

Birmingham Arts Journal

Volume 18 Issue 1



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\$6.00



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FRONT COVER: JAMIE'S ANGEL - Andrew Tyson - pen, ink, colored pencil *Andrew Tyson redrew this angel in memory of his stepmother who loved angels. After a house fire in which she died, Andrew found a badly damaged copy of this angel which he remembers seeing throughout his life.* tysona@bellsouth.net

BACK COVER: SWEEPING THE ALTAR - EScott Sinclair

Ebeth Scott-Sinclair is a visual artist who grew up in the South surrounded by diverse layers of culture, spirituality, history, and humor, all of which is reflected in her art. Her work can be found in books and magazines, and CD covers, as well as in galleries in Alabama and Florida. ebeth.scottsinclair@gmail.com

SKY PARADE

Alicia Fuhrman - *Winner, 1st Place Story, 2020 Hackney Literary Awards*

I'm half-awake earlier than sunrise, walk toward the shadowed sink. I rinse my head and face.

Icewater runs briefly pinkish and I realize a small clot behind my ear. Outside the window sort of flickers—light in August and proof summer's the longest season. Stray dust glints, settles. I've downed pines and seen wet bark fly and an eight-point buck onto the highway shoulder briefly airborne like some reindeer. Everywhere's another sunrise and reminders of what is alive; I never really planned on sticking around. I leave more or less exactly the same and keys dangling the knob.

Outside is the sea-city. It'll rise with the sun. Low fog and the painted streets will crawl. I step onto the street. Shipping trucks heave exhaust braked at the waterfronts for the haul of four a.m. trawlers now docked, their masted mini-cranes gone still while the windvanes spin. I pass Tory's place: two level storefront and window plant boxes done up like Venice. Petals bright by the rain and sort of spilling over, rough shutters a tragedy if bare. I've never even been. And never seen the rooms lit at night, just behind the window glass a couple tables and flipped stools like closed for the day.

All the neighborhoods here go three, four stories tops. There are rooftop decks and only minor gaps between. People are always laughing up there between hollow steps and voices traveling.

Probably you could make it to the West End without touching down. By noon looking up you can see their shadow figures dance, inevitable as wind. Only I wish I was higher looking below at roofs first while sidewalks and streets fill slow as cars from a plane.

There's a frame shop rounds out Tory's corner. There are always stacks out like pallet docks. The paintings change daily. Sheep dotting green Ireland, and kamikaze kites like an airborne regatta. I've glimpsed more of the world in those frames than I ever really will. One time I caught the gaze of this beat dust bowl farmer and he just followed me. The picture was grayscale but I could tell his eyes were blue, blue as a pinto's and lost.

Across the street are parking meters and take one newspaper boxes and J's, a forty-year raw dive and reeks of it. The shack roof letters of its name are permanently gull-marked. The original paint is splinter powder. I drop in. First thing inside's a bunch of legs swinging from high tops and stools. The place is floor-lit, hard to make faces out. I take a seat at the wraparound bar. The wood surface is forever glazed with spilled beer. My elbows stick. Center of everything is a giant table of raw oysters on ice. Two workers in rolled shirt sleeves and gloves shuck tops by the second. Half shells fly like checkers. Mirror trays of dozens circulate. I am familiar with barkeep. Wordlessly he

pulls me a draft from the wall taps. Someone nearby laughs—left of me this thick handed guy and his club mug. Lager foam laces the half inch rim, his initials are etched in the glass.

He knocks my pint, sloshing the pour, “Earn your place.” Before he was laughing, now keeps a grin. Along the wall hang some dozen mugs like his. Only one other is missing, a peg silvery with dust ash, you wonder. Was he buried with it?

Anyway, I don’t bite. The guy keeps busy. He’s arranged flattened papers before him and portions loose tobacco from a pocket. It’s light stuff and smells like vanilla. Two done skinny cigarettes lie rolled and grass pokes out. I slide a fresh paper my way and damp the seal with my thumb, fatten the shag and tighten the wrap with my fingertips one handed.

“My man...” he goes. I’d added my cigarette to his stash. It’s funny I only learned to roll proper because Tory showed me. And I don’t even smoke much. Just acted out the habit having never earned the right. I think about the list in my head, of what I’m chance worth becoming some day, and none of them I even came up with from scratch—making life off five acres, a river mill upstate. Or one of those free kites like Tory’s done and cut all allegiances to the past. If I was a father.

I watch the oyster table change over with a glittering pour of new ice. Crystals scatter the floor and start pooling their own dark circles, like the first snowflakes to touch pavement that late autumn night. And the next morning a billion diamonds in the roof gutters.

I down my beer, stand fast. The drink hits my throat hard but I don’t want to wait. I swallow harder and cough. I don’t want the best thing I’ve ever done to be a nail half-driven into the wood of some old bar. I put a few dollars under my emptied glass. Then I swipe back my cigarette, jam it behind my ear and leave.

Out back faces the open sea. A narrow dock feeds the washed bay but close in the water’s murky with boat oil and scraps. It looks brothy, sort of scaled. Short hulls thunk each other with the tide flux and rope hooks against the strung masts. Occasionally a glossy seal floats in then soon enough back to the expanse. Watch his little headcap ride the sea plain.

“Take you out, though.” Robin Tennis squats a flipped milk crate by the kitchen door and as much a part of the alley view. On the wall he leans against is a scoreboard of lines, a few more rows beneath W than L. Between shifts he’s always looking for a fight.

“No thanks,” I say, “I’m gone.”

He shrugs.

“For good,” I add, like it matters that he knows.

Tennis looks me over. Then takes a second empty crate and flips it top down beside him. I pause then sit. The wall bricks are cool against my shoulder blades. High sun blackens the shadows and corners like papercut and the bright sheaths between like mirrors of the sky itself. We stare out blinking the Atlantic a while. It gets easier to see.

Abruptly he takes this gold faded tennis ball from his chef's coat. And for no reason I immediately picture how long before his pitch arc drops and the ball goes underwater. Instead he splits the thing in perfect two with his thumb, offers me half. It drips—a peach. I bite in and the fruit just dissolves. Ripeness has loosed the pit so it falls away and the rest coming apart in my hands, pulpy and oxidizing every second by the sun. But to savor would waste it all—a lost fight outlasting time same as life and its immediate decay, better off recklessly indulged—we are dying from the start. But I'll feel full for days.

Yells from the kitchen, dishes clang the pass. Tennis stands and me too and shakes my hand, shoulders back in. A second at full volume with the door swung then the scene is final. Even if the sea appears the same bright mercury and sky and light panels on the alley ground and that pit. I move on. The town got up with my back turned. There is foot traffic now and little crowd swarms around street vendors and open storefronts like insects and a line for Portuguese malasadas crawling the block. I go between the gaps of bodies and openings on the sidewalk when there. The scene refreshes itself.

Farther uptown a vivid drag queen halts me. Her face is all made up and she blinks beautifully, propagating the matinee. Shimmery dust drifts from her eyelashes and makes me think of pollen collected on windows and doors where I grew up and tracing paths with my finger. The held-off storms making a dirty paste run surfaces. For a moment I might trace her cheek but already she's found a new audience.

“Townie bitch night,” she pulls a smile like elastic, “but you two are still invited.”

In the shadow of her towering silhouette this sidewalk couple beams.
Nothing about her is real.

Next chance I turn down a neighborhood. The way the town's cut all side streets are right angles and either dead end or in the sea. I walk the center of the lane. A few steps in and the air goes out like hit in the guts. The wind stops and sound flattens. Raw heat. There's no more taste of the sea. And I'm rooted to the spot in the collective gasp. Ahead are buildings and cars in parallel like rush hour only parked, and nothing moves until I remember my legs. Then just me and the cool, asphalt pools erased before I'm close enough to touch.

The sun bares. High up the blue sky's gone whitehot like coal before flames and brightness making shadows of buildings twice their heights and my own down here full and stretched and dancing as if impatient on its dark stilts. All down the street lawns are identically spaced. Just enough I imagine on my back I'd fit, head and heels head grazing the plaster foundations. On my back in the grass. Long as I can remember always lying like that with my chest to the sky to the heavens, like here's all of me and do what you will to my guts, do your worst. What settles into your whole life. Who taught you grace and above a plane and birds the same size somehow might die flying; downed crows like pepper in the goldish crop fields—grave them between the stalks.

