Birmingham Arts Journal

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Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **ICE STUDY** Digital Photograph – Peter Schwartz
Peter Schwartz is a painter, poet, writer, and associate art editor for Mad Hatters' Review. *Hundreds of his paintings, poems, and stories have been published both online and in print. He lives in Augusta, ME.* **www.sitrahahra.com**

Back Cover: **GENOA** Collage on Board 12" x 9" – Jayme Barr Nobles
A Missouri native, Jayme Barr Nobles, studied art at San Francisco State University and the California College of Arts and Crafts. She lives to create in Clearwater, FL.
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AMBROSE

John Saul

Instinct told him: she wanted to hear the words *I love you*. There were the pauses as they stood face to face, the spaces for him to say it.

Alicia was wonderful, passionate; he felt immensely drawn to her. She could dance. That wonderful movement—jive, jitterbug, balboa, lindy hop. She had style, sparkle. She could transform an interior with delightful ideas. Art enchanted her. She mentioned Tracey Emin as if she lived next door, and Matisse was just down the road. Art, sculpture, design, gardens made Alicia shine. But in the mystery of relationships, he wasn't in love with her. He watched for the pauses, and tried to cut them short.

Throughout, the dog made with wire, looking faintly like basketwork—which he had decided to call Ambrose—stood by the floor-length window in the living-room. He felt attached to it—him. With his neat terrier frame—he *was* a frame—he looked young, untrammeled, expectant. His corralled energy and pert little tail exuded joy. Alicia was going to cover him with paper but was taking time on the project, the artwork, of Ambrose. Until then he would stand at the window, beside ice and rain, sun and darkness.

Looking at Ambrose he sensed a bond. Whatever befell this creature, this true being, he remained likeable, always friendly: in front of the Christmas tree, with his nose against the old television on its way to the recycling centre, beside the H&M shopping, the raging Hoover, the little cactus that came and went, the suitcases ready for the Mediterranean.

Ambrose was Alicia's but it was he who came up with the name. He liked him from the start (as he had the little yellow pig on the shelf, Aurelio; or Joey the black sheep made from pipe cleaners). Ambrose was bright optimism, a presence, though obviously a sideshow to whatever happened with her. And one day, he knew, Alicia would say that she loved him—and he had no reply ready. Whenever—on the radio, the TV—a little swing orchestra started up and she danced—so naturally, enchantingly—he felt closer to loving her. But too seldom did the radio or television oblige.

He began consulting Ambrose when there was talk of foxes in the neighbourhood. What do dogs make of foxes? he said, pointing out of the big window. What would you do faced by a fox, Ambrose, hm? Would

your heart race? What about rats? Then he consulted on whether, at night, windows were best left shut or open. Well? Not worth a growl, apparently. Another talk was on recycling, a topic begun when the rules changed and which bin to use got confusing. Ambrose seemed to say it would be all the same whatever was put where. He himself would not fit in any bin easily and had no intention of being discarded yet. He was young and fresh. He hadn't even been clothed in his fine paper.

Alicia then said it. Not in one of the pauses but in love-making. Loudly, clearly, shockingly. He was hit by a wave of guilt at not having the expected reply.

He took a good look at young wiry Ambrose that morning. He was undeniably dashing. With his tail up, in that pose of bright anticipation, *he* would have responded the way Alicia wanted. Covered with coloured paper, he would be even more responsive. All the same he was a dog, and had no need to speak. Not even a dog: he was wire, a stiffly knit nothing. Exactly what kind of creature was this? He knelt to examine the construction: four ends to the wire; two lengths had been used. There must have been drawings, instructions, and after a good deal of bending with pliers out came this dog.

What was going on between them? Did Ambrose, he wondered, have something he would like to have? The way he stood firm, weathering events? But how deep did that confidence go? If, one day, he was picked up and placed in a box with, say, some glasses and cushions, packed up for a new home, or consigned to a back room, or the garden, would he deal with the pressures? What if, one day, he went to a rubbish tip—would he still look strong and proud in the rain and the night?

Hands on her hips, Alicia wanted to know what he was doing lying on his side fondling Ambrose's ears. He got up, grinning. Alicia broke into tears. The guilt, now bursting, paralysed him. Don't touch me, she commanded. I'm going out. I'll deal with that dog when I'm back.

Snatching up empty shopping bags, she left.

No matter how many possibilities you foresee, he said lying back on the floor, what happens is never one of them. Hm, Ambrose? And is there ever a final scene, a clear-cut anything? On the contrary, Ambrose seemed to be saying, things only get better

Alicia returned with the paper—not the classic stripes he'd always imagined Ambrose clothed in, or handmade paper with gold stars, or anything geometric.

She brought a poster of a garden scene called Le Cannet: trees, houses, sea, crockery and glimpses of tablecloth, fish, hair and a clock on the wall, bits of cupboard, basket, railing, flag, bicycle, fruit, a wild jungle, in purples and blues, greens, reds and pinks. She cut into this with scissors and shaped it about the head and legs and tail. He thought she was about to tell him it was over. But—enchantingly as ever—she turned to him in a dance move, arms rock-n-rolling in the air. You won't be saying Hello, Ambrose any longer, she said. She kicked up the paper strewn on the floor. This is all Bonnard: the painter. And that's what I've decided to call him. Look at the flag on his nose. Don't say Ambrose, say bonjour. Say bonjour to Pierre.

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John Saul's short fiction has been widely published and recently his work was shortlisted for the international 2015 Seán Ó Faoláin prize for fiction. He resides in Suffolk, England. **www.johnsaul.co.uk**

"Sleeping is like being dead without the commitment."

-- Karen Quan

WASHED SECRETS

Erin Ashley

Acrylic on Canvas

30" x 30"

Erin Ashley is a self-taught artist whose pieces are informed by layers of chipped paint, rusted metals and old buildings "because they spark new ideas about color and texture." Her work has been widely published in home decor and art magazines. She lives in Florida. **www.erinashleyart.com**

I HAVE LIVED IN THIS

April Salzano

I have lived in this
bell jar of anxiety for four
decades, the upside down bowl of my life
riddled with holes, breathing-slots
to prevent a welcome suffocation.
I have been her kind, psychopathic mother,
his kind, claustrophobic father.
I cannot differentiate
the mark from the belt,
the word from the voice, one
forest for a thousand dead trees.
A clock ticks. A life mules on
without any discernible legacy,
except the passing of the torch,
fueled from the hottest fires of hell.

.....

April Salzano's work has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Award and has appeared in numerous journals. Her chapbook, The Girl of My Dreams*, is available from Dancing Girl Press and her collection,* Future Perfect*, is forthcoming from Pink Girl Ink. She serves as co-editor at* Kind of a Hurricane Press. **www.kindofahurricanepress.com**

THE TOKEN CLERK'S TALE

Steve Slavin

Long, long, long ago, before Brooklyn got hot, there was a guy named Rocco who found himself in quite a bind. First he got his girlfriend pregnant. Then he did the right thing and married her. At the time they were both freshmen at Brooklyn College. With a little help from their parents, they found a nice three-room apartment in Bensonhurst and Rocco managed to get a decently paying job as a subway token clerk.

But not long after Anthony was born, Dolores was pregnant again. "Don't you guys ever use protection?" asked her best friend, Rosalie. Evidently not. Four years later they had four kids, but somehow, they both managed to stay in Brooklyn College, move to a much larger apartment in Dolores' uncle's house on Bay Parkway, and, in Rocco's words, "put food on the table."

A bunch of us hung out in the cafeteria around noon every day. We had our own table but anybody was welcome to sit with us. While other students spent their breaks studying in the library we would sit around and bull. Although not exactly *cafeteria majors*, we'd tell people we were studying astronomy since we were taking up time and space.

