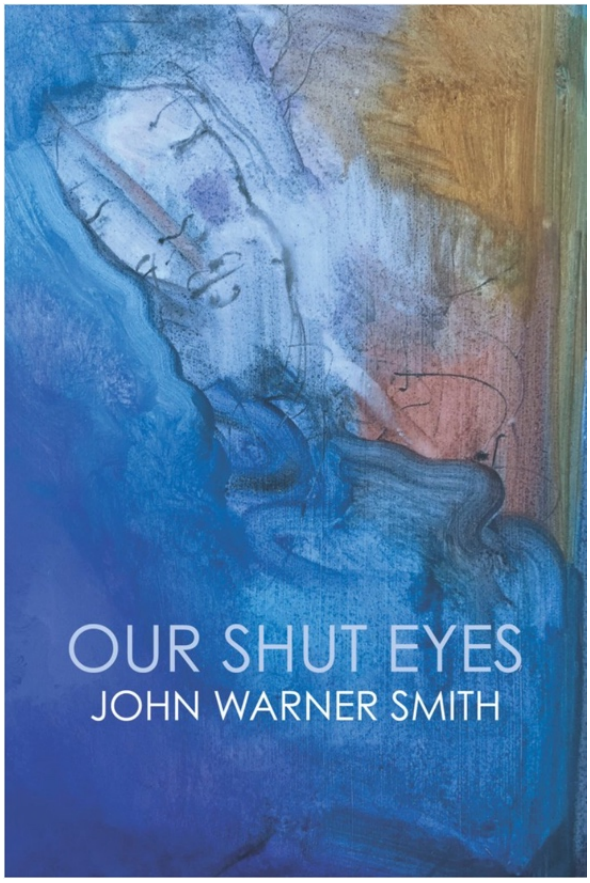

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Contributors

Ansie Baird has been published in *The Paris Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Quarterly*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *New Ohio Review*. *In Advance of All Parting* won the White Pine Press national poetry competition in 2009. *The Solace of Islands* was published by BlazeVOX Press in 2016. *Porch Watch* was published by The Foundling Press in May 2019.

Dave Barrett lives and writes out of Missoula, Montana. His fiction has appeared most recently in *Raconteur*, *New Reader Magazine*, *The Bark*, and *fresh.ink*. His novel, *Gone Alaska*, was recently published by Adelaide Books. His story, "Ashes" appears in the Spring 2021 issue of *The William and Mary Review*. He teaches writing at Missoula College and is at work on a new novel.

Christopher Buckley recent books of poetry are *Agnostic* (Lynx House Press, 2019) and *The Pre-Eternity of the World* (Stephen F. Austin State Univ. Press, 2021). He has recently edited: *The Long Embrace: Contemporary Poets on the Long Poems of Philip Levine* (Lynx House Press, 2020) and *Naming the Lost: The Fresno Poets—Interviews & Essays* (Stephen F. Austin State Univ. Press, 2021). His books of creative nonfiction are *Cruising State* (1994); *Sleep Walk* (2006), and *Holy Days of Obligation*, 2014.

Sarina Bosco is a chronic New Englander. Though first and foremost a poet, she has dabbled in flash fiction, with a piece recently winning the Bacopa Literary Review Short Short prize. Recent publications can be found in the *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Palaver*, and *Rascal*.

Stephen Campiglio founded and for twelve years directed the Mishi-maya-gat Spoken Word & Music Series at Manchester

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Michael Carrino is a retired English lecturer from the State University College at Plattsburgh, New York. He was co-founder and poetry editor of the University"s literary journal, *Saranac Review*. His publications include *Some Rescues*, (New Poets Series, Inc.) *Under This Combustible Sky*, (Mellen Poetry Press), *Café Sonata*, (Brown Pepper Press), *Autumn's Return to the Maple Pavilion* (Conestoga Press), *By Available Light* (Guernica Editions), *Always Close, Forever Careless* (Kelsay Books), and *Until I've Forgotten, Until I'm Stunned* (Kelsay Books), as well as individual poems in numerous journals and reviews.