I see the last house coming. One side is patterned with cross paneling for vines but the ivy hasn't took. What's left is this whole wall ladder to the roof. I run a hand over the trellis. No splinters.

Squalls have buffed the wood like leather. I wonder if the standing trees are as smooth. The air and I keep still. A few clouds patch over. Somewhere's the chime of drink glasses and voices like a far off tambourine then up and dies. I know I'll be listening for that music my whole life.

The crows were just crows except broken.

I spit my grip like a pitcher, try and ladder up quick, only the diamond gaps aren't rungs. I clear a couple stories. My muscles are twitchy with strain but there's no shaking it off—I'd just fall. I picture myself on the grass again, only with a million pieces inside wrecked. And I've got this dumb grin on; they say it's hours before bruising blooms, but the grin's still stuck.

I stop climbing. The gravity of earth feels suddenly immense. And this freeze runs through me fast like in the bloodstream: I am paralyzed by discontent. But I know inside still my nerves shudder; it's only reconnection I'm waiting out. Time doesn't show up passing. A sweat droplet rides my spine. I think back before dawn and sunrise not even a stain, and how tomorrow feels impossible.

Hello today, I am here and alone with my own mind and almost forgot that's always so long as I breathe.

And all this time I've been. I go to check my pulse like better proof, maybe—but never even graze the beat. Somehow already it's jumping in my mouth.

One-handed on the cladding, only now catching up the blood rush. I'd let go. Before I was numb, and I'd let go to feel alive. The noise of an invisible sea plane drifts over. I can almost feel its shadow lick and the looks of people's faces behind the vibrating glass. But they're above the clouds, come and gone. I stare back at the wall and my stable hand. I am only balanced there, not holding on. I count seconds and breathe. My weight doesn't feel like much anymore. And the idea comes back to me that the rooftops are their own kind of cross-streets. It's what gets me going again. I think how Tennis didn't talk after I said for good. I could have had him, but I'm not a liar.

I reach the gutter, sort of topple myself over. There's a floaty breeze but it only feels cold where my skin is damp. Tiny goosebumps rise my arms. I rest on my heels, scan around: the roof's flat as a blacktop but some vent pipes and a tall A/C duct sort of in the way. So this is the secret cityscape I've been dreaming—as if erased and above the spilling clouds like great smoke ghosts haven't gotten any nearer. I think how every building probably went up with the rest. And those spaces between nothing but seams.

The wind picks up. It's got a little salt and makes my mouth water. I spit and stand; I never really had a plan. I start walking the perimeter. The air prickles at me again, but I rub off the chill. A little on I can see past the duct, and something dark and sort of perching the corner—I'd check the sky for vultures but know there's none; it's all monotone and not a trace of bone down here to argue.

I'm scared, but walk quicker. I reach the corner, find only this standing telescope. I wonder why I expected anything alive. I scan the roof again like in case some stargazer stuck around, but I know the truth same as vultures. I face the scope. The tripod's got silver legs and the lens angled toward the sea. I'd be crazy not to look.

Through the glass the Atlantic's enormous, just enormous. Like I'm seeing farther by getting closer. Waves forever on silent repeat. And scattered across the sea stretch these bright dots dancing. I try and disappear them blinking, but they don't. I stare instead. My eyes burn at the edges, and the view becomes no more than a flicker and a bunch of dying sparks.

Those graves we dug. I never did catch one in the plummet. And I realize my mistake was looking for the same thing as a million summers ago.

I lean into the view again: it's flying kites. All along just kites, and I am brushed by the same wind. It washes over me, and I know those gone years are for good, now. The rest will go tomorrow but I'm not worried, watch the sky parade.

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Alicia Fuhrman is a West Coast born, East Coast raised writer. She studied at UMass and is pursuing a PhD in fiction at Ohio University. Her award-winning stories have been widely published. alicia.fuhrman@gmail.com

“Bravery comes along as a
gradual accumulation of
discipline.”

—Buzz Aldrin



ORANGES

8" x 8"

Acrylic on Canvas

Mara Jambor

Mara Jambor was born in Germany and came to the US in 1950. After a career in educational administration, she began painting in 2014. Her primary media are oil and acrylic, "sharing what she sees and feels in forms that others can understand and appreciate." In addition to numerous one-woman shows, she won first place in "Challenge 14" a multi-state show that limited artists to 14" canvas. She lives in Birmingham, AL, with her husband Tom. marajambor@gmail.com

WALKER

Jennifer Horne

She reads, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil.”

And so she walks. The verse becomes her marching song: YEA though I WALK through the VALley of the SHAdow of DEATH I shall FEAR no EVil. She walks over the viaduct, chanting the verse to herself. Down below, in the valley of the shadow of death, the white men in white robes gathered at night, ash flakes fluttering in the darkness. Her mother called her home, and she fled. There had been children, too, in their own little robes and masks, like on Halloween.

Walking past the used car lot where the German shepherd guards the cars at night, she and the dog exchange a glance of understanding. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” In this way He lets her know that she is taken care of.

On Wednesdays the imposter who looks like her aunt picks her up and takes her to the clinic. At first she hid and would not go, but they always found her and the hiding took time away from her walking, so now she just goes. The social worker asks if she’s been taking her meds every day. Yes, she says. Say it out loud, says the social worker. YES, she says, loudly, though her ears surprise her by hearing a whisper. This makes her laugh—her volume controls are messed up again. What’s funny? says the social worker. She can’t explain. Humor is like that. Either you get it or you don’t. The social worker sighs, checks his watch. Okay, then, we’ll see you next week, same time? Same time same time same time.

At the stoplight she gets out of the car, resumes her route. She has her work to do, and He is watching.

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Jennifer Horne is the former Poet Laureate of Alabama (2017-2021). Author of three collections of poems, she also has written a collection of short stories, Tell the World You’re a Wildflower. She has edited or co-edited four volumes of poetry, essays, and stories. hornejw@yahoo.com

**ADVICE FROM A PIRANHA WHO LIVED NEAR MANAUS,
BRAZIL**

Carol Coven Grannick

I did what they said to do.
Hunt. Gobble. Nap. Repeat.
They said Don't be singular in your family
or in school. Don't distinguish yourself from the others.

Stay safe.

But I swam in the once sun-streaked
glitter-floating river,
near El Gran Teatro Amazonas
heard the music of a baritone fishing on the banks,

and the beauty raced
through the air dividing drops of water
into yellow, green, blue,
purple notes of music.

They said we are all teeth and blood
But they don't know how the sound from the riverbank
shimmers through my backbone
and the tickling undulation of the water

rocks my soul to dream.

To the one on the riverbank I want to say:
do you see me flicker and flit through the wet?
Do you feel how I long to leap through the air
and test my lungs against your songs?

I was in a hurry, there where I dreamed of dance and opera,
of blue lights and yellow, of green and purple,
of a voice I wished could be mine, cutting through night,
separating the water into drops of color

slicing the air with my song.

.....

Carol Coven Grannick is a children's author and poet whose fiction and poetry appears/is forthcoming in Cricket, Ladybug, Babybug, Highlights, and Hello. She finds poetry everywhere, and loves the way it has scored her life.

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“May you never be the reason why
someone who loved to sing, doesn’t
anymore.”

—Sharouk Mustafa Ibrahim

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE HOUSE

Katharine Armbrester

Bette could understand why her sister was stunned. After all, Dianna had been their mother's principal caretaker for nearly three years. She had sold her fancy apartment in the city, put her career as an art gallery owner on hold, and in the end...she didn't get the house.

Bette continued walking down the gravel path, enjoying the satisfying crunch beneath her sandals. She passed her hands over the azalea and bougainvillea blossoms with the same unconscious daintiness the Arthurian maiden exhibited in the painting upstairs, meekly receiving her knight's bouquet and adoration. Dianna called the painting "abominable patriarchal slop." No, Bette thought, her sister didn't belong here.