It was amazing that Rocco and Dolores had the time, but it was probably their only chance to socialize. And they did have a great support system of babysitters, spearheaded by two doting Italian mothers, plus dozens of brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

But all was not well in paradise. One day, Rocco took me aside. I knew something was up when he used the indirect approach.

"You know where I work, right?"

"You work at the Park Place stop of the Franklin Avenue Shuttle."

"How do you remember that?"

"Because you mention it every day."

"So you know how much I hate my job."

"Rocco, another year, year and a half and you can quit. You and Dolores will have your teaching licenses. You'll be home free."

"I think they're gonna fire me."

"Aren't you past your probation period?"

"Yeah, but something happened."

"Seriously?"

"Look Harry, you know how I sometimes fool around a little on the side?"

"A *little?"*

"OK, whatever."

"Don't *tell* me!"

"No, Harry, it's not what you think."

"So *what* then?"

"*You* know."

"Well, maybe it's a *little* like what happened between you and Dolores?"

"*No*! Of course not! Listen, Harry, you're one of my oldest friends. I know I can count on you to keep this just between us."

"So what happened?"

"Well, every so often I get lucky. I mean, *think* about it! I see some good-looking chick who's buyin' tokens, and all she can see is my hands. So I gotta charm her with my winning personality."

"Don't you have a Plexiglass window?"

"No, the Shuttle will probably be the last line in the entire subway system to get them. It feels like you're inside a sardine can, except instead of fish, you're packed in there with thousands of subway tokens."

"Well at least you can study—I mean when you're not coming on to women."

"Very funny! Well, even though it's a pretty rough neighborhood, it's usually very quiet. And it's especially quiet on Sundays."

"So what happened?"

"Well I was just finishing my calculus homework when this bimbo walks over to the booth and starts chatting me up. And she was a real looker."

"Yeah?"

"I could see she was pretty hot tuh trot, so I took her into the ladies' room. And I left a pile of tokens where customers could take 'em. If they were honest enough, they'd even pay for 'em. I mean, it doesn't matter that much. Half the guys don't even bother to pay. They just jump over the turnstile."

"OK, so you're in the ladies' room with this woman."

"I'm reaching into my wallet for some protection and she tells me I don't need any. And get this: she says she's three months pregnant."

I just stood there with my mouth open. Rocco smiled and went on.

"*S___t,* Harry! I never had anything like this one. So we're really goin' at it, and then I heard this terrific racket outside. I figured they must be takin' apart the station."

"What *was* it?"

"Harry, would you believe it was a Girl Scout troop?"

"*They* were making all that noise?"

"No, not the little girls. It was the scout mistress – or whatever they're called."

"What was she doing?"

"She was this little old lady. And she was whacking the booth with her umbrella."

"*Why?*"

"She wanted service. She was in a rage. And when she saw me coming out of the ladies' room, she started screaming at me."

"Why?"

"Well first, she wanted to know why I was pulling up my pants. And then she wanted to know why I was in the ladies' room instead of the men's room."

"What did you say?"

"I told her the toilet in the men's room was out of order."

"Fast thinking, Rocco."

"But not fast enough!"

"Well, why not?"

"Because then the chick comes out of the ladies' room, and she's pulling on *her* clothes."

"*S___t!"*

"You're tellin' *me*!"

"So *then* what?"

"Well, I told the old lady that because I had inconvenienced her and her girls, they could ride for free."

"Was she OK with that?"

"Well, I went inside the booth and rang the buzzer opening the exit door. And all the girls marched through. But as the scout mistress went through, she waved her umbrella at me and said, 'Young man, you'll be hearing from *me!*'

"And did you?"

"I *think* so."

"What do you mean, you *think* so?"

"My supervisor and *his* boss are meeting with me this afternoon. He said they had gotten a letter from a passenger, and they wanted to get *my* side of the story before they took any official action."

"Rocco, I don't want to say that I *told* you so, but you've got to learn to keep your cock in your pants."

"*Tell* me about it! It's the story of my life."

The next day when I got to our table, Rocco and Dolores are already there, along with a bunch of our friends. He had his arm around her and they were both smiling. And then Dolores asked us to raise our drinks in a toast to Rocco.

After we toasted him, Dolores explained. It turns out that the scout mistress had been so taken by Rocco's kindness and ingenuity, that she wrote a glowing letter of commendation to the New York City Transit Authority.

"That's great!" we all agreed.

"But wait!" shouted Dolores. "There's more! On that same day, a second passenger wrote another letter of commendation. She was having a bad bout of morning sickness and Rocco was kind enough to unlock the ladies' room for her.

Rocco was named the New York City Transit Authority employee of the month. Millions of subway riders saw his smiling face taped to the windows of token booths. And at the awards ceremony, the commissioner observed that in just one afternoon Rocco had more social interaction with subway riders than most transit employees had in a lifetime.

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A recovering economics professor, Steve Slavin writes math and economics books in New York. His poetry and prose have appeared in dozens of literary magazines.
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RAINY DAY

Lisa Oestreich

Digital Photograph

Lisa Oestreich sought a career in photography but was discouraged by what she perceived as fierce competition in the field. She followed her other love, medicine, and is on staff at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Student Health Center. In her spare time, she pursues her passion of documenting light, form, and texture.

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FROM TEN-THOUSAND FEET

Richard Luftig

The Ohio below,
all oxbows, channels,
offshoots leading

nowhere. Inscapes
of furrowed fields.
Gray cumulus

or mountain cover;
from up here
one can never tell.

And then, always
without warning,
clouds break

reveal farms, towns
sliding in and out
like errant thoughts.

.....

Richard Luftig is a former professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio now residing in California, a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature, and a semi-finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award. His work has appeared in the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, Europe, Thailand, Hong Kong and India.
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WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SINS?

Noel Goodwin Hubbard

Excerpt from a novel

Everything stopped and it was hauntingly quiet around six o'clock in the morning in the rural and backwoods town of Dew Valley, Alabama, except for Cecil Caldwell calling his herd of six bellowing cattle to the barn for milking and a sampling of Cecil's homegrown corn. Cecil was good at raising cattle and farming and kept his family of nine fed with sheer determination and his aged and calloused hands. Farming didn't come without encumbrances for Cecil. Some say he was half-witted, but I was of the opinion that one couldn't be as productive as Cecil Caldwell if there wasn't something right going on in his strangely shaped head. You would notice quite shockingly that there was a large space between his two eyes and his forehead bulged noticeably. Cecil was nevertheless neat and tidy in his freshly-pressed denim overalls and blue chambray shirt. In a brief encounter he would not be thought of as odd immediately. Callie, Cecil's wife, saw to it that he was always spotless and presentable going to the fields every morning. It shouldn't have mattered at all, but Cecil was going to make his usual morning stop at Della Mae's Cafe for a cup or two of her black Luzianne coffee before sunup. Cecil prided himself on his neatness. It didn't concern anyone but Mama. “She said she smelled a rat!”

No need in pressing Cecil into conversation. He just wasn't talkative and that was respected by the morning crew stopping in at Della Mae's Cafe for her fried bacon, eggs, coffee and cat head biscuits. Cecil did engage in a brief converse with Della Mae. Mac Flannagin did too. It was well known that Mac was, and had been, pursuing Della Mae since he came to Dew Valley while working with the WPA. Mac Flannagin was secretive and arrogant and nobody liked him, especially Cecil Caldwell. Mac picked at Cecil and often made Cecil angry and combative.

Mama said that Cecil and all them kids wuz members of the Hepzibah Church of God and Cecil had received the Holy Ghost. The minister Rev. Dodd and the congregation touted Cecil as a good and righteous man. Rev. Dodd had talked that he was soon recommending Cecil to the church as his deacon. Mama didn't speak well of Cecil's wife Callie at all. She often said that she had observed Callie speaking harshly to her husband and to them youngins, too, who were polite as could be. Callie attended but was not a

member of The Church of God since she wore face paint and bobbed off her hair.