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Mary Crow is a poet and translator who has won several fellowships, including one from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is also a three-time Fulbright scholar. For fourteen years, she served as Colorado's Poet Laureate.

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David Konitzer has been a writer and student of poetry, spending the last twenty years teaching a myriad amount of college English classes to an eclectic collection of individuals before recently retiring.

John Grey is an Australian poet and US resident. He recently published in *New World Writing*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Blood and Thunder*. Work upcoming is in *Hollins Critic*, *Redactions*, and *California Quarterly*.

Brad Gottschalk is a writer and cartoonist who has lived most of his life in Wisconsin. For the last decade, he has worked primarily in comics and has had drawings and comics published in journals such as *Raven Chronicles*, *Nerve House*, and *The Writing Disorder*. More recently, his fiction has appeared in *Floyd County Moonshine* and *Raven's Perch and* is forthcoming in *The Rockford Review* and *Caveat Lector*. You can see his work at www.silenttheatercomics.com.

Daniel M. Jaffe's many short stories and essays have been published in literary journals, and several have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His most recent short story collection, *Foreign Affairs*, was selected by *Kirkus Reviews* as one of the Best Indie Short Story Collections of 2020. Other books of his fiction have been finalists for various competitions. More can be found at www.DanielJaffe.com.

John Krumberger has published a volume of poems entitled *The Language of Rain and Wind* (Backwaters Press, 2008) and a chapbook, *In a Jar Somewhere* (Black Dirt Press, 1999). His latest

collection of poems is *Because Autumn* (Main Street Rag Press, 2016). He has a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Minnesota, works as a psychologist in private practice in St. Paul, MN, and lives with his wife in Minneapolis.

Richard Lutman has an MFA in Writing from Vermont College and is listed in the Directory of Poets and Writers. He has taught composition and literature courses at Rhode Island Community College, Fairfield University, The Learning Connection in Providence, Rhode Island, and short story classes as part of Coastal Carolina University's Lifelong Learning program. He has published over two dozen short stories, three chapbooks, two novellas and one nonfiction book. He was a 2008 Pushcart nominee in fiction and the recipient of national awards for his non-fiction, short stories and screenplays. His novella *Iron Butterfly* was short listed in the 2011 Santa Fe Writer's Project. His first novel was published in 2016. A collection of his stories published in January of 2019 was a finalist in the 2020 American Book Fest: Best Books

Katharyn Howd Machan, author of thirty-nine collections of poetry (most recently, in 2020, *A Slow Bottle of Wine*, winner of the Jessie Bryce Niles Chapbook Competition), has lived in Ithaca, NY, since 1975 and, now as a full professor, has taught Writing at Ithaca College since 1977. After many years of coordinating the Ithaca Community Poets and directing the national Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc., she was selected to be Tompkins County's first poet laureate. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, anthologies, textbooks, and stage productions, and she has edited three thematic anthologies, most recently, with Split Oak Press, a tribute collection celebrating the inspiration of Adrienne Rich. In 2018 FutureCycle Press published her *Selected Poems* and selected it as their Best Book of the Year.

Glen A. Mazis taught philosophy for decades at Penn State Harrisburg, retiring in 2020. His poetic publications include close to 90 poems in literary journals, including *Rosebud*, *The North American*

Review, *Sou'wester*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Willow Review*, *Atlanta Review, Reed Magazine*, and *Asheville Poetry Review*; the collection, *The River Bends in Time* (Anaphora Literary Press, 2012); a chapbook, *The Body Is a Dancing Star* (Orchard Street Press, 2020), and five books of philosophy.

Chital Mehta is a writer of color and an MFA graduate from Lindenwood University. She serves as a fiction editor for *Great Lakes Review* magazine. Her fiction is forthcoming in *LandLocked* magazine. She lives in Worcester, MA with her husband and children.