Naturally, the will seemed unfair...on the surface, but the right decision had been made. Dianna had never really liked the country, and Bette had never enjoyed the city. She sighed. She knew herself well enough to know that she tended to flout her status as a widowed mother at her sister whenever Dianna got up on her liberal high horse; she knew it wasn't becoming. But here, in the garden her great-great-grandmother designed, she could be honest with herself beneath the low-hanging Japanese maple boughs; she could be truthful in the long day's dying light. Frankly, she was tired of dealing with her children.

Ever since her husband's death and her oldest child going off to an East Coast school last year, *all* her children had started changing; not listening to her opinions or relentlessly questioning them when they did listen. They were all too curious; they needed to get back...back to their roots, deep into the country, where history's traces were still visible (although those unpleasant buildings out back needed to be bulldozed) and the baleful mooing of cows could still be heard from open windows. Yes, Bette thought, I'll make them move back here, and everything will go back to the way it was before...Mother will see to that.

Dianna sat up in the increasing darkness of her mother's room. She hated it, but now that all the hospice equipment was gone it needed airing out. With all the windows and the French doors open, it was the best view in the house. Through the open doors leading to the rickety balcony, she could see in the distance her sister walking in the tick-infested garden. Her sister wafted through it like a Vera Bradley-patterned whiff of smoke.

"Bette has three children, and miscarried two more, and look how slim she is," her mother would say proudly whenever she passed by a prominent picture of her. *And look how plump you are, how childless* always remained unspoken. Dianna winced. She really came apart that morning at the reading, and in front of that idiotic former quarterback estate lawyer, smug cousin Bert and her sister. Dianna hadn't cried a suitable amount at the funeral, (which she knew multiple relatives had made note of) but after the will was read she wailed loud enough to wake every Antebellum ghost that remained on the property. And worst of all, she didn't even want the damn house. It had never really been home.

When Dad died and her mother promptly married again to a less artistic, more malleable man and had Bette, Dianna had moved in with her father's sister the second she turned sixteen. She knew her mother had never forgiven her for that, along with being plump and childless. And too curious.

Thunder rolled miles away; a spring storm was coming down the river. That's where she should be now, Dianna thought, down at the dock, the only place on the property she had ever truly loved, watching the water ease its way down and then depart—never stagnating. It was where she had always gone to mull over her mother's criticisms, and it was where she had learned about the history of the house, and slavery, which her mother would have preferred her to get over and forget about. But Dianna kept on asking questions, and that was what she knew had ultimately cost her the house.

Last year, when her mother could still speak lucidly to that idiot lawyer, one of Dianna's college friends had come down to visit, a Southern historian. Words were said, none of which her mother wanted to hear. Over and over again her mother had repeated the inherited, satisfying and self-absolving delusions. Afterwards her friend said that it would be impossible to have the place registered as a historical site, have the remains of the slave quarters out back restored, and begin having accurate tours around the place without her mother's permission.

“But you’ve given up your life, and you’re taking such good care of her,” her friend had reassured her, “I’m sure she will leave you the place.”

Dianna scoffed now at the recollection. She had wanted to change the past, to do something with it that she could be proud of...she too, had wanted to absolve herself. But now, finally, she knew once and for all that she didn’t belong, and her life would go on away from here—no more stagnating. She rocked in her grandmother’s ancestral chair in the dark and looked at the faint outline of that hideous Victorian slop on the wall. Her mother had been so good as to leave her that, she thought. She knew exactly where a can of gasoline was; she would feed the ashes to the river.

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Katharine Armbrester is an alumna of the University of Alabama at Birmingham’s graduate history program, and is now in the creative writing program at the Mississippi University for Women. karmbresterparis@gmail.com

ADOPTION

Seb Detling

First breath

a cry

of good-bye.

.....

Seb Detling was given up for adoption in a small Southern town and raised in Memphis, TN. She received graduate degrees in Spanish and Creative Writing at Florida State University and University of South Alabama, respectively. She has been an educator for over 10 years and now lives with her family in Mobile, AL. sbalmori@shc.edu

SEEING MY FATHER, DEAD TWO WEEKS

Paul Pruitt

Saw him for two seconds at the light
That time on Bryant.
He had the green. He was driving through, the
Law School on his left.

I took it all in and knew that it was some
Huge sum of parts: the truck, the jacket, the
Ball-cap, shoulders hunched, his nose
Like a hawk's bill.

How many times had I seen him drive, or
Ridden in
That truck? Enough so, maybe, that the image
Was there, ready

To be brain-proffered
Into being. But I've thought it over, and
I'm certain there was no conjuring of my
Unconscious, no

Longing or anticipation, sensible or
Insensate. There had been only a
Bleak sense of diminished
Boundaries and crowded memories.

What was there, then, of meaning at that light?
Was he, the Departed, departing
On an errand to some lumberyard of
Glory, invoking

A pickup-truck version of a Viking funeral?
Who can say? Ten years and more have
Passed, as I wait to help with his unloading—maybe
To hear him tell just once

How he at that stoplight tore, with such ease,
Through fabric that covers us all.

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Paul Pruitt works as Special Collections Librarian at the Bounds Law Library, University of Alabama. He has published recently in Birmingham Arts Journal and Dillydoun Review.
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"There's one thing you can say about
baldness---it's neat!"

—Myron Cohen



BARBIERI AND ME

8.5" x 10" Collage and Ink on Print
Dick Aunspaugh

Dick Aunspaugh, a native of Dunedin, FL, retired from teaching art at Young Harris College in Young Harris, GA. When not making art, his other passion is kayaking.
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MY '54 CHEVY OIL GUZZLER AND I GO EXPLORING

Jim Reed

I am now time-travelled back to the days before interstate highways were a thing. I struggle to legally-park the green machine—my very first car, a rusty 1954 Chevrolet. Today, I get lucky. It only takes six forward-reverse maneuvers to land between designated white lines. I creak open the driver's door and check to make sure adjacent vehicles are safely distanced from my precious cruiser.

I enter the Jitney Junior—what you folks in the future will call a convenience store—and select enough snacks to last me through my upcoming journey. As I head down the winding blue road, I feel my independence beckoning. While inside this upholstered automatic-shift rattler, I am my own boss. I am king of my own little booth of privacy. The AM radio picks up a staticky signal, providing me with a private performance by Nat King Cole. The green machine and I politely stop to allow a rattling locomotive to pass by. A quick glance and a smiling wave are offered to the engineer. He returns the gesture.

Once the earth stops rumbling, once the flashing red signals are dampened, once the coast is clear left and right, I push gas peddle, savor rail bumps, and begin the journey. In the rearview mirror I see plumes of blue-gray smoke as acceleration occurs. In the trunk are unopened cans of motor oil. I use several quarts a week, not to mention the required gallons of gas. A just-in-case empty gasoline can shudders next to the oil containers. An oily rag rests atop them, useful when frequent fluid checks are needed.

Eventually, I pass city limits signs and arrive in the village of Moundville. The state park is my destination. While it is only a short distance from home, it is a great distance from civilization. Moundville is the quietist place. Very few people travel here among the enormous mounds constructed by long-gone Native Americans. The quietness is appropriate. The quietness is homage to the thriving village that used to be here. Beautiful green grass covers the mounds. Silence hovers, forcing introspection and meditation. I drive through the enormous area, then enter the museum that displays instructive artifacts and exhibits that remind those of us living that there were once earlier families and tribes going about their daily lives.

Since childhood, my infrequent visits to Moundville have infused my imagination with the idea that others came and went before me. And that I, too, have arrived and will eventually be replaced by future others who in turn will live their lives... My sobering moments completed, I am now ready to check the oil, test the faulty gas gauge, dispose of cellophane wrappings that once housed nibbles, brush away the crumbs, and head back to my tribe. As I pass shops and eateries and service stations and asbestos-shingled bungalows

and dusty side roads, I ponder a bit about things like small temporary villages, passing behaviors, gossamer lives, love and life and death, passion and listlessness, moral high and low grounds...you know, things that are unsolvable but must be mentally massaged once in a while.

