

Everscribe

MAGAZINE

ISSUE NO. 6

SCRIBA VITA

Embrace the art of the written word in Everscribe's sixth issue, showcasing incredible works from our talented writers.

everscribemag.com



Table of Contents

Editor's Note	iii
Scribe's Corner	1
Interview with Ethan Wang	2
Interview with Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo	3
Fictional Short Story	4
Paul O. Jenkins Union	5
Mark Keane The Jenkins	8
Paul Lewellan Free Coffee Fridays	11
Sarah Das Gupta ON THE ROCKS	13
Zary Fekete Lessons in Shakespeare	15
Zoe Caryl The White Roses	18
Alan Swyer King Of The B-Sides	21
Poetry	25
Daphodille Shore-gazing, Longing	26
HR Harper Gravity	27
	Alchemy 28
	Luxembourg 29
MK Kuol When I had the chance to be god	30
	The Disgruntled Griot 31
	Do not be like us 33
E. C. Traganas THE DEPARTURE – A Haibun	35
ari b. cofer IF I SEE THE PRIEST NOW,	36
	MAYBE FORGIVENESS CAN HELP ME FORGET
Simon Collinson Night People	37
William Doreski The Wind from Ireland	40

About Everscribe

Everscribe is a non-profit digital literary magazine dedicated to showcasing exceptional writing and talent. We invite individuals from all backgrounds, experiences, and ages to share their work with us.

Our mission is to create an accessible platform that makes it simple and straightforward for anyone to publish with us. We want to break down barriers and provide opportunities for all writers to showcase their talent and creativity, as we believe that talent should speak for itself. With our monthly issues, Everscribe aims to be a launching pad for those who have longed to share their stories but felt limited by traditional publishing routes. Our submissions are always open, and our process is free, easy, and unlimited!



everscribemag.com

Table of Contents

Valerie	<i>Pale red carnations</i>	41
Loralee Clark	<i>Stonehenge: Ecology of Flux</i>	43
Natalie Hammonds	<i>as i lay me down to sleep</i>	45
Christina Zhang	<i>The Quiet Echo of Essex</i>	46
Emmanuel G G Yamba	<i>Stories</i>	48
Will Reger	<i>The Needle</i>	49
	<i>We Stand Up</i>	50
	<i>Cat and Mouse</i>	51
Nattie O'Sheggzy . .	<i>Licking Candy by the Roadside</i>	52
Christina Chin & Uchechukwu Onyedikam	<i>Of A Jazz Thing</i>	53
Uchechukwu Onyedikam	<i>SPIRIT</i>	54
	<i>HAIL MARY!</i>	55
Chris Bridgen	<i>He takes stock</i>	56
Kimutai Kemboi Allan	<i>SMILES IN THE DARK</i>	57
	<i>WHILEND THOUGHTS</i>	58
Sas K	<i>the dress</i>	59
Alistair Gaunt	<i>Ennui</i>	60
John Jeffire	<i>All Stories Are True</i>	61
	<i>they always come back</i>	62
	<i>SOS</i>	63
Terence Young	<i>Seeing Red</i>	64
	<i>Antecedents</i>	65
	<i>Mystery Train</i>	67
Acknowledgements		iv
Future Issues		v

Everscribe's Platforms

Join the conversation and fun in Everscribe's welcoming community across various platforms.

Visit our official [Discord](#) server and reach out to us on [X](#), and [Instagram](#)!



@everscribemag.com



@everscribemag



@everscribemag

Editor's Note

Dear Scribe,

I'm beyond excited to share the sixth issue of Everscribe with you, titled *Scriba Vita*, meaning "Writer of Life." This title speaks to the heart of storytelling—how writers breathe life into words, shaping emotions, memories, and entire worlds with their craft.

This issue is particularly special. Not only is it filled with incredible talent, but it is also officially our largest issue yet! We were overwhelmed by the sheer number of outstanding submissions, and we are so grateful to every writer who entrusted us with their work. Your stories, poems, and voices are what make this magazine a space for creativity, connection, and inspiration.

A heartfelt thank you to our contributors, our Managing Editor, and our amazing community. Your passion is what makes Everscribe thrive.

I hope you find joy, inspiration, and a little bit of yourself in these pages. Thank you for being part of this journey—your support means everything.

With warm gratitude,

Dafia

Founder & Editor-in-Chief

Scribe's Corner




Word of the Month!

The Scribes have spoken... The word of the month is: **Weary!**

Last month, our Scribes were feeling dreary, and now we've leveled up to weary—progress? Maybe. This month, the word captures that deep, lingering exhaustion that seeps into the bones. Whether it's the weight of winter clinging on, the endless cycle of work and life, or just the shortness of February leaving us feeling like we blinked and missed it, weary seems to sum it up perfectly. But even in weariness, there's a certain beauty. The quiet moments of rest, the weight of experience, the resilience in carrying on. Sometimes, being weary just means you've lived through something worth telling.

Want to help choose our next Word of the Month? Vote in our polls on Discord and social media!

Literary Technique Spotlight



Sometimes, what's left unsaid speaks the loudest. This month, our spotlight shines on **subtext**—the art of saying something without actually saying it. The best stories aren't just about what's on the surface, but the unspoken emotions, hidden tensions, and quiet truths between the lines.

A pause in dialogue. A glance that lingers. A word choice that hints at something deeper. The best writing isn't just about what is said, but what is felt beneath the surface. Take Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. When Elizabeth thanks Darcy for saving her family, he doesn't confess his love outright. He simply says: "*I thought only of you.*" Just five words, yet they carry everything—his devotion, his vulnerability, and the love he cannot fully express.

Question for our Scribes...

February may be the shortest month, but it holds some of the biggest feelings—love, loss, longing, and everything in between. What are the unsaid things in your writing or life? The moments where silence speaks louder than words? Maybe it's a look exchanged between characters, a line of dialogue that means more than it seems, or even something in your own life.

Send us your answers in our official Discord community, or post them on X and Instagram using **#ScribesCorner**.