Greg Moglia, Ph.D., is a full- time poet writing about the foibles of mid-life dating, the challenge of aging parents, and the sweetness of lovers both old and new. His debut chapbook of poetry is *Lost but Making Good Time* (Finishing Line Press). His full book of poetry is *A Man is not Supposed to Give in to Tears* (Cyberwit Press). Among 360 journals, ten countries, and six anthologies, his work has appeared in the likes of *Peregrine*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Rattle*, *English Journal*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Tampa Review*. He is also a ten-times recipient of the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award from the *Patterson Literary Journal*.

Thomas R. Moore's fourth book of poems, *Red Stone Fragments,* was published in 2019. Readers can find his work represented in more than thirty literary journals. His work has been broadcast on *Writer's Almanac* and *American Life in Poetry*. His poem "How We Built Our House" won a Pushcart Prize and is included in the *2018 Best of the Small Presses Anthology*.

J. Tarwood has been a dishwasher, a community organizer, a medical archivist, a documentary film producer, an oral historian, and a teacher. Much of his life has been spent in East Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Currently living in China, he has published five books, T*he Cats in Zanzibar*, G*rand Detour, And for The Mouth A Flower, What The Waking See*, and *The Sublime Way*. He has always been an unlikely man in unlikely places.

Sharon Scholl is a retired professor of humanities who convenes a poetry critique group and maintains www.freeprint-music.com, which gives music free to small liberal churches. Her books include *Music and Culture* and *Death and the Humanities*. She has three poetry chapbooks, *Seasons*, *Unauthorized Biographies*, and *Summer's Child* available from Amazon.

Wally Swist's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), selected by Yusef Komunyakaa as co-winner in the 2011 Crab Orchard Series Open Poetry Contest, and *A Bird Who Seems to Know Me: Poems Regarding Birds & Nature* (Ex Ophidia Press, 2019), the winner of the 2018 Ex Ophidia Press Poetry Prize. Recent books of poetry include *The Bees of the Invisible* (2019) and *Evanescence: Selected Poems* (2020), both with Shanti Arts. He has also published collections of nonfiction, including *Singing for Nothing: Selected Nonfiction as Literary Memoir* (The Operating System, 2018), *On Beauty: Essays, Reviews, Fiction, and Plays* (Adelaide Books, 2018), and *A Writer's Statements on Beauty: New & Selected Essays & Reviews* (Adelaide Books, 2020).

Allison Whittenberg is a Philadelphia native who has a global perspective. If she wasn't an author, she'd be a private detective or a jazz singer. She loves reading about history and true crime. Her other novels include *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Maine*, *Life is Fine*, *Tutored*, and *The Sane Asylum*

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Sangam Literary Magazine currently uses **EQUITY** and **CONCOURSE**, serif and sans-serif typefaces designed by Matthew Butterick.

EQUITY finds its inspiration from the work of English typographer Stanley Morison, a typographic consultant to the Monotype Corporation, for which he oversaw the design of such household publishing typefaces as Baskerville, Bembo, Gill Sans, and Times New Roman, among others. Despite the ubiquity of these designs for commercial and personal print, Butterick created Equity from Morison's typeface Ehrhardt, a 1938 revival of the 17th-century type known as Janson.

CONCOURSE, for which *Sangam* uses for dedications, subheadings, and footnotes, finds its roots in W. A. Dwiggins's typeface Metro. Aside from Dwiggins being credited as the one to coin the term "graphic designer," he modeled his Metro typeface after the 1922 font Erbar, the first geometric sans serif typeface that inspired many types still in use today, such as Gill Sans and Futura. As Butterick notes, the charm of Metro, like all great geometric sans serifs, is its ability to be "historical" and yet "contemporary." It is Concourse that captures this essence of Metro but does so by imparting "versatility, warmth, [and] personality" to those that have the pleasure to witness its keen design.

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