I think about the joys and terrors that I may experience in the coming decades of life on earth. I struggle to write these feeling and observations down so that each moment will mean much more than just another day, just another life. I am destined to be a writer and recorder. I just don't know it yet

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Jim Reed's latest book is "What I Said" Small Wisdoms Hidden Comforts, Unexpected Joys.
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"When you can, always advise people to do what you see they really want to do. Doing what they want to do, they may succeed; doing what they don't want to do, they won't."

—James Gould Cozzens

WHISPERINGS OF THE OLD FIR TREE

Cynthia Grady

Let winter come. Let the poppy
that shouts up the morning sun
go back into its sandy bed.

Let the hoe and the rake take their
long deserved rest against the wall
of the garden shed. Let winter come.

Let the bats and geese traveling
overhead find their way to their
southern homes. Let the blackberry

vines go bare, to click and rattle
in the wind. Let the sun shine low
on the water, the woodsmoke rise

high on the air. Neither the tide
nor I will stray from your side, no
matter how chill, so let winter come.

.....

Cynthia Grady writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for young readers and adults. Her most recent book, Write to Me: Letters from Japanese American Children to the Librarian They Left Behind was the 2020 One Book, One San Diego selection. She lives near the Rio Grande in central NM. cynthia@cynthiagrady.com

"The more one listens to ordinary conversations the more apparent it becomes that the reasoning faculties of the brain take little part in the direction of the vocal organs."

—Edgar Rice Burroughs

FLYING WITH CHAGALL

Pat Launius

I am a milkmaid in a blue dress and white apron, soaring in nightclouded dreams. I pass far above quaint villages scattered from Minsk to Bialystok like random pieces in a wedding quilt. I fly toward sunset, but never reach it. I must be catching up with Sun and Moon, en route to Gemini. Below me houses cluster round miniature onion domes, also patched with fading color...these country cousins of St. Basil. And in the fields, the livestock sing their songs to the stars, wishing for love. For it is springtime. I too am a creature seeking, for love perhaps. Or, like the geese I follow close behind, perhaps for home. But home is love, I have been told. Or is love home? Will I find both or none? Ah, from the fields below, up rises a white heifer, shining like a moon of amorphous form. She lows in passing greeting. Or is she calling russet bull so far below, too weighty to follow in her arc? One never knows with man or bull and maiden.

But longing calls me westward, some distant beckoning through time and space. It is a voice I long ago heard among school children. It is the voice of a boy perhaps of fifteen years, tall and strong, but shy like me. When we were children together yet apart, with downcast faces and awkward voices, we learned of maps, words, numbers, and how to read the signs to plant and harvest. But we did not learn of love before he left our village, and love has never found me in the years till now. And I had never learned to fly until today. But then one day, a letter came from far away, from the boy Tomas whom I remembered after long forgetting, but who had not forgotten me. Somehow, in all the world which he had traveled, he had remembered me. In those words, not many but enough, he recalled a day of games in the fields beside the school. He had seen me fall down from dancing on a rock, or learning to dance, or perhaps wishing to be seen dancing by him. As I read his letter, I too saw that day, as if from afar and as if spectator, not myself the girl who fell. The girl who did not know, or did not wish to show, the pain she felt, an ankle bruised or elbow scraped... a minor hurt. But Tomas had felt her pain. He'd run to scoop her up like a child, which both of them were. But in that tender gesture, he had felt the slight weight of her in his arms. And that he had not forgotten. And so his first few words, inscribed in blue ink, so like the blue of my dress, had brought to mind his eyes and mine meeting as he carried me for help.

Eyes quickly averted, faces aflame with shyness, we both had locked away what we had seen reflected there. More letters caught the trains between us, more memories in blues, sepias, and inky hues, like night siphoned from the bottle of the sky to promise hope between us... to draw me inexorably toward him in whatever vehicle memories choose to ride - in search of love. In inks of different hues, so like our eyes of browns and blues, we found our love and home, like towns inhabited in dreams, so like the villages I fly above. Tomas waiting past continents, oceans, mountains, in a far country I have never seen, to whom, to which I cross from past to future and connect the two somehow without the aid of maps, clocks, calendars. Is it a love of the mind and heart I feel? And is love, ever, truly real? These questions I ask as I fly...from east to west, from child to woman, from then to now. I wonder does he ask himself the same. I have not heard his voice of man or he my voice of woman. We have not seen the growth or change that may have come. How have we felt the magnetism of love that draws us close? Or are the fields of love invisible and distant - as to those who do not fly as milkmaids far above? Dreaming or awake, for who can tell with lovers in a trance. Do I still have so far to fly? Will I encircle earth and pass him by, so far aloft that he disappears again to me, as once did the boy Tomas? And then I ask again of the stars around me, "Where am I?" Am I lost I wonder. I call out in a voice of song or weeping, "Tomas, Tomas." But there is no answer from the west or from below. The winds that carried me seem weaker, my dress and apron heavier. No longer soaring, I begin to slowly fall, not precipitously as I fell from the dancing rock, but gently drifting as if into sleep or waking. No longer over Minsk toward Bialystok, I find myself nearing my childhood home and the window where blue curtains flutter above my soft downy bed. I sit wearied by travel, one tear rolling slowly down my cheek, splashing down upon the lone letter in blue ink. "Hello, goodbye," the smeared blue ink seems to cry. I lean to the window and look out above me. No clouds, no cows, no geese. The cold night and brittle stars scattered from east to west like silvery fencing. I call, "Tomas, Tomas."

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Pat Launius is a retired college art and English instructor, artist and potter. She lives in Smokerise, Blount County, Alabama, near her birthplace. She is a graduate of Phillips High School in Birmingham and the University of Alabama. plaunius@usa.net

THE HOLYMAN OF VIETNAM

David Hirshberg - Winner, 2nd Place Story, 2020 Hackney Literary Awards

1956, Arroyo Grande, New Mexico

After dinner on Friday nights, my father would tell stories to me, my older sister Débora and my younger sister Nohemi. We'd sit, legs crossed, with our backs to the great fire, listening to him raise and lower his voice, watching him standing, walking around the room, hearing the wood crackling, seeing ashes floating in space, noticing shadows flickering in an otherwise darkened room. When the stories got too scary, Nohemi would crawl inside her blanket, roll to where she was touching my legs, and peek out, turtle-like, only when there was a pause for a transition from one scene to another.

The stories would all start out the same way: a group of three children, one boy and two girls, all related, would sneak out of their house at night, go into the woods and dig up dirt, clay, and loam, and fashion the materials into a person twice the size of a normal man. The giant creature would spring to life as they poured hot coals over it, then the children would throw water to cool the figure, and watch it form hair, eyes, fingernails, and toes. The children would stick twigs into the head and then blow air into the space when they pulled the twigs out, giving life to the creature—or Holyman—as my father called it. Then the children would reveal to the Holyman the terrible situation that they were in, and how the Holyman should seek revenge on those who'd harmed them. The stories always took place on a cold windy night filled with danger in the fields, woods, and alleys. The children would be pursued by pirates and wizards, then would be assaulted with words, and attacked with weapons. They'd be forced to admit crimes that they hadn't committed, sins they weren't guilty of, and made to believe that they'd never see their parents again or witness the sun to rise that very day.

Then—the Holyman to the rescue!

The creature who couldn't talk, but who could see and hear, would materialize from the shadows and instantly spring into action, absorb taunts and insults, fend off musket balls, knives, and lances, retrieve those strapped to the rack, tied to the stake, shackled by chains attached to horses, or hoist up those who had their heads forced under water, in which case he'd breathe life back into the child, knowing that the very air that he blew would empty his own lungs, and cause his own death. In the end, he'd always die, without a sigh or trace of any emotion, and simply melt back into the earth to be recalled again, on another Friday night. Then we'd go to bed, to dream of the Holyman who'd always be there for us when we'd need him most.