Interview with

Ethan Wang

Featured and published in [Issue No. 2, Vox Novum](#).

Hello! I am **Ethan Wang**, and I am 20 years old. I am from Pennsylvania, and I am currently a University of Virginia student. I am planning on studying marketing with a minor in data science, and I started writing last year for my creative fiction class-- this is something I'm new to, so I am glad that people enjoyed my story. It makes me want to continue writing in my free time! Other things that I enjoy are watching movies and making my own short films, photography, music production, exercise, trying new foods, and seeing new places.

What inspired you to write the piece that was published in Everscribe? Can you share the story behind it?

In my creative writing class, the first few stories were serious and had this immense weight to them. I wanted to make something more lighthearted and fun. A lot of the dialogue was inspired by conversations I've had, or observations that I've made. I like to notice these little things because they're funny. The Idiot by Elif Batuman inspired the level of detail in Business Bear. I studied it in a class last year. Finally, there are some feelings of fear towards the corporate world. Trying to get into the selective commerce school means tackling it head on.

What themes or messages do you hope readers take away from your work?

Really, I'd be happy if you left the story just feeling amused. It doesn't have to be much more than that. If you want to think about it more,

then go ahead. That makes me happy, too.

How has your writing evolved since you started? Are there any particular influences that have shaped your style?

Like I said earlier, Elif Batuman's The Idiot. Business Bear was my first story, and I made a sequel that was similar in style, and then the last one I made was pretty different and retrospective. The latest work was inspired by Haruki Murakami. I was reading Kafka on The Shore at the time. Super cool book. Other than that, I mostly write like how I would talk, or how I would journal to myself.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

I don't feel like I should be giving advice; I'm just a student that took a creative writing course for fun. I like to write conversationally and try to make weird observations that I find funny, but you should do whatever you want to do. Just write

something that you'd read yourself. Also, get a nice mechanical keyboard to type on. Makes everything more fun. And take long showers for ideas.

Are there any upcoming projects or works in progress that you're particularly excited about?

No, not really. I was going to take intermediate creative writing this semester, but I decided to study Chinese history instead. But, I think I'll try to write something else over winter break. Writing is super fun! I have more time now.

How can readers find you and see more of your work?

I have a website: www.fthanwa.com. There are some pictures and videos and stories I have on there. If you want to read the sequel to Business Bear, it's titled Detective Dog under the more section. I'm also on Instagram @fthanwa and Bluesky @fthanwa. I plan on making some more videos soon.

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Ethan Wang! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Ethan Wang's Featured story "**Business Bear**" in [Issue No. 2, Vox Novum](#), or on our official [website](#)!

Interview with

Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo

Published in *Issue No. 2, Vox Novum, Issue No. 3, Pulsus Litterae*, and *Issue No. 4, Musa et Verbum*.

My name is **Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo**. I was born on the 25th of October. I am a poet, playwright, and essayist from Nigeria, West Africa. I am from the Northern region of Nigeria. I love writing!

What inspired you to write the piece(s) that was published in Everscribe? Can you share the story behind it?

One of my poems that got published in the second issue of Everscribe, "A smile in Agony," was inspired by a young lady I fell in love with secretly for months. "A smile in Agony" came up and I wrote about it. My second poem, "Mother Abujá; one who settles fight," was inspired by the story my mother told me about a River that came up due to disagreement between two brothers. "Oldmar's plea: the biblical verses" was inspired by the way I see how people treat nature and how nature is dying. I wrote the poem from a biblical perspective.

What themes or messages do you hope readers take away from your work?

I often explore the theme of death, love, pain, agony, peace and social justice. Most of the themes I

portrayed in my poems are universal in nature and this tends to spread the whole message I want to pass.

How has your writing evolved since you started? Are there any particular influences that have shaped your style?

My writing have evolved continually to my perseverance and passion to continue to write. I make us of simplistic language to explore sophisticated themes and subject matter. Wole Soyinka, Williams Wordsworth, Samuel T. Coleridge, Williams Shakespeare and Niyi Osundare influenced my writing. I started as a novice in poetry, but now, I even write to the extent of been nominated for a Pushcart award.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

I would advise them not to ever give up. The culture of a good author is to continue to write as if

he didn't write, he is going to die. If I don't write in a day, I do feel incomplete. Also, for an author to succeed, you have to study other authors of your genre work too, and respect their work and dedication.

Are there any upcoming projects or works in progress that you're particularly excited about?

I am currently working on publishing my debut poetry collection. I would upload it on Amazon for readers to enjoy. The book should be out next year by God's grace.

How can readers find you and see more of your work?

Readers can find me on my Twitter handle @KazeemOcheni(Black Orpheus), they can also find me on Facebook @Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo, they can also find me through my Gmail ochenikazeem025@gmail.com

Everscribe is thrilled to have published talented writers like Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo! We thank you for choosing Everscribe as your literary home. Read Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo's "**The Poet's invocation**" in *Issue No. 4, Musa et Verbum*!

Fictional Short Story

Paul O. Jenkins

Union

On a pleasant day in late April as a Kentucky wind crooned in his ear, Michael Morgan examined his ledger. Among credits he recorded the facts that Laura was tall and pretty, and that he was full of the dazzling poetry of youth. Laura, he felt, could re-dew the grass for him, make it sparkle under her gaze through some authority granted only to the blessed. Yet it was this very bliss, this consecration, he considered, that constituted the damning entry in the debit column. Laura struck him as entirely natural, someone who flawlessly navigated the very waters which for him held unseen eddies and whirlpools. As he cataloged his thoughts, Michael heard the wind gather again and watched the grasses bend and straighten, bend and straighten in a pattern so apt both to life and his own predicament.

Bent at the waist, Laura was studying a tiny wildflower, a timid harbinger of spring. He watched her guide a strand of hair around her ear, then wet her lips unconsciously. Suddenly he wanted to leave her alone in the field, grant her sole dominion over the ground to which she so clearly belonged. And as he held the thought he wondered where he might belong. Michael staggered a bit, having lost his balance as the blood crushed to

his head, and with a sickening realization, he defined his quandary as unalterable. For he had tried, and could not believe.