"Them kids of hisson are like little angels," Mama said. "Ain't never seen a one of ov 'em misbehave. Pray God they don't. Ain't no tellin' what that mean Callie would do. Probably beat the Hell out ov' em'," Mama said.

Cecil helped out at Della Mae's Cafe, chopping wood and totin' water when nothing would grow on his vast acreage. His hiring on with Della Mae helped to feed and clothe his hapless kids which was a blessing during the long, cold winter months. Della Mae seemed to know how to calm Cecil when he was stricken with one of his frequent fits of anger. Cecil hung around after work at Della's. Seemed that he was never in a hurry to go on home. Mac Flannagin, eating supper at the café, teased and taunted Cecil mercilessly. Some had said that Mac was green-eyed over Cecil hanging around Della Mae. After working his normal eight hours, Cecil was often in the kitchen washing dishes, cleaning pots and pans or chopping stove wood and bringing it inside. Mama, who worked part time for Della Mae, was curious about Cecil's commitment to Della.

"Ain't no need in him acting a fool about her when he oughta be at home with them youngins," Mama said.

Then it happened, Cecil caught Mac Flannagin outside with his back to him, walked up and cold-cocked him and left him lying on the ground. A diner leaving the cafe found him and helped him inside. Della Mae was livid and had a come-apart. She took Cecil aside and told him in no uncertain terms that she would not tolerate his behavior. Mama was so shocked that she cried when Della Mae confided in her.

"Trudy, I don't know how to handle this, Hon. Where did I go wrong? Trudy, Cecil Caldwell just told me that he wanted to leave his wife and kids and marry me. Oh Trudy, what a mess I'm in! All along I felt sorry for the man and only wanted to be of help to him and his family. I told him to leave and go to those kids and his wife where he belonged and that I could never be interested in a man with nine precious children.

“Well, honey, the man is crazy. I'm scared to death ov’ ‘im. He ain't saved and sanctified. Why they let him join the church beats me. I thought he had accepted the Lord, but Della, he ain't right in the head.”

“Best you tell ‘im not to hang around here no more, Della.”

Three days passed and Cecil didn't show up at the cafe. Mama and Della breathed a sigh of relief. Nothing could have shocked Della and Mama more. Mama tells the story teary-eyed to this day.

Right in the middle of testimony and healing service at the Dew Valley Church of God on the following Sunday morning, Mama and Della Mae stood to their feet in absolute horror.

The congregation had been on their knees in prayer when the folks were alerted to the squeaking front door of the church to observe Cecil Caldwell arriving alone late to Sunday morning service. Cecil's hands, face and denim overalls were covered in blood. The congregation fell back in a complete stupor. Some ran from the church. Many burst into tears. Young children ran to their mamas in fear. Cecil walked to the choir within a few feet of Mama and Della Mae. He faced Della Mae as calm as could be.

“Miss Della, ain't no excuse now for you not weddin' up with me. I done took care of the main problem. I ain't no longer got no wife and kids.” Della fell to the floor as white as a sheet. Mama's muscular and calm minister and his deacons attacked Cecil and knocked him to the floor where they restrained him until the sheriff arrived.

Cecil Caldwell, in restraints and handcuffed, flanked by two large deputies, left the church singing, “What can wash away my sins, Who will make me pure within? Nothing but the Blood of Jesus. Goodbye Della Mae, they is taking me away afore I can pledge to you my undying love.

“What can wash away my sins,” he sang with his head held high.

…….

After a stint in the U.S. Navy, Noel Hubbard traveled extensively for the floral industry and founded a library in his home town of Green Pond. He resides in McCalla, AL. His first novel was "A Seed from the Serpent" *which won the Pacific Book Award for fiction in 2014.* **noelwhubbard@bellsouth.net**

LIKE THE CANTALOUPE

Katarina Boudreaux

the store was overcrowded

but the table was close
to the doors

and the cantaloupe
overripe
but easy to cut as the
knife Frances left was
of good quality at least

my nose is not so fine
as to distinguish

sweetness

what's good to eat,
and I took the first
bite expecting glory

it was good

but the next bite
wasn't as refreshing
as the first

dirt had mixed in
on the knife
from the rind

the clerk shook
her head and
mentioned the
watermelon was better

already cut

and it was
like that cantaloupe
between us
.....

Katarina Boudreaux is a writer, musician, composer, tango dancer, and teacher—a shaper of word, sound, and mind. She returned to New Orleans after circuitous journeying. New work is forthcoming in HARK *and* YAY! LA.
www.katarinaboudreaux.com

"Everyone has talent; what is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark place where it leads."

–Erica Jong

WHAT I REMEMBER MOST ABOUT BROOKWOOD HOSPITAL

Tammy Smith Stathelson

It was springtime 1983 and I was outside of Brookwood Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, looking through a pile of rocks trying to find just the right one to present to my Grandfather. I finally found one that I thought was worthy. It was smooth, flat, and round. Using a black, permanent marker I wrote "Brookwood Hospital - Paw – 1983." For some reason I thought he needed a souvenir to remember his time there.

Paw had a heart attack earlier that year and was at Brookwood for quadruple bypass heart surgery. Over the past two months I had been awakened in the middle of the night twice to rush to see him for what I was told would probably be the last time. Now waiting to see him again, I was nervous and excited. I loved my Grandfather and could not imagine life without him. He was fun and funny. I still have that rock, but that is not what I remember most about Brookwood Hospital.

The waiting room was cool and bright. It had colorful abstract paintings on the walls. Brookwood, built in 1973, was more modern than what I was accustomed to. Hospitals had always seemed dark and forbidding to me, a place to die. This one, however, almost seemed cheerful with all the different colored walls and plants everywhere, but that is not what I remember most about Brookwood Hospital.

I went into the room with my rock, all smiles hoping to cheer Paw up. The room was larger than the one he had been in at the local hospital. The walls were painted a pretty yellow, not the dingy white I was accustomed to in hospitals, but that is not what I remember most about Brookwood Hospital.

It did not take me long to realize he didn't need my feeble attempt to cheer him up, he had his own way of doing that.

He had lost a lot of weight and his face looked sunken, but I realized that was because he wasn't wearing his false teeth. With a mischievous sparkle in

his eyes and a smile creeping across his face, toothless, he said "Tammy Lee, look out that window and tell me what you see!"

After that introduction I was almost afraid to look. I had no doubt there was nothing there to hurt me, but he was way too happy about the prospect of my looking and I was way too suspicious. I had fallen victim to his pranks before but I was so happy he was alive and smiling that I felt obliged to follow his command and tell him what I saw.

A statue of the Roman God Vulcan stood outside Paw's window. Vulcan is the god of iron and the city of Birmingham was established by and relied heavily on mining coal and limestone in the beginning. The statue, which stands 56 feet high, towers protectively over the city. To put it into perspective how big the sight that awaited my young eyes was, the Vulcan weighs 120,000 pounds. That is a lot of man. Unfortunately, he was facing away from Paw's window wearing only an apron that covered only one side and it wasn't the side I was looking at. I saw a huge, iron, naked backside. That is what I remember most about Brookwood Hospital.

I blushed. Paw broke out laughing. He was cheering himself up at my expense.

"That is disgusting!"

It only made him laugh harder. Once when I was very small I had asked Paw why the "All Jug Band" on Hee Haw was called the "All Jug Band." He laughed just as hard that day too. As a child, I made it a habit to rush over and cover his eyes when a bra commercial came on TV. I was a modest child. He had many opportunities to laugh at me.

The more I protested this horrendous sight the more he laughed which, looking back, had to be hard on him. They say laughter is the best medicine and I guess it is because every time he laughed he had to hold a pillow against his chest to keep from pulling his stitches out, but he kept laughing anyway. Finally I gave in and laughed too.

Everybody who came to see him was told the same thing I was and everybody looked at that big butt before leaving. Some were amused and some were disgusted like me, but all looked and Paw laughed every time.