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David Hirshberg is author of the novels My Mother's Son and Jacobo's Rainbow. He studied at Dartmouth College and the University of Pennsylvania. david@davidhirshberg.com

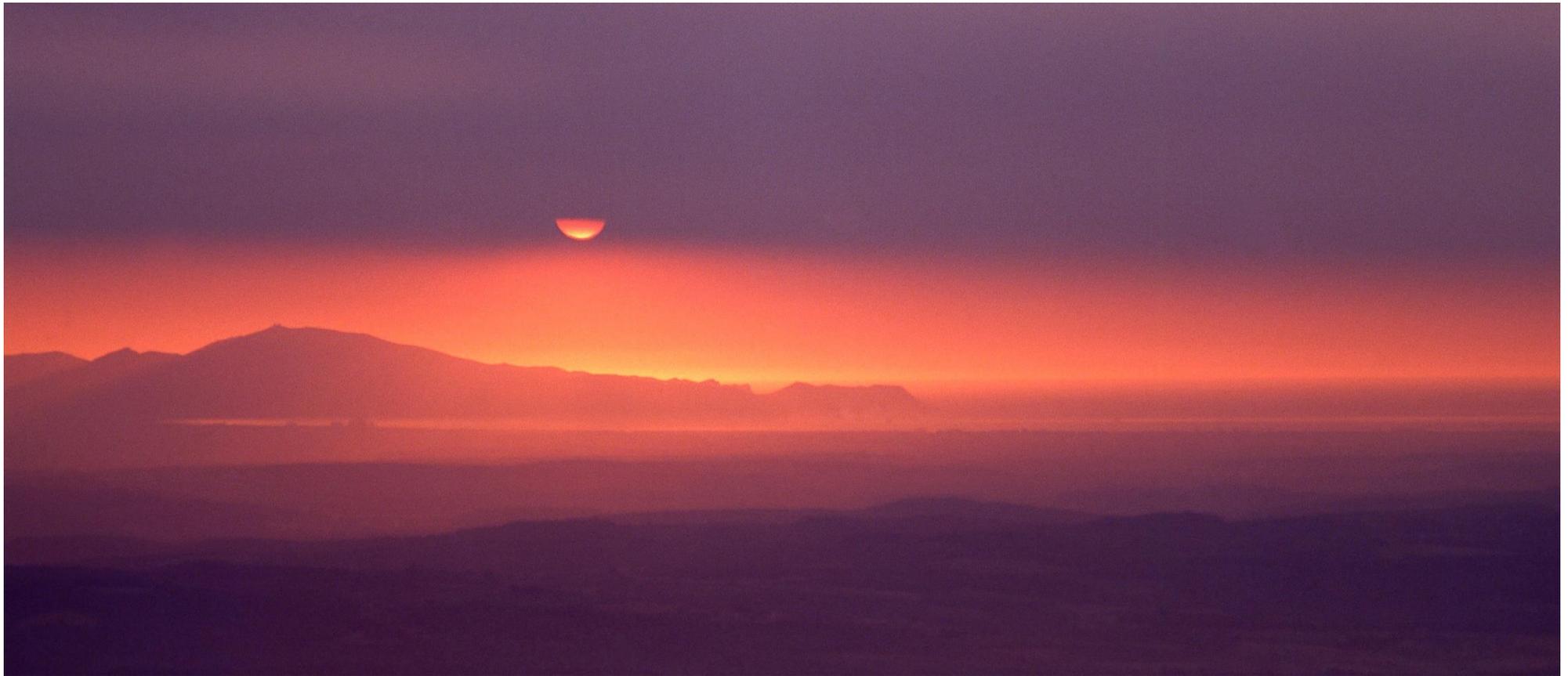
grief is not trying to drown me

Cynthia Grady

struggling as she is, as we both are,
against the riptide, kicking
the undertow with everything she's got--
I cling to her out here where there's no foothold.
She thrashes through a tangle of seaweed,
dashes me so deep, the floaties
behind my heart inflate,
and we resurface together,
we breathe together,
and we ride the swell breaking toward shore.

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Cynthia Grady writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for young readers and adults. Her most recent book, Write to Me: Letters from Japanese American Children to the Librarian They Left Behind was the 200 One Book, One San Diego selection. She lives near the Tio Grande in central NM. cynthia@cynthiagrady.com



SPANISH SUNRISE

Digital Photograph

Andrew Tyson

Andrew Tyson accompanied a group of teens on a mission in Spain. "The group spent the night on top of a mountain and slept under the stars. I woke up just in time to grab my camera and the scene was gone about a minute later." The photo is exactly as shot, not enhanced by any digital effect. tysona@bellsouth.net

VALPARAISO

Andrew McSorley

Bastard son of glaciers
and lake-effect snow,
pulsing in the pummeled
kettled pastures like a fading
star, I am the sparrow
that returns to you –
look me in the eye and tell me
you are nothing like your father,
look at me and tell me you are not
the smokestack towering
above us all, raining down
ash like hammer blows:
a reminder to bless the fields,
pray for cleansing rain.

.....

Andrew McSorley is the author of What Spirits Return (Kelsay Books). He is a graduate of the MFA program in creative writing at Southern Illinois University. His poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as The Minnesota Review, HAD, UCity Review, Gingerbread House Literary Magazine, and elsewhere. He lives and works in Appleton, WI. andrew.mcsorley@gmail.com

ABIGALE'S BLOOM

John Ryland

The forest opened abruptly, revealing a vast prairie of tall grasses. Pausing, I allowed my eyes to wash over the vastness before me, taking in the beauty of the scenery. Green hills rolled gently into the valley, yielding tall grasses that swayed with the ease of a woman's hips. To the east several grey boulders had made their escape from the distant cliffs and had migrated across the prairie in a slow, thousand-year march, making their way to their places well before my days had begun. They protruded from the grass like a giant's teeth, cast out in some horrible tragedy spoken of only in legends. To the west lay a vastness matched only by the expanse of the sea, its grassy arms bending in the wind, beckoning me onward.

It is through this vastness that the way I was on lead me. Two muddy ruts in the endless grass winding their parallel path toward another unseen town, whose name I would forget as soon as it had passed. Following the snake of the trail, a surprise captured my eyes, drawing me forward, toward it.

I saw a flower growing bravely in the center of the track, having not an ounce of right to be there. Any taller and it would have lost its head. To the left or right, it surely would be crushed. But here, in this dangerous place, it thrived by knowing its limitations. A single daffodil, like a beacon of light, stood firm with its face to the sun, neither knowing nor caring of its precarious existence.

As I appreciated its bravery, I pondered its fate. Was its placement here kind or no? Out on the prairie, safe from a travelers' path, it might be lost in the tall grasses and remain unseen, unappreciated, and perhaps stifled by the thirsty roots of the grass. But here, seen by everyone who passes, it remained endangered by the same weary travelers who might welcome its beauty. I determined to withhold my verdict on the fate of this flower, for neither did I set it here, nor would I pluck it from its site for it was a poignant reminder of the passing of time. Its days were already determined when it first sprang forth from the cold ground, but today it was surviving on its own and deserved no judgement from me.

I watched it bend, yielding slightly to the wind, then return to its post, a timeless worship of the sun. Kneeling before it, like a knight before his king, I stretched out a hand and felt the strength of its stem with a careful caress before cupping the flower in my fingers with all the gentleness a rough, calloused hand could provide. Looking into its face I saw an intricate beauty and an eternal promise of rebirth and renewal. With a deep breath I inhaled the light fragrance that it lent to this place, which hung in the air like the scent of a beautiful woman's perfume after she'd stormed angrily from the room.

Standing, I removed my shadow of my sadness from the yellow pedals, allowing the sun to embrace its adoring fan once again. The flower lit up with the sun's rays like the innocent laugh of a child, unaware of the finiteness of its days.

As a smile snuck across my unshaven face, I considered plucking it from its throne and delivering it to my beloved Abigale. She was kin to such things as delicate flowers and downy feathers, and yet remained one dress size out of her Christening gown.

With many miles to go and the desire to not upset the balance of things God given, I bade the flower farewell and wished it luck as I continued my journey, looking back a few times to refresh its memory in my mind. When at last I turned and could no longer distinguish its color nor shape, the smile it had lent me ran away from my face and returned to the flower, undoubtably to be recycled and reissued to the next follower in my footsteps.

I retrieved from my chest the telegraph that called me home, unfurling it with the same dread as when I was first handed it so many miles behind me. A call to return, with urgency enveloped in four simple words. Abigale is sick. Come quick.