Still, it was part of his nature to try and make the best of things, counterattack when the battle seemed lost. He strode up behind her, daintily fondled a lock of her hair and planted a warm kiss on her elegant neck. He felt her rise up and lean into him, willingly forcing him to draw his arms around her waist to maintain their balance. For the moment, they were purely one and depended on the other in equal terms. Michael's mind was deliciously blank. For a moment, he only felt. He heard nothing, spoke nothing. And yet too soon he was again alone. She had never said that she loved him.

Michael Morgan believed in words, and perhaps only in words. Words on paper were best, for they could always be revised. Next best were words once heard, then recorded forever in the mind for playback. But this physical sharing, torso on torso, so apparently real, escaped him even as he knew he was experiencing it. If only she would say those few words to him! He waited and listened to the joyous song of far-off birds. He wanted to sing her a song of his own now, but felt his voice would break before he might finish. The wind blew back in short fits and

starts, as if in pert answer to his longing.

Michael turned Laura in his arms now and saw her smiling at him. There was something eternal about her face. Everyone must love it. He was certain she had been put on earth for the sole purpose of being loved, and how could anything, anyone so simply beautiful ever find satisfaction with what little he had to offer? Overcome by the beauty before him, he swallowed, choking down the thought that he must rise above himself to retain her attention.

Her eyes held him. In their kiss, slow and gentle, wonderfully ever-changing, he was a willing and bewildered participant. It was her world with which she might delight him, her world to enjoy as it should be enjoyed. He wanted her to initiate every kiss, for he preferred following the delicious trails she led him down rather than charting a course himself. Better he should momentarily breathe the air of her

“Put on earth for the sole purpose of being loved.”

world than ask her to enter his.

Yes, he wanted to sing her a song, any song that might make her smile. But before he could draw

breathe to begin, she unknowingly cut him off. “You know, Mike, I think I will buy that hummingbird feeder,” she said, apropos of nothing, and shattering the idyll he had created in his mind. “Might as well help one of God’s creatures that’s hungry.”

“A bird-feeder, yes,” he said, thinking all the while that hope was indeed a thing with feathers. So far, they’d avoided a serious conversation about the topic, this

“It’s the most natural thing in the world.”

gulf of faith, but he’d known right from the start that it would define their relationship. Her conviction was part of what attracted him, of course. How reassuring it must be to know that such a pillar existed. His little world featured no such buttressing. The wind might toss him wherever it would, for he had no anchor. Yet he knew just as clearly that tethering himself to a believer would be no true substitute for real faith. He’d simply be a freeloader, a parasite, leeching from her whatever convictions he lacked and was unable to conceive on his own.

He gave her a final peck of admiration and backed away. He walked down to the small stream, pleased by the gurgling sounds it spread. As he neared the banks he found the ground uneven and strove to maintain his balance. He carefully picked his way around the emerging wildflowers until he found a rock on which he could rest. The warmth it had absorbed

from the sun was a comfort to him.

Laura stood for a moment and regarded her friend. He was such a dear, but always that little bit stiff. They were both tall, well-matched, a bit wide in the hips. Musing, she followed him down to the water in a leisurely fashion. She mistrusted the fact that he often seemed to find it difficult to look her squarely in the eye. And then there was that element she’d told herself not yet to dwell on, his pride. More troubling still was the fact that while he seemed to place undue trust merely in himself, she suspected this very self-regard held no firm foundation. He was still so young.

And so unlike Vance. Coloring unconsciously, she remembered what a tremendously good kisser Vance had been. Vance never asked her anything. In fact, he said next to nothing, but his breath seemed naturally sweet. She recalled the little burn marks that decorated his hands, the result of welding, the job he’d already known would be his vocation. She liked to touch those little ridges whenever they held hands. And, oh, how she had collapsed inside herself every time he brushed his lips against hers. It was something she nearly refused to believe in, so wonderful was the effect. When they held hands after church on Sundays the surge inside her always felt more heavenly than sinful.

Then, one day Vance had simply left town. He had never said a word of good-bye, and Laura had often wondered what she might have done to have lost his affections. She knew that he had found something lacking in her, and she was yet full of doubt. Callous as she knew it would sound if spoken aloud to

anyone, she suspected that if she were to state God’s truth, she would admit that Mike was an experiment, a reappraisal of sorts.

As she reached the river now she slipped off her shoes and gave a quick gasp as her feet penetrated the surface. Though the spring day was warm, this wild stream retained an elemental chill. Still, it was pure and lovely, and once you got over the shock of the transition, felt entirely natural. She sought Michael’s eyes and beckoned him with a wave to join her in the water.

“It’s a bit cold still, isn’t it?” he answered. He recalled how much he disliked having to put his socks back on after toweling off his wet feet.

“It’s wonderful,” she replied. “You should try it.” Then, after a pause, she added, “it’s the most natural thing in the world.” She gestured to him again now, willing him to join her.

The wind was tossing her hair about. Everything around him was newly verdant, aroused from slumber. The sounds of bird calls lingered, and the gusts of wind provided a primal accompaniment to the scene. He reached down to untie his shoes, but then checked himself, taking sensible inventory. Motionless, Michael wilted as a surge of jealousy overcame him. He felt powerless, a bystander to a world that so willingly embraced her but that he might only observe. Scorned, excluded, he retied the two bows of his shoes in a tighter knot.

Now Laura was raising her feet with little kicks every few steps, welcomed by the water, delighted to find herself immersed in this river of redeeming love. She would keep covenant with the call she felt

rising within her. For a moment she remembered Michael as she sat crouched on the opposing bank. One final time she tried to summon his voice within her, but failed. All she heard now was the breeze, and as she felt her toes find union with the riverbed, she longed only to follow an eternal song, one sung graciously by the wind, blowing wherever it pleased, summoned by the force of righteousness.