Paw asked me if I wanted to get a closer view and visit Vulcan Park before going home.

"Noooo!"

I never did go to the park. Paw succumbed to his heart problems eleven years after his surgery and two years after that I moved to a little town called Moody near Birmingham. It was while I was there in 1999 that Vulcan got his make-over. He was removed and did not return until 2004 when he was fully restored to his former naked derriere glory.

I moved from Moody back to my piece of Paw's land sixteen years ago and I haven't seen the Vulcan since, but I will always remember the first time I saw him mooning all of Birmingham and Paw's hospital room.

My grandfather loved to laugh. He never got tired of telling people about the first time I saw the Vulcan statue. It always made him laugh and I hope wherever he is, it still does.

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Tammy Smith Stathelson, a resident of Beulah, Alabama, is an avid explorer of all things old and forgotten. Her hobby is visiting cemeteries where she finds peace and solace among the departed. She is currently enrolled in Antioch University Connected pursuing a degree in literature. **tammystathelson@aol.com**

BLOOD MOON

Jim Ferguson

After the eclipse we realized
The transit of the moon
Through Earth's shadow
—Though calculated with precision—
Could be occluded by vagaries
Such as the wisps of moisture
We call clouds.

.....

Jim Ferguson practices law and poetry in Birmingham, Alabama and recalls other lives and vocations on cool misty days. A frequent explorer of Reed Books and the Museum of Fond Memories, he tries to exercise restraint in commenting on social media but is not always successful. **ferguson.jamese@icloud.com**

SOLLIE CRACKS SOME EGGS & A COUPLE OF SMILES

Jim Reed

It is just Dad and me today, tooling around in his truck, looking for something fun to do.

My name is Sollie, and thanks for reading this story, copied just for you from my red velvet diary.

Today goes like this. Since I'm too young to drive, Dad gets to decide where we will go and where we will not go. Just between you and me, I know that I'm his favorite daughter, mainly because I am his only daughter. So, actually, Dad will take me just about anywhere I ask, unless it's too far away or too dangerous.

“Let's go to the Museum of Fond Memories and see what's there today!” I act more enthusiastic than I plan, because, even though I pretend to make a tough decision, the old book store is where I want to go all along.

Dad grins and turns the car toward Downtown. It's Saturday and I don't notice much traffic, so basically Dad has nothing to grumble about.

Now I'm rushing into the book shop, the Museum of Fond Memories, trying not to show too much excitement. But I am excited, even though I try to keep it to myself. I go down the aisle of the old store, speaking to Mister Reed, who owns it and who always smiles a big smile when he sees me. He and I have a secret. We can read each others' minds. We both love all these old books and toys and statues and strange objects. We can tell just by looking at each other.

Now I have arrived at my destination, an old metal tub filled with “doodads,” according to the sign. It's the doodads I love the most. I'm scraping away layers of key chains, bottle openers, marbles, small dolls, tiny shoes, billfolds, and all kinds of collecting kinds of stuff. The great thing about the tub is everything in here is fifty cents each! I know I can get an armful of loot for a few dollars.

Dad is wandering around, looking at an ancient book, examining an old bookend, reading the sleeve of a vinyl recording. Me, I'm just digging for loot.

Today, the old tub is different. Inside, among the toys and keepsakes, some large plastic colored eggs are scattered. Really. These are oversized eggs, and they have been sealed up so that you can't open them right there in the store. I pick one up and shake it, holding it close to my ear.

Something is inside. I grab another egg and shake it, and I notice that each egg feels differently, some heavier, some lighter, but all of them definitely filled with things ready to be taken home.

I have got to have these eggs.

I walk up to Dad, holding four eggs and grinning up at him. “Dad, this is what I want.”

Dad says, “That's it? That's all you want?”

“Yes, yes.” What I don't tell him is I want to take the eggs with me and open them in the truck, just to see what's inside.

I show Mister Reed the eggs. He charges me two dollars, raises an eyebrow, and says, “There is treasure in each egg. Are you ready for it?”

I nod and smile and wish him a good day.

Inside the truck, Dad helps me peel the tape off each egg. I begin to open them.

All kinds of surprises and prizes fall into my lap. A necklace. An earring. A polished rock. A bouncing ball. A toy soldier. A tiny baby shoe. A small wrench.

And so on.

I open all the eggs and start organizing the contents into Baggies. When I'm through, I look at Dad. He looks at me. Finally, he says, “Want to go get some more?”

I squeal and dash back into the shop, where Mister Reed seems to be expecting me.

“Glad you're back,” he says.

I start picking up more eggs to buy. Dad helps me. Pretty soon, we have decided to get them all, all seventeen of them. I know I won't be satisfied with less.

Mister Reed looks at me, fills a bag with my loot, and tells me to come back soon, that maybe, just maybe, there may be more treasure eggs by the time I return. Why do I have the feeling that he packed these eggs just for me?

Dad and I sit in the truck until all the eggs are emptied and their contents sorted.

I look at Dad. "How will Mister Reed be able to sell me more eggs if I've bought them all?"

Dad frowns, thinks, says, "Why don't we give him the egg shells?"

Sometimes dads have great ideas.

Mister Reed and I stare at each other for a second while I return the eggs. We don't have to say anything because, as I said in my red velvet diary, he and I can read each others' minds.

"I'll be back," I yell to him as I head for the door.

"I know, I know," Mister Reed says, as he starts helping another customer at the Museum of Fond Memories

.....

Jim Reed is editor of Birmingham Arts Journal. His blogs and podcasts can be found at **www.redclaydiary.com**

"Maybe creating itself is all the fun the universe gets."

–Don Marquis

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A COUNTRY ROAD

Irene Latham

- after "The Road" by Edgar Degas

Unpaved, crooked.
Halfway hidden,
yet known by a dozen
different names.
For the barefooted,
for snakes and rabbits.
A place for those
who can't sing,
to sing.
Sometimes muddy,
sometimes dusty.
No one knows
where it's going:
maybe to a lake,
over a mountain,
into a cave.
It says, *come.*
Walk a while with me.

.....

Irene Latham is a poet and novelist from Birmingham, AL. Her latest book of poems for adults The Sky Between Us *features poems that explore what we can learn from nature about being human.* **www.irenelatham.com**

THE SKY IS LOW

Digital Photograph

Gordan Cosic

Gordan Cosic was born in Cacak, Serbia, in 1956. In 1975, he finished school for graphic design and since 1976 works as a graphic designer in Užice, Serbia. Cosic is the winner of the RK SSO "Daring Flower" competition for creativity. In addition to graphic design, he is engaged in painting and photography. **gordancosic5@gmail.com**

SUNBURN

Ian Artis

"You're going to burn," the black boy said.

He said it with a satisfaction that disappointed him, but didn't surprise him.

"Maybe," the white boy said, and it was true, but also, he was already a little burned, since their English class had been sitting outside in the sun for a half an hour now. The sun drenched the fair-skinned boy in a halo of light so that the black boy could not look away. He was reddening under the glare, that delicious apple red that only comes from a lack of sunscreen, and the black boy was satisfied.

"Burn," the black boy said, a prayer and a request on his full lips. "You're going to burn," and he looked at the white boys' arms. They were folded in his crossed legs, but he put them out behind him so that he was leaning on them.

"Yeah," the fair-skinned one breathed, ignoring his professor waxing on about political poetry, (something about *Howl* and Ginsberg), "I burn so easily," and with that, the white boy trained his eyes on his darker counterpart, who suddenly became aware of himself.