The rhyme, probably unintended by a wife who had no time for such frivolities, struck a certain chord that had sustained me. A child's voice as melodious as a Lark, eyes as to draw envy from the bluest sky, and a smile as pure as a frozen pond surely deserved a poem of such greatness as to move mountains on such a forlorn day while she lay dying.

Born in a night as cold and dark as a cave, her chest remained frail and expensive to upkeep. With doctor's calls and concoctions the like I've never seen, she'd been kept as well as our prayers and our pennies could muster, but now both had run dry and the end was neigh for my sweet flower whose bloom was fading.

Pausing, I considered again returning to retrieve the flower as a gift for a child while she perished, but neither were mine to keep and the hours were of the essence. The time and place were memories now, allowing the moment to bloom only in my mind. It was a temporary respite; a moment of clarity and beauty, but it was gone. Thankful for the moment, but sad at its passing, I turned and continued walking, aware in my heart despondent that the flower was gone and it's bloom would kiss the sun nevermore.

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John Ryland has published stories and poems widely. rylandlink@yahoo.com

*"... it is better to be part of beauty for
one instant and then cease to exist than to
exist forever and never be a part of
beauty."*

—Don Marquis

LOVE IS LIKE A TREE

Reed Agan

We always search for light
in the dark.
The light is always there;
even when your fear blocks it out.

No one person is all good or all bad;
everyone has their imperfections.
You just have to learn how to embrace
those imperfections
to truly understand
what love is.

Love is like a tree.
It grows and grows
and can last
for lifetimes.

The people you truly love
don't just drop from the sky.
They stay planted in the ground,
waiting
for you
to find them.

Reed Agan is fifteen years old, a student at Leeds High School, who began drawing and painting at a very early age, and was inspired to start writing poetry after reading work by his great-aunt, Joanne Cage. Reed performed as percussionist in the Leeds Middle School Band. He enjoys drawing, painting, photography, music, and poetry, and is planning on a career in photography.

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A GOOD DAY

Linda Brewer Breeden

The alarm clock buzzed in the dark. As was his habit, Danny Ray turned it off and reached for Sarah only to bury his face in her empty pillow. His futile effort to escape his emptiness and doubt was made more painful by the fading scent of her.

Mornings had made her happy. On frosty winter days, when he was reluctant to leave the warmth of their bed, she would bounce up and down on the mattress saying, "Time for our run; the sun's already peeping over Cheaha Mountain!"

"Go without me," he'd plead, pulling the blanket over his head.

She would tug the blanket from his grasp declaring, "If we can't welcome the day together, how good will this day be?"

She insisted they run due east to greet the sun. Often their runs turned into discovery when she dropped to the earth to examine animal prints, identifying each as belonging to a bear, deer, coyote or bobcat. If that wasn't exciting enough, she would try to find the scat to confirm which animal had left it. She was fearless in seeking her delight and would declare every morning as a good day to have a good day.

Today, he felt a strong need of her, so he headed to the wooded area where they had gone to have sweet tea in the cool of the evening. The path was overgrown with knee high grass, snarly weeds, and blackberry bushes whose thorns grabbing at his pants went unnoticed.

The morning fog was thick, making it hard to find his way. Instinct guided him as Sarah's voice played in his head, "Why instinct is nothing but memories that come when you need them."

He moved slow, each step leaving a reluctant footprint behind in the wet grass. The distant crowing of a rooster made him smile. Sarah had declared that the rooster's crow was a trumpet from God because everyone needed a wakeup call. That was his hope because he had some thinking to do about this day.

By the time he reached the once vibrant red Adirondack chairs, now faded gray with a tinge of pink, the sun's rays slicing through the pines had burned off the fog. He brushed the pine straw from the seat of the chair, ignoring the droppings left by birds who had perched there. The boards on the chair cracked and shifted under his weight.

He should have expected the intensity Sarah would bring to their twenty-year marriage. After all, she had two speeds, off and warp. It was what triggered him to propose.

They had been taking a car trip across the state and had begun arguing as soon as the sun touched the horizon. The heat of the argument built with the temperature of the Alabama summer day. When she clammed up, he pulled his first love, a '57 cherry red Chevy, to the side of the road.

"We are going to talk about this," he said, attempting to take her hands into his. It had been like trying to pick up her cat, squirming with claws at the ready, who tolerated only one person—Sarah.

"I'm done talking and I surely don't need you to get me where I'm going," she said as she got out of the car and grabbed her suitcase from the backseat. "I'll catch a ride with the next car that comes along."

She walked a few feet and stopped, gripping the handle of her suitcase with her left hand, and stuck out her right thumb. He made a dramatic show of looking to the left, then to the right of the two-lane road, ignoring *her* ignoring *his* silent, but obvious, skepticism.

He wanted to drive away from this impossible female, but his protectiveness was stronger than his pride. He sat on the fender of the car and waited; vehicles on this stretch of road didn't come along often. Only one rusty pick-up truck had come by in the past hour, and it had turned onto a dirt road, stirring up a cloud of red dust.

The increasing temperature caused the sweat to trickle down his back, pasting shirt to skin. He took a lukewarm can of Dr. Pepper from a cooler that he'd forgotten to replenish with ice and walked over to her.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

Her eyes slanted toward him, "Kinda."

"Well, I love you—or I would if you weren't so dad-gum mean."

The flash of her eyes told him he had one move left. He dropped to a knee and lifted the Dr. Pepper as if it were an offering, the words rushing through his lips. "Sarah, will you marry me?"

She accepted the drink, popped the top and chugged half of it. Then she gave a satisfied smile and said, "I'd be honored, Danny Ray."

He sure did love that woman.

Bittersweet memories swirled inside him as he lay his head back, just to rest his eyes. Sensing a presence, his eyes popped open. Sarah was sitting in the adjacent chair, once again a shiny red.

“Sarah?” His voice trembled and his heart felt as if it would beat out of his chest.

She jumped to her feet and put her fisted hands on her hips like she did when she would be heard. His hands reached for her but came back empty. Her body melted away like the whisp of a candle blown out, while her words lingered, “Go to her and no more doubts. You hear me? It’s time to get your happy back.”

He opened his eyes. “Sarah—” His tears welled over, flowing unchecked as the lump in his throat released the sobs that had been stuck there.

“I love you.” Danny Ray uttered her three favorite words.

Peace filled his empty heart with the promise this day held. It was time to get ready for his wedding.

It was, after all, a good day to have a good day.

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Linda Brewer-Breeden lives in Smyrna, Georgia. She holds a BS from the University of Alabama and a MS from Troy State University. Her short stories have appeared in Redbook, Guideposts, Southern Writers Magazine, Chicken Soup, Bouirk Foundation and Widows Might. She has a grandson, two children and a rescue puppy. breeden.lin@yahoo.com

“Not everyone grows up
as they age.”

n

Tom Nichols—



STONEWARE YUNOMI INCISED DESIGN

Alan Burch

Alan Burch is a ceramic artist living in Florence, AL. His work focuses on wheelthrown traditional forms with a modern approach to surface decoration and construction. Alan earned a B.F.A. degree from University of North Alabama in ceramics, and though he has lived most of his life in Texas he considers himself an Alabamian because of the formative years spent here. abnxs@bellsouth.net

BITS OF THE WORLD IN VERSE

Carol Coven Grannick

I walk as summer fades, and find a poem.

A step, a skip, all seem to free a poem.

A tree with reaching branches shares the words
that speak in silence, Will I be a poem?

My foot sets tiny rocks to spinning 'round—
delighted now they whisper, We? A poem?

The turning sunlit leaves begin to fly
in neon colors they agree: a poem!

At home, and warmed by sun and earth's delights,
give words to walk's events and see—a poem.

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Carol Coven Grannick is a children's author and poet whose fiction and poetry appears/is forthcoming in Cricket, Ladybug, Babybug, Highlights, and Hello. She finds poetry everywhere, and loves the way it has scored her life.
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MISS INDIRECTION MEETS JESUS

Sharon Devaney-Lovinguth

So, I see this guy walking along the beach carrying a tent. It's an ocean beach, not a white-sand-teal water Gulf beach. So pretty drab. Like the guy and his tent. He fits right in. He sees me and he says, "I see I'm not alone here."*

And I say, "Obviously not." But not mean—I just say it kind of flat like the color of the sand, "Desert Dun."