Paul O. Jenkins lives in New Hampshire and often in the past. His stories and poems have appeared in various American, European, and Asian publications.

Mark Keane

The Jenkins

The morning after their fortieth wedding anniversary, the Jenkins sit down to breakfast in their kitchen. It's a Wednesday, which means porridge and a slice of buttered toast for Jim. Jean has muesli with blueberries, soda bread and marmalade. At weekends, they have pastries and, sometimes, pancakes with crispy bacon and syrup. Jean pours her tea, adds milk and a smidgen of sugar. Jim sips his instant coffee and scans the front page of the newspaper.

"Those bloody heartless Tories and their sense of entitlement." He looks over at Jean. "Not that the other lot are much better. Do you know those union jokers still address each other as comrade?" He raises his arms and addresses the ceiling. "Solidarity comrades, I propose we recognize our common mediocrity." He lowers his arms and fidgets with his cup. "Comrade Smith, same bloody thing as Viscount Dingleberry or Cardinal O'Bannion. Bloody titles."

Jean reads the arts section and doesn't comment.

Jim folds the newspaper, leans back in his chair and crosses his legs.

"Lucky I ordered firewood last week. Getting noticeably chilly these days. It'll be Christmas before we know it. Bloody Christmas, having to deal with a tree and lights

and decorations."

Worse still, he thinks, is taking everything down in January.

Jean spreads marmalade on her soda bread. She pictures Jim rifling through the dresser for old Christmas cards and arranging them on the mantelpiece, filling the spaces between the cards that will come in the post. She'll ask him why he does it and he'll say, "It looks too bare otherwise."

"There's a recital in St. Cuthbert's on Saturday," she says.

"Really? What are they playing?"

"Offenbach, four pieces for cello and piano."

"Who's doing it, some amateur group?"

Jean checks the advertisement. "The Friends of St. Cuthbert's Chamber Orchestra."

"Thought so. Well, you know what I always say?" Jim waits, but Jean

"There's no sign of Jim, and the dream ends."

doesn't look up from the paper. "Better Bach often than Offenbach."

The rattle of the letter box heralds the arrival of the postman. Jean watches as Jim rushes out to the hallway. She hears him grunt as he bends down. Silence, then his steps on the wooden floor, a

hesitation as he stops at the hall table. More steps and he reappears in the kitchen doorway, hands plunged in the pockets of his brown cords.

"Bloody electricity bill." He looks at the cups and plates. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm fine."

Jean starts reading an article, entitled, *What Distinguishes an Autobiography from a Memoir?* The chair scrapes the floor as Jim sits down. She feels him watching her.

"You're looking very pale."

She says nothing, moves her plate to one side and turns the page.

"I mean it," he says. "Your face is really pale."

"I didn't sleep well."

She doesn't tell him about the dream, the one she's been having intermittently. In the dream, she wakes up in bed but Jim isn't there. The room is full of smoke. She gets out of bed. A strong wind buffets the flat. She leaves the bedroom, moving slowly, running her hand along the wall. The ceiling in the kitchen crashes down and somehow she is under the table. The fridge explodes, flames creeping around her, but she feels safe. There's no sign of Jim, and the dream ends.

Jean pours more tea. The milk jug is nearly empty. She takes the carton from the fridge and fills the jug. Rain lashes against the windowpanes. The tenement

buildings across the street appear blurry. Jim had insisted on a top floor flat to avoid the sound of footsteps overhead and, as he put it, the intolerable intrusion of other lives.

“It’s a pity you didn’t get around to cleaning the windows,” she says. “They’re filthy from all the pollution. It’s too cold and wet to clean them now.”

“I’ll sort it out in spring, don’t worry.”

He resents her implied criticism and refuses to share his private dread. The sash and case windows swing inwards on a hinge so the outer face can be cleaned from inside. Thinking of the window yawning open causes a queasy fluttering in his guts. He imagines reaching out with a sponge, the bucket of sudsy water balanced on the window sill. Reaching into the emptiness and tumbling through the window and down five floors, the impact of crushed bones on the pavement or impalement on the spikes of the metal railing. An inexorable force draws him into that emptiness, but there’s also an insidious desire he can’t ignore, the temptation of falling.

“Anything special on today?”

It’s what he asks every morning. Jean works in a Cancer Research charity shop, three days a week, at the cash register or arranging the window display or sorting out the accounts. She was a financial analyst before retirement.

“I told you, I’m filling in for Grace. Her husband is in hospital.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“They’re still running tests.”

Jim nods but stays silent. Another topic to avoid, the unwanted shadow of illness, even the illness of

someone he doesn’t know.

Jean removes her reading glasses and puts them in their case. “You’ve got your book club.”

“Hmm,” he responds, stung by her tone, the way she said *your book club*—cheery and dismissive.

“Aren’t you giving a presentation?”

“That’s right, I better finish preparing for it.”

He goes into the study to get the folder that contains notes for his lecture on the life and work of Joseph Roth. The Radetzky March is the club’s next book of the month.

Back in the kitchen, he puts on the kettle to make more coffee.

“Joseph Roth is a very interesting man,” he says. “You know, he claimed to be an alcoholic at the age of eight.”

“Really.”

He watches her fussing around the table. Of course, she’s not interested in Roth or anything the man had to say or write.

“Marrying an unstable woman didn’t help Roth. She was schizophrenic, and ended up in an asylum. He died from liver failure—keeled over in a Paris cafe. She outlived him, but came to a worse end.”

He spoons instant coffee into his mug and waits for the water to boil.

“A victim of the Nazi Aktion T4,” he says. “Involuntary euthanasia. What do you make of that?”

Jean puts the used dishes and cutlery in the dishwasher. A glance at the wall clock tells her it’s almost nine. She’s due in the charity shop at ten but will leave early and take her time, stroll through the park, passing the young mothers with their children in the play area.

“I’ll get out of your way,” she says, and goes to the window. “Looks like the rain has stopped.”

The electricity bill is on the table in the hallway. She’ll deal with that and the other bills at the weekend. Why does he have to be so nasty and bitter? He wasn’t always that way—he used to make her laugh at silly things.