"Yeah," the dark one said and watched as the white one squeezed his eyes shut and turned his face to the sun, the upturned nose so eager for the sunlight, so welcoming it in lieu of fluorescents, so inviting to the possibility of sunburn. His lips were slightly parted and there was a line of saliva connecting the two, and the dark boy wondered what the white boy ate for lunch, what he would have for dinner, and why his relationship with that blond girl ended last semester without much fanfare. The class was enraptured by the professor's words but the dark boy had a fixture and he was fixed. He reached out and touched the white boy's sunburned arm, trailing two fingers, index and middle, from the shapely bicep down past the elbow and to the forearm, freckled and hairy. He trailed the fingers down past the sensitive new burn being worsened by the continual exposure, but gently, like a song at a funeral, and watched as the white boy responded to the touch: he leaned his head back and relaxed his squeezed-shut eyes and parted his lips wider and exhaled deeply, a sigh giving wordless permission.

The black boy pulled his fingers away and saw that they were wet with sweat, and he licked his fingers thoughtfully and tasted the saltiness of the boy sitting next to him.

"Why don't you burn?" the white boy asked carefully.

"What?" the black boy responded.

"Why don't black people get sunburns? Like, what's the scientific reason?" he asked again.

"Oh," the dark one said, "We can. It just takes longer, and it doesn't happen often," he replied.

"Why did you touch my arm?" he whispered. The professor was on to them and their side conversation. They had to be quiet now, speak covertly. His eyes were open and trained on the black boy.

"Because I've never felt that before," he said. He returned his stare.

"What?"

"Sunburn."

The white boy again turned and closed his eyes, refolded his legs and stared up to the sun, and the black boy once again looked at him and the halo of light that so artfully framed his high cheekbones and tanned skin and eyes that were the freshest variants of green and brown. The black boy wondered at the mystery of sunburns. He marveled at the pain that something as incredible as the sun could give, yet not to him, not thus far in his life. The sun, like spaces of trembling pleasure and heady rush come barreling from a river, was selfish and sadistic. He, too, turned his face up to the sky, and at that moment, a stiffness as tight as a sheepskin drum tugged the two of them together in a universe they didn't live in, and at each parallel life they occupied they collapsed into their favorite heaps of fever-hot daydreams. But for now, they sat wordlessly and wondered about each other, thinking of false nostalgia. So they sat, and enjoyed the feeling of the sun and the sunburn and the professor droning on and their classmates aiming cluelessly for the theme of poetic language.

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Ian Artis is a senior English literature major at Wabash College, where he studies literary theory and gender studies. He was born in New York, but lives in Alabama, where he enjoys fishing, cooking, and finding creative ways to beat the summer heat. He will attend law school next fall. **ianartis69@gmail.com**

DAD

Mike Treadwell

There's a chair in his garden now
Half way down the row
After forty years of planting there
He must rest at each half-row

His body frail from life's long years
Yet his garden still knows his hoe
The seed in lines from end to end
Dare not refuse to grow

But short green sprigs in early spring
Become tall dry stalks by fall
Measuring life in seasons too
Now Dad has seen them all

His chair and hoe soon put away
But I'll still see him there
Resting half way down a garden row
In that rusted old folding chair

.....

Mike Treadwell believes everyone has a few poems in their heart, but not everyone is inclined to express them in writing. He doesn't claim to be a poet, or even aspire to be one, only a translator, coaxing a faint emotion or feeling into the written word.

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MY LAST DAY WITH OLLIE NOONAN: A COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHER'S REMEMBRANCE

Bill Crawford

I finally reconnected with Ollie Noonan, Jr., after 45 years. He is on Campobello Island now, near his family's home, not at Fenway Park where we planned to meet. His gravesite is hard by the Bay of Fundy where some of the world's biggest tides provide a striking contrast to the rugged jungle terrain of Hill 445, Landing Zone West, where we met.

I last saw Ollie in 1969, when we spent a long day together interviewing and photographing exhausted grunts as they battled an overpowering North Vietnamese division. The temperature was an unholy 120 degrees, and the strong stench of death poisoned the air in the Hiep Duc Valley, Republic of Vietnam.

Ollie and I bonded instantly because of rock 'n roll and sports. We planned our day's itinerary as the Coasters' "Yackety Yak" pounded out of my tiny transistor radio. I sang along like crazy to calm my combat nerves. Ollie sang harmony, pausing just long enough to remove his smoldering cigarette from his moustache-framed lips. He cut a striking figure at 29: tall and handsome in his jungle fatigues.

We talked furiously about the Celtics and the Red Sox. Ollie took mesmerizing photos of Bill Russell dueling with Wilt Chamberlain in the Boston Garden. I wouldn't see them until decades later on the Internet. We made a solid plan to meet back in the world after the war to go to Fenway Park. He knew of a good neighborhood bar that served steamed clams—my favorite.

Ollie even took up the thankless job of trying to make me a better photographer. I lied during my job interview when my Sergeant Major asked me if I could shoot photos. I had plenty of writing experience from my college newspaper days, but I didn't know jack about cameras. My assignment abruptly changed from rifleman to photo journalist in the same battalion.

I learned on the job and Ollie pushed me along the learning curve. I realized later he was just paying forward a family debt he owed his father who taught him photography at an early age.

Ollie's dad, Ollie, Sr., was a respected Boston newspaper photographer. He took iconic photos such as the doomed *Andrea Doria*

foundering in "Times Square" off Nantucket in 1956. Ollie and his dad eventually worked briefly for rival newspapers.

Ollie, Jr., quickly made a name for himself by shooting well known photos of the Kennedys, Boston sports figures, the Beatles, and Martin Luther King, Jr. He was president of his press photographers association and he paid his own way to the 'Nam.

Noonan came to the war zone to experience every photo journalist's dream: combat. Later his dad would say he went "in search of the truth." The young photographer wrote his family: "If you hear that I am coming back soon, forget it. I like this place. It is really great for a newspaper man."

Noonan signed on with the Associated Press although he vehemently told me he was "just on leave" from the *Boston Globe*. He was one of the Horst Faas boys, the platoon of young photographers hired by the legendary AP photo chief. These lensmen would gain immortality for their stark images of the war. Faas also came to LZ West with Peter Arnett where he too helped improve my photography.

Ollie arrived in Hiep Duc, Que Son, and Song Chang Valleys in the summer of 1969, as the region became a focal point for big headlines. The Communists mounted a huge offensive against Hiep Duc, a model village for the South Vietnamese government's refugee resettlement program.

The powerful 2nd North Vietnamese Army Division infiltrated the area over time on a mission to annihilate Hiep Duc. When they were prematurely discovered by US troops, they revamped their battle plan to just kill as many GI's as possible to take advantage of mounting anti-war sentiment in the US.

As temperatures soared a major August battle erupted. Infantry soldiers dropped like flies from heat exhaustion and withering enemy fire. A number of compelling subplots unfolded against the backdrop of this bloody inferno.

Notre Dame running back Rocky Bleier, an army draftee, was seriously wounded as his company engaged in close combat with the NVA. He would later rehab from his career-threatening wounds to win four Super Bowl rings with the Pittsburgh Steelers. A movie, *Fighting Back*, depicts Bleier's story and a book, *Death Valley* by Keith Nolan, chronicles the heroism and the failures of GI's during the summer battle.

Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry attracted worldwide attention as GI's demoralized by days of ferocious fighting, heavy casualties, and furnace-like heat temporarily refused their commander's orders to move out.

Other US units balked throughout the region but with far less fanfare. Marines defied orders to don flak jackets in the boiling rice paddies. The entire demeanor of the American fighting machine was changing in 1969 as dope, facial hair, beads, and peace symbols began to chip away at military discipline.

On August 19, Ollie Noonan headed back for another visit to our region accompanied by AP colleague, Richard Pyle. A critical decision occurred when Noonan elected to chopper to LZ Center while Pyle continued on to LZ West. Both locations were in the thick of battle, but the AP men attached themselves to different battalions several klicks apart. Noonan may have chosen LZ Center because he had already been with us on West several times.