He plops the tent down and sits. I check him out, eyes first, top down and he looks okay. Nothing radical, nothing yay/nay. Except maybe the brown eyes. I fall straight in love with the eyes. Like looking into a mirror. (You know you can't see your own eyes in a mirror, right? Just a reflection on a silver surface. Hall of mirrors stuff. But you can see your own eyes in maybe ten other people's eyes on the planet.

"You are waiting," he says, flat like the sand, the horizon, hell, there aren't even any waves.

"No shit, Sherlock," I reply, wit that I am. I am witty, people say all the time, "you're so funny . . . way with words, you should write." But here's the thing, they're wrong. I have no business writing. None at all. Writers have to have something to say.

"Sorry, drifted, sorry, yeah, waiting for the guy with the cards. I'm waiting.

"You, too? Waiting?" So, he answers but with a question. Poor guy. He's lost, too.

"South of France," I answer, and then again, "About \$500." The card. That's how much the guy with the cards doles out on the last day of every month. Just enough to keep body and soul, as they say. He nods and in unison we look into each other's brown eyes, then down to the brownish sand, then out to the horizon. No color there really, but it is flat. That's something, I guess.

"Do you ever want to go home?" he asks. This time there's sadness in the question. Like when you ask a question that you know will hurt, but you ask it just to feel the sadness. That kind.

And I say, "Every second of every second."

"Why don't you, then?"

Both of us have those sad, sad basset hound eyes. Brown and rich. He knows why, even though I don't say. Because it's really a question he's asking himself and I just happen to be in front of him when it comes out. Neither of us can go home and neither of us can stay here. It's closing time. The bridges to home are all burned. A veritable island remains. Flat. So, it's sink, swim or sit on the beach waiting for the money. Afraid to sink. Too tired and hopeless to swim. So, the beach, the tent, the South of France, just me and Jesus, Jesus and me by the sea, by the sea, by the colorless sea.

How I know he's Jesus? I don't know, but I do.

"How the hell did you land on this plane of a beach," I ask him.

"Lack of planning," he says. Or too much, I think. Or lack of control maybe even. He's Jesus. He probably isn't lying. But he could think he knows the answer when he really doesn't. It's all about belief, what you believe you know.

“Planning, lack of,” I echo.

“Yeah, that’s an old story.” He’s not unsocial, but it does take effort to get past the sang froid. The water here is froid, by the way. Jesus in France on the same beach as me. Hoodathunkit, right? The cold ocean, and the man, both. Unexpected, but not necessarily unpleasant. Starry, shiny brown eyes. Pure. Not a fleck in nor halo around. The ocean is an island’s halo. How poetic. Ergo, the island is an angel. How logical. But I digress. A huge leap.

“They say you have to have been a place to capture it in writing. Do you believe that?” I ask. “I’ll warn you, I have an opinion, but I want your unvarnished one. Please.”

“Honestly?” He rolls his eyes. Ironically? I can’t tell. Rolls them in my direction. His face stays east, though. “Honestly? Well, I’ve always relied on someone else’s wing and a prayer.” And the kindness of strangers, I think.

“You mean imagination?” I say.

He says “Yes,” real softly. Then we both face east and gaze off.

*Jesus’ words are in red as they were in my childhood Bible

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Sharon DeVaney-Lovinguth is a Birmingham writer, artist and supporter of self-expression in all forms. Recently retired from teaching English at Jefferson State Community College, she is currently reviewing and revising her life, walking her dog, Happiness, and sleeping in a lot. devlov@gmail.com

TRUE GRIT

Daniel Moore

Of all the grains I've been known
to go against, I admit to having favorites.
The straight and narrows crooked plan
to bury us alive, living beside the right
and wrongs blind ambition to make the
world exciting as an Amish coma. I asked
the man at the hardware store to get me
the roughest paper made so I could caress
the holes in the ground where crosses killed
the trees. He stared at me as if a forest was
burning in his eyes, then turned his face into
an axe and said your tears need trimming.

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Daniel Edward Moore lives in Washington state on Whidbey Island. His poems are forthcoming in The Chaffin Journal, Chiron Review, The American Journal of Poetry, The Bitter Oleander, Plainsongs Magazine, The Blue Mountain Review and Drunk Monkeys Magazine. He is the author of Boys (Duck Lake Books) and Waxing the Dents (Brick Road Poetry Press).
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History Being Made The Lives of Children During the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

Breland Sansing

December 1, 1955 was a historic day for African Americans. My mother was late picking me up, and when she finally arrived at my friend's house, she explained what had happened. She said that another colored lady refused to sit in the back of the bus. Since she refused to move from the white section to let a white man sit down, she was arrested. My mother was very upset when she was telling the story to us.

Four days later on December 5, 1955, I had to get up extra early to get to school on time. You see, since Mrs. Rosa was arrested, we boycotted riding the bus. This means I had to walk to school. I remember it was a cold winter morning, I bundled up and walked to school. However; I don't mind walking to school, because we were trying to change the law. We did not believe that it is right to make colored people sit in the back. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was trying to help us get more rights.

It has been many months and we have made many accomplishments. We are still boycotting the bus and The Montgomery City Line is losing approximately 30,000 - 40,000 fares per day. We will boycott until Mrs. Rosa Parks is declared innocent and when they change the law. Until then, I will continue to walk to school and other places. Sometimes my mother and I take a taxi when we are coming home from the store. The black taxi drivers charge us a reduced fare of 10 cents. I especially enjoy taking the taxi more than riding the bus or walking, so I do not have to carry groceries all the way home.

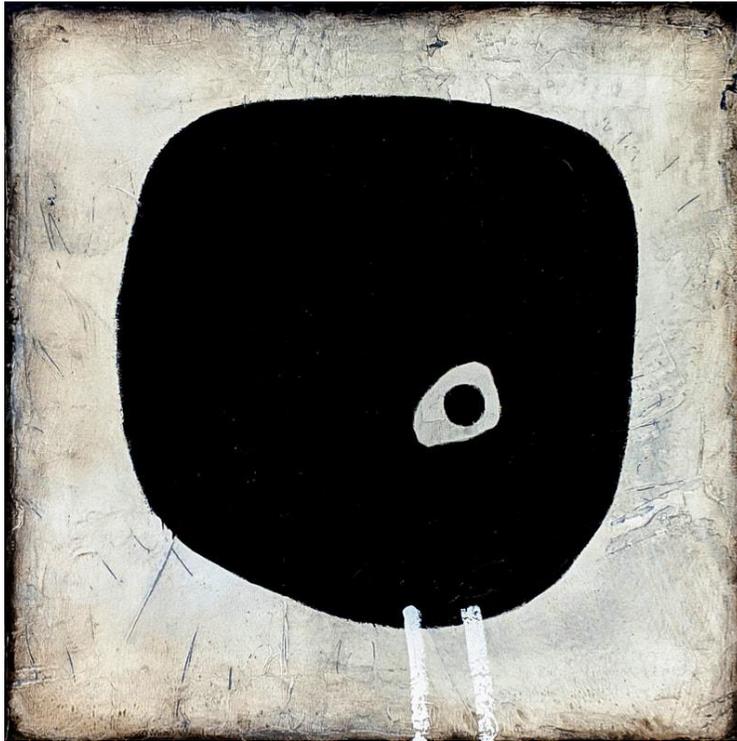
It has been 381 days and we are finally able to celebrate. The boycott finally ended on this day, December 20, 1956, when the US Supreme Court ruled segregation on public buses unconstitutional. We had won the fight! It was such a great day of celebration. My family and friends rejoiced when we heard the news. We had family and friends over to our house to celebrate the occasion.

Thanks to Mrs. Rosa Parks, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr, and many others, history was made. This brought Rev. King into the spotlight as one of the most important leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement. We are so proud that our boycott brought a lot of awareness nationally. My mother told me that Rev. King became well known throughout the country. She also said that the success in our town inspired other colored communities in the South to protest racial discrimination.