Jim can’t concentrate on his presentation. He had given Jean a first draft. The pages were left

“Desire he can’t ignore, the temptation of falling.”

unread on the coffee table. He pressed her for an opinion, and she pointed out some grammatical errors.

“But what do you think?” he had asked. “Is it interesting?”

“That’s your stuff,” she said. “Why do you have to involve me?”

“So, you don’t have an opinion?”

“You take any criticism badly.”

Jim looks up, distracted by the ping from Jean’s phone, which she has left on the table. “Jean,” he calls. “You’ve got a message.”

He sees her walk past the doorway and hears her opening and closing drawers in the bedroom. His eyes skim over his lecture, taking nothing in.

“You’ve got a message,” he calls, louder this time.

Nothing is ever urgent as far as Jean is concerned. Passive, no opinion but never siding with him on any topic, and taking every opportunity to undermine him.

Eventually she appears, wrapping

a scarf around her neck. She takes the phone and swipes the screen. “Oh dear,” she says.

“What is it?”

“Grace’s husband has died.”

Jim puts his notes back in the folder. Jean has her back to him, phone to her ear, talking to one of her friends.

“Yes, it’s terrible. Poor Grace.”

He leaves the room and picks up

the envelope with the electricity bill, unthinking, not knowing what to do with it.

Grace must be in her sixties. He half-remembers Jean telling him she’d retired from the civil service. Filling in time, like Jean, in that charity shop. Now a widow and alone though she may have children, even grandchildren. Not

that it matters; children or grandchildren, she’s still alone. Her husband is dead.

Jim puts the electricity bill back on the table. There’s no reason it can’t happen to him or to Jean. No reason at all. Jean gone, leaving him on his own. He looks back and sees her, standing at the smog-streaked window.

Mark Keane has taught for many years in universities in North America and the UK. Recent short story fiction has appeared in *The Interpreter’s House*, *Paris Lit Up*, *For Page & Screen*, *Midsummer Dream House*, *Zero Readers*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Bards and Sages Quarterly*, *untethered*, *Night Picnic*, *upstreet*, *Granfalloon*, *Into the Void*, and *Firewords*. He lives in Edinburgh (Scotland).

Paul Lewellan

Free Coffee Fridays

Hannah Lobsinger called out to Owen “Cully” Culhwch. “Can I buy you a drink?”

“I’m sorry, what?” Cully was standing outside the Cozy Café. He didn’t remember walking there.

Hannah, sitting at a corner table, smiled reassuringly. “I’m offering you coffee. Tragically the café doesn’t serve beer.” The sixty-something woman wore a green tartan flannel shirt, khaki skirt, and Keens hiking boots.

“I can buy my own coffee,” he growled.

She joined him at the door. “Cully, it was a joke. It’s Free Coffee Friday.” The retirement village’s

“She rarely spoke, but she listened well.”

snack shop featured a two-burner Bunn, chip racks, assorted candy bars, and a popcorn cart. Canned soft drinks and juice boxes were kept in a small Frigidaire with microwaveable burritos, chicken pot pies, and corn dogs in its tiny freezer. For \$2 you could buy a taco on Tuesday or Sloppy Joe on Thursday. On Fridays the coffee was free.

Hannah steered him over to her table. “What’ll you have?” He saw her milky cup beside three creamer

tubs and two empty packets of sugar.

“Black coffee would be great.”

“Coffee here is never great. Only convenient.”

Cully knew her from the Saturday morning book club he moderated. She rarely spoke, but she listened well.

The taste of the coffee startled him. “This is terrible.”

“It’s free.”

“That doesn’t mean it has to be bad.”

“It’s bad when they charge \$1.50. When free it’s better.”

He used the cup to warm his hands.

“How did your mother’s first Care Conference go?” Cully had moved his mother to The Gardens memory unit a month ago. He’d mention the conference to the book group.

“The staff wanted me on the same page.”

“And...?”

“Martha Murray the head of nursing told me, ‘All of us love Katie.’ I stopped her right there. No one, absolutely no one, calls my mother Katie. It’s Katherine. Not Kate, Kathy, Kay, or Katie. Mother always insisted. She felt ‘Katherine’ had weight.”

“You’ve mentioned she could be difficult.”

“Her motto was *Never Weaken.*”

“Catchy.” Cully noted the smile

on her face. Hannah didn’t smile much. Fourteen months ago her husband of forty years had died of pancreatic cancer.

“Apparently Martha asked Mother what she’d like to be called. ‘Katie’ was her reply. Friends called her that growing up in Montgomery, Minnesota.”

Hannah was amused. “You’re the retired psychologist. You’ll figure that out.”

“I suppose I will.”

Hannah was short, wiry, and athletic. He knew she was a hiker.

“Anything else?”

“Everyone in the unit, especially the aides, love my mother. ‘She’s so friendly,’ they told me, ‘always has a good word for everyone.’ They described her as a hugger.”

Hannah suggested cautiously, “She sounds like a delightful woman.”

“Exactly. That’s exactly it!” Cully punctuated his point by gesturing with his now half-empty coffee cup. A few drops sloshed on the floor. “I stopped the conference. ‘Who are we talking about?’ I asked. The woman they were describing was not my mother. Mother is a racist. Inflexible. She is demanding and unbending. Definitely not a hugger!”

“I understand.” Hannah took the cup from his hand. Most of the aides are BIPOC.

“She’s regressed.”

“Actually it sounds like an upgrade to me.”

Cully paused to consider that. “I suppose you’re right. It’s just surprising.”

“Why? You’re not the person you were when you moved here either.”

“What do you mean?”

Hannah described the broken man he’d been, grieving the loss of his spouse. “The way you were drinking, no one expected you to live out the summer. We said a prayer every time you stepped into your car.”

“Even sober, I was never a good driver...” There had been accidents. Fender benders.