Noonan ended up embedded with the aforementioned Alpha Company near the Song Chang River. He experienced a day of fierce fighting against an NVA regiment with temperatures reaching 120 degrees. Later in the afternoon he made another fateful decision. He requested a helicopter extraction. Ollie wanted to get his fresh combat film back to Da Nang to be processed quickly.

He scrambled aboard the helicopter of Battalion Commander, LTC Eli Howard. The chopper was taking heavy small arms fire but the pilot managed to fly safely to the east by hugging the Nui Lon ridge line. Howard made several attempts to land with nearby Bravo Company, but was forced to abort because of intense fire.

The chopper then banked steeply toward Hill 101 probably to recon an enemy anti-aircraft position. Communist fire struck the chopper dead on throwing Howard and Sgt. Major Franklin Rowell out the open doors. The fuel tanks exploded creating a midair fireball. Some of the craft stayed intact as fuselage fragments rained down on the ridgeline.

I was scurrying around LZ West trying to coordinate the expanding press coverage of the battle. I scooted into the Battalion Operations Center to arrange a chopper ride to the bush when I heard a heart stopping transmission amid the chaotic buzz of radio chatter. A nearby battalion commander had been shot down. One of

the passengers was an AP reporter. Ollie! Richard Pyle mentioned his location to me earlier. My heart sank way below my jungle boots.

A pall settled on me. I staggered outside into stifling heat and the deafening sound of our artillery pounding away at enemy positions. The din muffled a single sob from deep within my chest. I selfishly thanked God that I wasn't on that chopper. That's what I always did when we had KIA's—my only way of coping.

The helicopter crash site quickly became famous in every newspaper in the world. A dazed and exhausted Alpha Company temporarily refused to move out to recover the bodies. After five more days of fighting US forces finally reached the remains of the bird. Horst Faas arrived to accompany the advancing GI's. There was little left of Ollie Noonan, but Faas did retrieve one of Ollie's cameras. Eight persons had perished including the crew.

Several grunts related stories of Noonan furiously shooting photos, even leaning past a firing helicopter door gunner to capture images of the bedlam. Noonan even laid down his camera to help drag a wounded GI to safety.

Several years later during a hurried trip home through Boston my wife and I visited Fenway Park for a Red Sox game. I tried to remember the name of the bar where Ollie and I planned to meet. I couldn't dredge it up. All I could see in my mind's eye was his mustached face with that smoldering cigarette dangling. "Yackety Yak" pounded in my brain. I remained silent, flashing back, still not close in 1976 to coming to terms with the jungle war or with Ollie's fate.

We waited our turn at the teeming ticket window. The clerk finally barked out in a clipped Boston accent: "How many?" I silently thrust my left hand forward with my wallet in my right. I curled back my index finger with my left thumb exposing my remaining three fingers. He shoved three tickets out the window. I stuffed them in my pocket with the change.

I said not a word to my unsuspecting wife. I never discussed the 'Nam with anyone but ex-grunts back then. Ollie's empty seat in our crowded section was his memorial. I lamented that he would never again help me with my photography. There would be no steamers and beer with him that night or ever. There at Fenway for a few heart breaking hours I finally caught back up with my friend. It just took me 45 years to be able to write the story.

Epilogue

Ollie Noonan often wrote poetry and listened to tapes of classical music to calm down after combat. He wrote the following poem in Vietnam and sent it to the *Boston Globe* obituary department for use if he were killed. It is at his grave site.

On the Side That's Winning

The moon hangs like a tear
And I, sensing mortality
But afraid of tomorrow, rush to greet it
Afraid to die
And keep running,
Afraid to realize it may be hopeless
To carry tears on my sleeves
While right behind me, in cloak and gown,
The man's juggling bombs
Like a circus clown
Though the bells toll
They can bomb the land
But not the soul.

"Nothing comes easy here. Everything is earned."

– Ollie Noonan, in a letter home, 1969.

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Bill Crawford is a social worker, writer, and photographer who lives in Winston Salem, NC.
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AFTER ALL

Marty Sternstein

***

The man writes in his notebook:

Their baby died soon after it was born.

They tried again—with prayers (two who had never prayed, even as children)

And so I came to be.

What was it like, that night I came to be?

***

There's the photo of him as a baby in his mother's arms.

He looks like any baby. But his mother in white is beautiful, is more than not proud.

He thinks about his good fortune that she came to the United States from Poland between world wars. *Her* good fortune, he means.

Her oldest sister stayed behind.

***

In another photo he's maybe five years old, standing in front of bushes in the park where the family went for picnics in the summer. He remembers the bugs, the heat, that he hated picnics—but when the picture was taken he was too old to cry, so he's smiling.

His father is kneeling beside him, his right hand holding him protectively at the waist, his left hand large against his thigh. His father is wearing a tie (on a summer's day!). His father's hair is brushed severely back and pomaded, his face is angular.

His own face will look something like his father's in time, but in the photo it's round. And a barber has given his hair the part it will keep forever, has cut away the waves and curls he had as a baby, but which he will let happen again, once he's in charge of his own appearance.

His father isn't smiling.

***

It's evening. He's ten years old, making his father tea, doing what he thinks his mother did. But he only heats the water, doesn't bring it to a boil before putting a teabag in the glass his father loved, pours water over the teabag.

His father enters from the bathroom, just showered (shaved before he went to bed). He sips the tea, then rises and goes to the stove, turns the flame on under the kettle, smiles at his son while pouring out the tea, brings the water to a true boil, says, "It's better this way," as he pours that new water over a new teabag.

Minutes later he kisses his son's forehead, then leaves for the two hour subway ride from the Bronx to the 24-hour diner on the Brooklyn docks that he owns and works in.

The boy sits down on the floor next to the bookcase where his father keeps the set of 1911 *Britannica* that he once lugged from the east coast to the west coast and back again, the first books he ever bought. The boy chooses a volume at random, turns the onion-skin pages, is careful not to tear them. The boy would like to be able to read about anything that he doesn't know.

He's certain that there will come a day when all his questions will be answered, and when his mother won't have to go to book discussions at night or his father have to take the local to a distant borough—a day when everyone will gain a just reward by simply trying.

***

"Adventure, not just reading, will make a real man out of you"—his father's words, spoken slowly to him before he's a teenager.

***

He begins writing poetry on his fourteenth birthday. He reads one of the poems to his understanding mother.

Couldn't reach out to stroke Monica's hair
that flowed clear to the ground
did Monica's hair
—while young thugs
brawled on the movie screen.

His mother says, “Maybe you can write a song with an unusual melody—I don’t know how else to say it—a tune for a special baby.”

Maybe she means that he should write a song for himself, maybe for that older brother who was born and died soon after childbirth.

***

A man’s eyes find his amidst a crowd of 8th Street walkers, thrusts pamphlets in his direction: “Read! Socialism!” Though shorter, thinner, this man reminds him of his father.

His father—communist, conscientious objector—who once stood on the pavement, vigilant, day after day, week after week, buttonholing young men and women, offering literature. Who one day surrendered his activism, so that his child could not be accused one day, could not be convicted.

***

The man writes this in his notebook:

Burn marks on my father’s chest.

His heart had stopped, had been revived.

Took his hands, attempted to squeeze life into them.

His hands turned plump.

Rouges were applied to his cheeks.

***

His father becomes a fly, flying noiselessly in the man’s living room. The man turns out the lights, afraid that the heat from the bulbs might attract his father. The man closes all the windows. But in spite of his efforts, his father disappears.

Has he become one of the floaters, floating in my own suddenly older eyes?

***

On her left hand, his mother wears two rings: her wedding band and a Crackerjack prize a kid had given her—she cherishes them equally.

She is dying, her right hand has turned gangrenous. She says, “An abomination. Or the finest marble. A perfect base for my sister who is now a lampshade.”

His mother lies in a hospital bed. Her son keeps vigil.

She says, “Always, in all ways, a grandmother is loved”—a plea for family, for him.