It feels great that I was able to help participate in this event. Someday I will tell my children and grandchildren about the time that my mother was late picking me up from a friend's house.

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Breland Sansing is a fourth grader at Southminster Day School in Vestavia Hills, AL. His is the winning essay of those submitted for the Annual Glenn Feldman Historical Essay Contest for fourth graders.



IDIOSYNCRATIC

Kay Vinson

24" X 24"

Acrylic on Canvas

Birmingham artist Kay Vinson, arranges textures, shapes, and found objects, then adds layer upon layer of glazes to create a multisensory experience for the viewer.

www.wildwoodarts.net

UNDERSTANDING

Bracha K. Sharp

The way to
the quiet is
often through
this rushing

In my
Head—and
Follows the hanging darkness,
or how, in bed, from this mass, my

Thoughts will come,
Like they
Were always meant to:
This quiet distillation,
This thoughtful stream, the cool
Air blowing—and I am aware

of my heart in
My chest, of how the
thoughts creep—
How they wind.

And I am there,
In the grass,

Breathing in the wet dirt,
the urge to Meld into this:

This thing I feel in my bones,
The way through the noise
And the way to the quiet,

This understanding that
Rocks my bones

And lets me

Sleep.

.....

Bracha K. Sharp was published in the American Poetry Review. She placed first in the national Hackney Literary Awards and the poem appeared in the Birmingham Arts Journal. She was a finalist in the New Millennium Writings Poetry Awards and received a 2019 Moonbeam Children's Book Awards Silver Medal.

www.brachaksharp.com

*"I can tell people are judgmental
just by looking at them."*

—Jackie Muckenfuss



TRIPPING IN THE ANGEL TRUMPETS

16" x 20"

Acrylic on Canvas

Ebeth Scott-Sinclair

Ebeth Scott-Sinclair's drawings and designs reflect a quirky, emotional world of juxtapositions filled with texture and color. In the process of painting or drawing, a piece of art reveals the world from which it came, and stories flow with snippets of dialogue, music, relationships, and emotions.

ebeth.scottsinclair@gmail.com

DOUGLAS

Larry Barton

After a few minutes . . .

“If you don’t sit still, you’re gonna make me cut your ear off” I told Douglas. Douglas was an 8-year-old, quick witted, full of energy and had not learned the meaning of sitting still while getting a haircut.

“Have you ever cut an ear off,” asked Douglas.

“One time,” I responded,

“What happened?” Douglas asked.

While cutting his hair I began to explain to Douglas about a young boy who would not sit still. As I started cutting around the ear on the right side of his head, I kept warning him to be still. All of a sudden, he moved and jumped. When he did , the clipper blade caught his ear and cut it off. Blood started flying everywhere. The boy was screaming, and all the customers were excited. His mother said we would have to take him to the hospital to have his ear put back on.

By that time all the customers in the shop had picked up of our conversation and were listening intently as I talked with Douglas.

“What did you do when you cut the boy’s ear off?” Douglas asked.

“Fortunately, I had a sewing kit with some red thread. I picked up the ear up—it had fallen on the floor—I washed it off, tried to stop the bleeding and began to sew the ear back on the side of his head,” I said.

“Did you get it back sewed on?” Douglas asked.

“After a while, I finished sewing it back on, but I discovered that I had sewn the ear lower than the other ear” I responded.

“What happened?” Douglas asked with a real serious look on his face.

“Well sir, there were a couple of small problems. Not only did it look awkward, but the poor boy also had tremendous headaches all the time. When someone talked to him, the words would go in one ear, but due to the unevenness of his ears, the words could not get out of his head. All the words became entangled in his head causing his headaches,” I concluded.

“There was a big floor length mirror on the wall facing my barber chair. While continuing to cut his hair, I was watching Douglas in the mirror. There was nothing but silence, not only Douglas, but everyone in the shop. Douglas continued looking at me for a couple minutes. Finally he asked, “Are you telling me the truth?”

Everyone in the shop burst out laughing and as I started laughing, I told Douglas, “Nah, it’s not a true story, but I knew it would keep you still while I cut your hair.”

.....

Larry Barton is retired from several occupations: barber, baritone gospel singer, goat farmer, mayor of Talledega, and mortician to name a few. He spends his time these days spinning tales based on life experiences. Douglas is part of Never A Dull Moment, his 7th book. mayorlarrybarton@aol.com



SUNFLOWER

10" x 16"

Multiblock Woodcut

Marianne Hall

*Marianne Hall
studied at the
Alabama School of
Fine Arts in
Birmingham and
Cooper Union in
New York. She and
her husband have
created a
homestead in
Danville, AL, with
sheep, goats,
chickens, horses
and five dogs. Like
many rural
southerners, they
also garden and
keep an orchard.*

**mariannehall
@gmail.com**

THE RAIN IS THE EARTH TODAY

Bracha K. Sharp

The rain is the earth today—
Today the earth's
Stratosphere is
fine rain.
The smell of
rain covers
The earth;
Judge the rain
for its fine
film of quiescence,
its open-hearted
being.

It soaks the
deck,
it smells like the woods
of Eden.
Find—your
place in the rain.
Strike your being
with rainwater; fill
Your Soul anew—you
know:

The rain is the earth
Today.

.....

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MATTERS TRULY

Heather C. Morris

Two days before school started, I realized that I had not even glanced at any of the required summer reading for my AP British Lit class. Half of my brain had forgotten; half of my heart had dismissed the reading as unnecessary. After all, nothing would ever be the same again, would it?

Usually, English was my favorite subject, the one at which I excelled, but nothing since March 2020 had been “usual.” I tried to motivate myself by mentally listing my top five college choices, but the chances of me attending any of them next year felt as remote and unattainable as the moon. I could see the same lackluster spirit taking root in my parents, both of whom are engineers, and my two younger brothers. Why not binge watch the entire Star Wars universe on Disney+?

Did it really matter what time you woke up in the morning? Or if you were even showered for that Teams meeting? What truly mattered anymore? At least now, we had the start of school to distract us from troublesome, existential, pandemic-induced reflections. I am a good student, or at least, I aspire to be. Therefore, I went to the library, armed with my mask and self-scan temperature results from that morning, to find one or two required reading books. I also found a miniature commentary on the state of our communities.

In the parking lot, I heard, “Maddie! Maddie Prescott! That’s you, isn’t it?” My head whipped around. One of my good friends, Ella, sprinted toward me. She checked up suddenly. I could tell that she wanted to give me a hug...but remembered. My arms longed to encircle her and squeeze tightly. How long had it been since I had been able to greet a friend with a hug? “Ella, it is so good to see you.” “I came to find a book for AP Brit Lit. What about you?” “The same. I totally forgot about summer reading. It hasn’t really felt like summer.” Ella opened the library door and we both walked inside, past the librarian stationed at the door. At first, I thought she wanted to take our temperatures, but she waved us into the lobby. Ella and I paused to chat. As we reviewed our summers (not much had happened) and upcoming classes (we were not expecting much), we noticed the same librarian approaching.

“Excuse me, ladies, but we have a line to enter the library. You need to move on and make your selections.”

I felt the familiar sadness and anger that seemed to characterize living in uncertainty. Ella’s face mirrored mine – disappointment, sadness, resignation.

As Ella and I promised to text each other with notes on our Brit Lit assignment, I glanced around the library. The computers were gone; the story time steps were blocked; the toys in the little kids’ reading area had been removed, leaving a blank void in their absence. The emptiness and dead space screamed silently.

I hurried to find Pride and Prejudice, check it out, and leave. I texted Constance later.

Me - Went to the library today. Depressing. Connie –

Huh? that's one of your fav places.

Me - Not now. No community there. Is that what we are all missing? Relationship. Connie –

Yup. I sure am. Then she wrote the words that still haunt me –

Maybe we have found what really matters after all.

.....

*Heather C. Morris is a research scientist by day and a writer and reader of stories all the time. She lives in Huntsville, AL with three fantasti children and two furry friends who keep her and her husband hustling. **heathercmorris.com***

*"I taught millions to read but
not one to sin."*

—Noah Webster



The non-profit Birmingham Arts Journal is sustained by its editors, donors, and readers, with additional support from

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