“You lacked focus.” She touched his hand. “That’s why I invited you to our book group.” Cully had forgotten she was the person who’d asked him. “Within few months, you’d sobered up and were leading it. Your mother has evolved, as have you.”

“My mother has Alzheimer’s and sometimes mistakes me for my favorite uncle...” He shook his head.

“You know, you don’t have to always be in charge.”

“What do you mean?”

*“ Hannah described
the broken
man he’d been. ”*

“You went to the care conference expecting to control everything, like you’ve always done. The staff saw things differently.” He was nodding. “You know some people are comfortable with others in charge.”

“That’s hard to believe.” He broke into a grin. “I’m a control junkie. My late wife was the same way.”

“A house with two people in charge...? How long did that last?”

“Thirty-five years. It was the second marriage for me, third for her. We had epic fights, but found our way through them. Then the ovarian cancer came. We lost that fight.” He took a breath. “What about you?”

“I’ll need more than coffee if you

want to know about my marriage.” She appraised him. “Do you still drink?”

“I was never an alcoholic, only a drunk.”

“What’s the difference?”

“The first is an addiction; the second is a physiological state. I haven’t had a drink in a month. Could use one now.” Cully hesitated. “What do you suggest?”

“A burger and a craft beer at Sippee’s. Onion rings. Maybe bread pudding for dessert.”

“Is this a date?”

“That’s your call.” She added, “I put on clean underwear this morning.”

He flashed a smile. “I showered and brushed my teeth.”

“No woman could ask for more.”

He took a good long look. “Oh, Ms. Lobsinger, I suspect your standards are higher than that.”

“Not if it’s about a beer and burger. Anything beyond that, we can talk.”

He shrugged. “What do we have to lose?”

“My thoughts exactly.”

Paul Lewellan lives, writes, and gardens on the banks of the Mississippi River along with his wife Pamela, who is also his best friend and accountant. They’re raising a rescue kitten named Caitlin Cat. Find archives of his work at www.paullewellan.com

Sarah Das Gupta

ON THE ROCKS

The car had been parked only a few meters from the cliff edge that sultry August evening. A grey mist had drifted in from the sea. Brian could just make out the piles of jagged rocks far below and the white surf crashing against them. Jenny was curled up on the front seat, apparently in a deep sleep. The cliff top was bare. Dog walkers and hikers had disappeared for the day. Far out at sea a few local fishing boats bobbed at anchor.

Brian stood, looking down where the chalk cliff had crumbled away as if a giant mouth had bitten a chunk, only to spit it into the waves swirling and foaming over huge pieces of broken chalk. Sea gulls perched on eye-wateringly narrow ledges. Further out at sea, three black cormorants kept sinister guard over the sandy cove beyond the cliff face.

Quietly, Brian opened the door on the driver's side. Leaning across he prodded Jenny's right shoulder and arm. No reaction. Slowly, Brian released the hand brake. Slammed the door shut. Jumped clear. At first the car stayed obstinately still. Then it suddenly began to move. Meter, by meter, it crawled forward over the well-worn turf. A second later and it had gathered speed. It stopped for a moment, as if contemplating the sheer drop. In the slowest of slow motion, it

tipped over the cliff edge. Brian looked down at the toy car broken on the rocks below, its metal limbs and innards splattered over the chalk and foam. He thought he saw the flash of his wife's scarlet cardigan before waves swirled over the wreck.

Brian lay on the beach in the spring sunshine. There was something relaxing about Greece. The ancient olive groves, already in new leaf, the whitewashed cottages, clustered round the domed village church. The sound of local fishermen, returning with the night's catch, had changed little since classical times. Should he go into the sea, impossibly blue in the April light, or sit with his new translation of Homer, with a glass of the regional red wine?

"Brian, be a darling and get my swimming cap from the bedroom. I don't want to spoil my new hair style."

"The sea here's like crystal. You can see the shells and sand under your feet,"

"Yes, but it's still salty and I've just had my roots done."

As he walked reluctantly up the beach, Brian imagined he heard Jenny's voice in the whispering olive grove, 'Brian, darling just run a bath for me, please darling, only a minute, darling...'

That evening, under the trees, a

silver slice of the new moon shone through the dark branches. In the distance the hypnotic sound of the waves washed and rinsed the ear. Brian was savouring his third glass of wine and had reached that part in the "Illiad" where Achilles desecrates Hector's body.

"You can see the shells and sand under your feet."

"Darling, can you just look at the washing machine. It's not draining and the kitchen's flooded!"

"Leave it for tomorrow. You, can always wash stuff by hand;"

"No darling, I wouldn't feel they were really clean. It won't take you a minute. You're only reading all those violent Greek stories. Brian, darling..."

He mopped the beautiful, worn tiles in the kitchen and altered the dial on the ancient washing machine. He wondered how this translator would deal with Helen of Troy.

"Oh, thanks dear. Those awful tiles need replacing. I don't know where they got that washing machine. It must have come out of the Ark! I thought we'd go into town tomorrow. I could do with a jar of marmalade and I'd like to look round the shops."

“I want to visit the ancient theatre at Dodon. It’s one of the best preserved in this area.”

“Oh, Brian darling, it’ll be most dreadfully hot. One pile of old stones looks much like another. Once you’ve seen one lot of old rubble, you’ve seen them all.”

Brian wondered idly how the translation would treat the murder of Iphigenia!

In bed that night, Brian lay awake listening to the cicadas and a night jar in the distance. He looked at Suzy lying snoring quietly beside him. A hairnet hung over one ear, a jar of make-up remover was open on the bedside table. The Greeks knew how to deal with women. Think of Zeus and Danae or Paris and Helen.

Suddenly he heard, faintly at first, then louder, an only too

familiar voice, “*Brian darling, come here for a minute . . .*” At first, he thought he was dreaming. But he was definitely awake and Suzy was definitely snoring. Brian hadn’t heard that voice for over ten years. He thought the flash of scarlet on the rocks, among the mangled car, had been the end of it.

“*Brian, Brian come here . . .*”

He slipped quietly out of bed. Suzy knew only that his first wife had been killed in an accident and that it upset Brian to talk about it. That’s how it had to stay!