***

“I’m going to die!” His mother says. “It’s time for me to rest.”

He says nothing.

“Go,” she says, “forget about me. Take my rings. Or give them to the nurses. They’ll steal them anyway.”

He never tells anyone that he is relieved when she closes her eyes.

***

Good friends, gone now.
Their photographs on my wall.
Until some stranger takes them down, throws them away.
No reason to keep them after all.

…….

Marty Sternstein grew up in The West Bronx. A former teacher, he writes in Manhattan. **misternstein@gmail.com**

“Every solution of a problem is a new problem.”

–Goethe

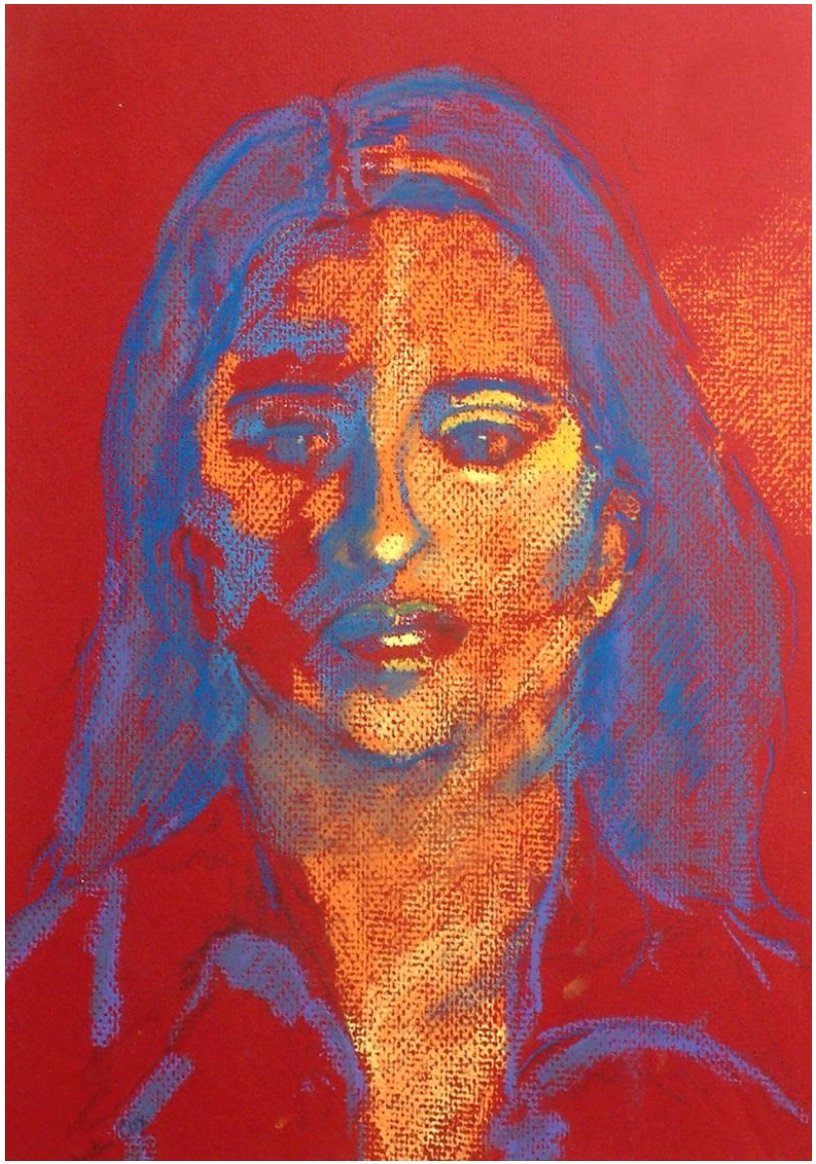
OUR FROSTY WINDOWS

Joel Fry

Our closely guarded oblivion
only suffices for the moment.
Laughter keeps rearing its young within us,
summoning its strength from our delicacy.
As the moon climbs through our
frosty windows, illuminating filigree and
panes, we almost believe this frozen hour
could be what it was when we
searched each other for nothing
and the comedies of our absent minds
collided. This night barely
sustains a second glance. We both feed
pregnancies of chance encounters, unaware
we are born in this light. Our sadness
kicks within us, tenderly stroking some
notion that entered us in conversation.
The life we carry from bout to spell
is not ours. You say our bed is big enough
for whatever comes. You collect me
in your hands, unknowing, bewildered
by what you see in me, growing as I die,
as we both share the space intended
for one.

.....

Joel Fry lives in Athens, AL. His poems have appeared in Melic Review, Stirring, Eclectica, Off the Coast, Iodine Poetry Journal, *and others*. **fryjoel46@gmail.com**



NEHA

Artist Unknown

Pastel on Canvas

16” x 20”

CARIS RUNS ON

Sean DeArmond

There was a crisp autumn webbing in the morning air, uncharacteristic of late July (which it was), as I laced up my newly broken-in sneakers snugly around my carefully trained dancer's feet, which were graceful under the pressure of an audience's evaluation but terribly inconsistent of balance otherwise, and began my unbridled horizontal free-fall through the doorway, across the sidewalk, and onto the familiar pavement which soon dissolved into the streets of strangers with a stride in my footsteps tapping out the rhythm of a veteran percussionist granting the less experienced house instrumentalists a foundation on which to play and explore; and the earliest of unfortunate risers wearily greeted me with a silent wave and a melancholy attached to the knowledge of what undeserved stressors awaited them at the end of their vehicle's journey across the Interstate, and the odd feline who had undoubtedly claimed the better portion of the neighboring blocks as its area of dominance took little more than a passing interest in my approach, when I became aware of the motorized delivery service containing one driver and one passenger (both of whom were being guided by the presumption that their current assignment, to distribute the weekly collection of coupon-laden advertisements to anonymous recipients devoid of incentive to peruse through said plastic-blanketed media, was better suited for an employee of comparatively less advanced qualification and age than they were), had begun keeping pace with my shoe soles' measurable contact tapping against the granite below me, for reasons I'm better off not taking into speculation (but in the event that the discussion should arise in my absence I'm obliged in expressing that my choice of attire is selected for my own comfort and delight, and factors in no other assessment from any outside source), and individual packages of the aforementioned literary product in possession of said transport was serving its couriers as, what I can only assume to be, an entertaining projectile with my variably personal space and the lone patron of kinetic meditation contained therein as the intended target; for a series of aerial ammunition all bearing the 'fifty cent off of half a dozen sixty watt light-bulbs' emblem was marking the pathway I found myself on, and their aim was becoming progressively less humorous (at least in

the eyes of the soul attached to the heels in the scope); and it's with a certain amount of empathic regret I consider the pitiable gentleman tasked with restocking the vendor's wagon of morning related produce (i.e. apples, strawberries, variously flavored and colored juice-reminiscent liquids in single serving containers) on top of a pile of what can only be described as a previously existing glacier's worth of ice separated into its individual components (for the purpose of temperature regulation) with which the middle-aged man (with whom I was soon to nearly have an encounter) was engaged in refilling his wagon, for a stray paper ballista meant for an area of my anatomy somewhere between my waistline and toes wound up ricocheting off a metallic waste receptacle, impacting his wrist instead, dislodging the utensil he was using to scoop the ice into the wooden cart and spilling it onto the sidewalk where a hapless pedestrian, being preoccupied with his handheld device, reacted on reflex to the sudden lack of friction where his soles no longer held traction and tore off the side of the wagon on his way down while trying to regain his balance, sending the contents previously held within into the street and the path of my pursuers, diverting their vehicle's tires into the side of nearby station wagon which happened to be parked in the wrong spot (in as much as fate was concerned) leaving me with a sense of satisfaction that I truly should be ashamed of, on par with the knowledge that I didn't stop to pretend like I didn't know what had transpired, but my morning jog is a sacred experience to me, and no buffoons with licenses will keep me from it, so I just kept running on.