Brian found himself walking towards the beach. As his eyes became accustomed to the feathered darkness, he could see the waves, the crests, moon-tipped, magical.

“*Come here, darling. It will only*

take a minute. . .” The voice echoed and re-echoed, mingled with the music of the sea and the breeze in the olive grove.

He walked on, as if drawn by the haunting, whispering sound. The ground seemed to be rising. He could feel the sandy soil beneath his feet as he climbed a steep, winding path. A wind had arisen, blowing from the north, he guessed. Clouds were scudding across the sky. The path had flattened out. He could feel grass beneath his feet. The wind was now almost gale force.

“*Brian darling, come here, here...*” the voice now came from the right.

He stepped off, into vacancy. Down, down accelerating faster, ever faster, drawn down, always down!

The rocks below waited.

Sarah Das Gupta is a writer from Cambridge, UK who has also worked as an English Teacher in India and Africa. Her work has been published in literary journals and anthologies in many countries from New Zealand to Kazakhstan. She was recently nominated for Best of the Net and a Dwarf Star.

Zary Fekete

Lessons in Shakespeare

The door to the church sanctuary opened, and Jasper watched the students wander in from their lunch break. He tried to sense from their level of energy what kind of class it would be today. The overachievers made a beeline for the front row. Most of the younger girls and boys gathered two or three chairs back. The last row was where the three older kids always sat; two guys and a girl, all seniors. The class had been meeting for the past month, and rhythms were starting to develop. Jasper let the chatter continue for a moment while he took out the book and laid it on the music stand. Then he raised his right hand.

It took a few seconds before one of the kids noticed. Then, one by one, enjoying the game, all the students raised their right hands. The hubbub died down until the

“Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt”

sanctuary was silent. Jasper smiled at them and put down his hand.

“Thank you.” He picked up the book and held it out, tapping the cover. The front row all already had their copies out along with mechanical pencils. In the middle

rows some had physical books and others pulled up the pdfs on their phones or tablets. The three in the back were all looking down at the laptop the middle girl held on her lap, definitely not reading the text. Jasper thought it was probably a video.

He cleared his throat loudly enough for the girl in the back to notice and look up.

“Katie, give me your thoughts here,” Jasper said. He looked down at his book and read, “*Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew... What do you think it means?*”

She looked down at her laptop, typing quickly.

“Don’t bother looking for it. I just want your first impressions.”

She stopped typing. The two students on either side of her snickered and sat back, leaving her on her own. Ben, one of the front row students, raised his hand, and Jasper knew it would stay up until he called on him. Jasper waited for Katie.

This was Jasper’s third year teaching at the co-op. The students were all home schoolers from the surrounding community. The small town had a local public school, but many local parents chose to do things at home. Some of the students came from Christian families. Some were from homes

where the parents wanted separation between themselves and the local government. The co-op met in the church every two weeks on Fridays and there were students from fourteen to eighteen years old. In spite of the age differences, they all seemed to get along and there were few cliques. Classes ranged from outdoor skills to cooking to different levels of math. The principal of the co-op met Jasper after a community event three years ago. They chatted and discovered a shared love for Shakespeare, a subject Jasper once studied in university. The principal pressed him to consider teaching a class for the co-op. Jasper initially didn’t commit. His job had involved some travel, but the pandemic shut that down, and now most of what he did was online. The more he thought about it during the next days, he liked the idea of introducing students to Elizabethan language and drama. He texted the principal and said he was game. The first two years Jasper taught *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. He had been saving *Hamlet* for this year, once the patterns were established.

Katie was still fumbling with her laptop in the back of the sanctuary. Finally, she said, “He’s... I... I don’t know what it means.”

The two boys next to Katie looked down with schadenfreudian smiles. Katie’s face turned red. Ben’s hand

remained raised, like he was reaching for the ceiling. Jasper relented and pointed at him. Ben put down his hand and spoke mechanically, “He wants to not be there. He hates the pain he feels. He wishes he were dead.”

“Right,” Jasper said, looking slowly across the room. “*He wishes he were dead*. Why would he feel this way?”

Once again Ben’s hand shot up. The kids in the middle fumbled through their books. The two tall kids on either side of Katie picked up their phones, out of it, but Jasper noticed that Katie was still paying attention.

“Katie?” he said.

She looked down, considering her words. Then she said, “He’s fed up with his mom. He doesn’t like his uncle. He wishes his dad was still there.” She paused. “He can’t decide what he should do next.”

It was the most the class had heard from the back row, and all of the younger students craned their necks to look back at Katie. The two boys on either side looked impressed.

“Yes,” Jasper said. “And in some ways, that’s a very normal thing for a young person to feel.”

A low titter of nervous laughter rolled through the students. Jasper smiled at the students and then looked back at Katie. She wasn’t laughing. Her eyes had a distant, faraway quality.

When the class was finished the students filed out. Most of them had after-school chores to do at home. They caught rides with older kids who had licenses or, if they had cars themselves, they *gave* rides. Jasper packed up his bag when he noticed Katie was still sitting in the

back row. He threw his bag over his shoulder and made to walk out, but purposefully walked slowly.

Katie looked up as he passed. “Mr. Anderson?” she said.

Jasper stopped. “Yes?”

She looked down at her phone. Jasper saw the text of the play hovering below her thumb. Then she clicked a button and the screen went dark. “Nothing,” she said. “Thanks for class today.” She stood and went out the door. Jasper stood in the empty sanctuary for a moment. Then he left too.

For the next few weeks, the play gradually unfolded. Jasper assigned students to read certain parts. They dissected Hamlet’s monologues and soliloquies. Usually after they read through a couple of scenes Jasper would show them the same scenes from different film adaptations. The students giggled at Laurence Olivier’s measured line readings.

“ *She silently recited the lines to herself.* ”

They gaped and pointed at the modern moments throughout Ethan’s Hawke’s portrayal from the early 2000s. When they covered the famous “to be or not to be” speech, Jasper cued up the scene from Kenneth Branagh’s full text adaptation.