.....

Sean DeArmond is an assistant at the Hoover Public Library, Birmingham. He has published his first short story, Beachfront*, in the ghost story anthology* Summer Gothic*. A two-act stage show,* End of the World*, was performed in 2005 at the Walt Disney Story Theater.*
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POINT MOLATE

Kyle Heger

Tucked between a secluded survivalists'
marina, half-torn railroad tracks and the
crenellated walls of a castle used formerly
as headquarters for a winery and later as a
U.S. navy facility, the beach comes and
goes with muddy, ray-haunted tides.

Timing it right, we cross the point, following
cryptic flashes of sunlight bouncing off what
first appear to be mirrors cast upon the wrack,
but which, on closer inspection, turn out to be
transparent jelly fish the size of dinner plates
laid like magnifying lenses among the rocks,
invading the privacy of barnacles, clam shells
and emptied crab claws.

Between the dried remains of kelp—salty
whips, root-like holdfasts, air bladders—are
signs of a humanity that could be extinct:
scraps of net, chunks of iron, bits of beach
glass from shattered bottles, the written calls
for help they once held long ago plundered
by mistaken and ultimately disappointed
scavengers.

But reminding us of the continued proximity
of human lives are the wake of ferries and tour
boats that lap upon the shore, the pop … pop …
pop… from a nearby oil company shooting
range and the lowing of a diminutive light house
that squats on a guano-covered island and startles
a flock of Canada geese from a ruined pier.
Flying toward us, casting shadows over a
superfluous no-trespassing sign, they swerve
at the last minute to avoid a crumbling cliff face,
passing so close we can hear the rusty hinges
of their wings.

…….

Kyle Heger, former managing editor of Communication World *magazine, lives in Albany, CA, with his wife and three sons. His writing has appeared in* The Binnacle, eFiction, Five Poetry, Foliate Oak, Milk Sugar, Miller's Pond, Nerve Cowboy, Poem, The Santa Clara Review, Third Wednesday, The Thorny Locust." **kyleheger@yahoo.com**

"The reality of beauty yields itself to no words."

–H. G. Wells

PLACE TO PLACE

Mary Jean Henke

Acrylic on Gallery Wrap Canvas

40" X 40"

Mary Jean Henke of Birmingham, AL, creates nonrepresentational works in acrylics and mixed media. Her paintings are in private and corporate collections throughout the United States and Europe. Mary Jean is one of the original founding artists of Artists Incorporated Gallery.

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ZOO ATTACK

Carolyn Ward

The place was deserted with the animals lying quietly on beds of straw. Mikey trod lightly on the tarmac, but his steps still sounded like gunshots. The moon hung watchfully in the star-speckled blackness. He wandered around haphazardly, rattling cage doors and fences, looking for weak spots as he walked he spun the pistol in his right hand, finger light on the trigger.

Suddenly there was a whistle and he looked up. His friend Willy had arrived, big goggle-eye mask on his head. They fist-bumped, pistols held up to the sky. Mikey pulled his own mask into place, wriggling it until his ears were comfortable.

Beyond the zoo, the whole town was deeply asleep. There was not even a car purring along the road. It was exhilarating to be the only ones awake, and they jumped and jived a little on the spot.

"OK, dude, let's go!" Mikey was suddenly all business.

Pumping their pistols, they began to decorate the walls and fences of the zoo with their specially altered paint guns. They worked for five solid hours, creating huge murals and detailed pictures.

Working clockwise through the zoo, they ended up at the tiger enclosure. Willy had the stupidly brilliant idea of painting the inside walls. They leaned over, checking that the beast was asleep, before climbing the wall. Then they swung down on the over-size climbing equipment like a pair of monkeys, flipping and leaping. When they reached the floor, they ran swiftly to the far side, and got lost in their landscape.

In the dark, a pair of massive amber eyes slowly opened and the beast gave a small rumble of excitement as it caught their warm scent.

They were completely engrossed in their art, detailing a vivid image of the jungle which gave the impression that the enclosure was many times bigger. Their sense of perspective and use of colour and shade were incredibly realistic.

Secret zoo painting had become a worldwide mystery when it had begun appearing in enclosures as far apart as Dudley and Delhi, Detroit and Darwin. To their amusement, there was feverish speculation online as to their identity.

The tiger crept stealthily out of its lair. Shoulders low, it began to stalk them. In the dark it was a silent shadow, impossible to see against the long grass of the enclosure.

The boys were crouched, finishing the low parts. The art was unbelievable, some of their best work. When done, they stood up, hands on hips.

"Awesome, my friend!" murmured Willy.

At the sudden sound, the massive tiger pounced, leaping high in the air and knocking both boys over in one enormous crash. They opened their mouths to scream, but powerful paws landed on two scrawny necks, and their voices were choked off.

The artwork found in the zoo the next day was utterly amazing. Visitors and staff alike were thrilled. Nobody ever found out who had painted the brilliant murals. Or why the tiger refused his breakfast.

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Carolyn Ward loves to write, and has won competitions from travel writing to co-authoring a modern children's fairy tale. She finds writing short fiction a fun challenge, condensing a punchy story into fewer words to incite some kind of emotion. **Twitter @Viking_Ma**
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"As things get worse, poetry gets better, because it becomes more necessary."

–Eileen Myles

THE WHALER

Ethan Bethune

The old man
Set his cane against the wall
And then
Stood there
In the dark
Watching
As the beast circled
The tank
Its great fin
Just hanging there
They were so much
Older now
Both so much older now
His heart pounding
He stepped off
The walk into the tank
The water over his head
The beast
Watching as he sank to the bottom
Its great fin hanging flaccid
The man remembered
Seeing them in the wild
Majestic
Families
Broken apart
He remembered
The cries
As the adults swam
Hard after the boats

With their captured young
They were supposed to be dumb
But they stayed right with the boats
Crying out
He had never forgotten that.

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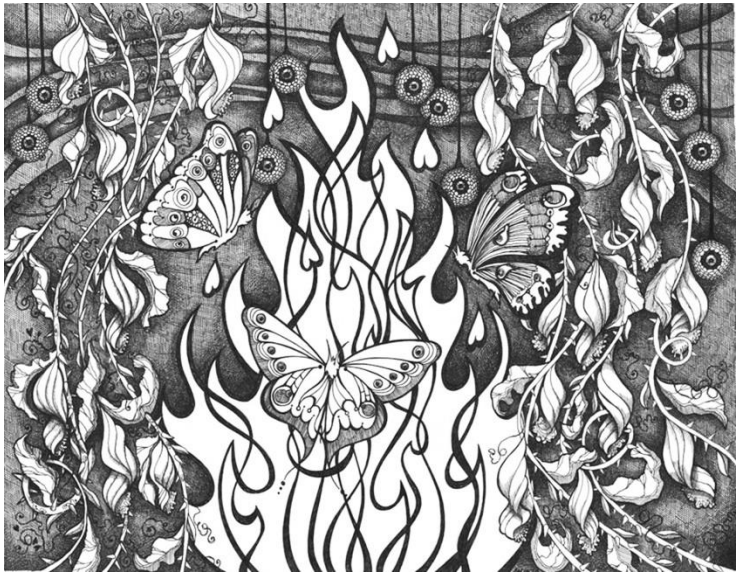
Ethan Bethune is a published writer of short stories, essays, poetry and sometimes songs. He likes old things, bookstores, photography and antiquing. He lives in Alabama with his wife. **ethanbethune@gmail.com**



MOTH TO A FLAME
April Muschara Harris
Pen & Ink on Paper
20" x 16"

April Muschara Harris grew up in Central Alabama, attended Auburn University Montgomery and graduated with a degree in Fine Art. She is currently a professional graphic designer. April is an award winning artist who works in acrylics, pen and ink, chalk, and pencil.
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