Jasper stood to the side while the scene played. He watched the students as they watched the film. The younger kids were mildly bored. The kids in the middle mostly paid attention, occasionally checking Branagh’s dialogue against

the lines in their books. Jasper shifted his eyes to the back. Katie was motionless. She stared at the screen. One of the boys on her side tapped her shoulder to show her something on his phone, but she didn’t move. Then, when Hamlet arrived at the penultimate few lines of his speech, Katie’s mouth softly moved as she silently recited the lines to herself.

The scene changed when Ophelia entered. Now all the students were paying attention. First, they oo’ed and ah’d when Hamlet insulted Ophelia with the nunnery lines. But when the dialogue shifted and Hamlet became more violent, many of the younger kids stopped watching. They put their heads down and studied their shoes, like they felt guilty. Jasper glanced at the back row again. Katie was crying.

Jasper waited in the sanctuary. The door opened and the students filed in. They were near the end of the semester now. Many of them had plans for Christmas. Snow was piled up outside. Some of the older students rode to class on snowmobiles.

They read through the scenes for that day, the episode featuring the gravedigger. The students chuckled at the thought of Hamlet remembering someone by looking at a skull. Jasper smiled. This level of comfort with the text would have been difficult for them to manage at the beginning of the year.

The students filed out after class. As Jasper was putting away his books, he suddenly noticed someone standing next to him. He looked up. Katie stood there with a piece of paper in her hand.

“Hi, Katie,” he said. “Plans after

school today?"

She shook her head. Then she handed him the paper.

"What's this?"

She looked down, smiling but embarrassed. "I... I wanted to try something. So, I rewrote Ophelia's speech from Act III. I tried to make it modern. Would you read it?"

Jasper looked at her a moment and then nodded. He dropped his eyes to the paper. Her writing was in pencil with circular vowels. It said:

*Your brilliant mind is lost to me,
shattered*

You, renaissance man, look at me

How far you fall

There's no hope

You were my pristine prince

Now you rule the mud

*And me? Once proud to be seen on
your arm*

I? Who gave my first kiss to you

I see your new form

I hear your cruel voice

I see what is left behind

You've destroyed yourself

How live with it?

Jasper read through it twice.

Then he looked up at her. Her eyes were bright. Frightened but hopeful.

Jasper knew that look. It was an expression of a desire to be noticed... to be recognized. Jasper thought about where they were. A

small Midwest town on the prairie. With a sheen that covered great depths.

"I like it, Katie," he said slowly. "There's only one thing I would change."

"What?" she said.

He considered the paper again. "It feels like it needs to be heard rather than read."

Her eyes grew sharp.

"Would you read it to the class next time?" He handed the paper back. The sound of a snowmobile sounded on the street outside and then died away in the distance. Katie looked up and nodded.

Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (*Words on the Page*) out with *DarkWinter Lit Press* and a short story collection (*To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction*) out with *Creative Texts*. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete

Zoe Caryl

The White Roses

Why is it that when the moment you've longed for finally happens, you hesitate? The thing you've searched for and turned many corners to find is within your reach, but you hold back—is it perhaps because you fear you will be disappointed?

Cara sat in a café in a shopping centre opposite a cemetery and wrote a note to her grandparents on a small piece of paper. She had not planned to do this; the idea had come to her on the way there. But despite the noisy surroundings, the words flowed easily from pen to paper. There were still a few people wearing masks around her, but Cara had even braved the flight to Glasgow without one, having had her three vaccinations against the dreaded Covid virus. Surely by now, in the autumn of 2022, it would recede and leave the world in peace.

She had never known her grandparents, but in the hope of finding their grave, she had bought some white roses to lay there. Now, she found that she wanted to leave a message for them in the flowers. It just meant a small delay; there was plenty of time. Perhaps somewhere in her heart, she wanted to enjoy another half hour of living in the hope that she would find them, rather than rushing into sadness and disappointment if she did not.

Having written her message, she rolled up the piece of paper and inserted it deep into the heart of the small bouquet. She had a feeling her grandmother would have liked the white roses, although she couldn't say why. *You remind me of her so much, Cara,* came her mother's voice in her head. *She had auburn hair and hazel eyes, just like you. I wish you had known her, and your grandfather...* But they had both died before Cara was even born, some fifty years ago.

She finished her coffee and left the shopping centre, crossing the busy road to enter the cemetery opposite. October in Scotland could be dreich, but it was not so on this

*“ I'm sorry...
I'm looking for my
family. ”*

occasion; a gentle breeze stirred the fallen autumn leaves, but summer had not completely relinquished its hold on the old graveyard.

The traffic noise faded away as she advanced deeper into the grounds, the grand monuments nearer the road giving way to older, more faded stones. She had the map of the cemetery that she had downloaded from the internet, and she knew the lair number and

section where her grandparents were buried. But as she went further on, more and more stones were fallen, and there was less evidence of family members coming to tend loved ones' graves.

On she must go, to the far end under the very lea of the Celtic football stadium. She hoped her grandfather had not been a Rangers supporter, to end up here. But whilst her eyes scanned the monuments and stones around the perimeter of section eleven, she found nothing.

I must go further in, she thought, as she started a second circuit of the section about ten feet in from the edge. *I'm sorry,* she said quietly to those others sleeping beneath her feet. *It's just, I'm looking for my family, and unless I walk on your graves, I won't find theirs...*

It was difficult; many of the letters on the headstones had worn away, and she felt that some monuments were too grand to have belonged to her people, so she didn't even look at the words inscribed there. *I've come so far, I've come so far to find you, please let me* – she thought as she paused in her search, wondering if there might be anyone she could ask for help.

This is a place of faith, not science, she thought as she looked up from her map, then off to the right at a patch of long grass. There, half-covered by some coppery

fallen leaves, she saw the name she was looking for. Her heart lurched, and emotion welled up inside her—grief for those she had never known and would never know, sudden and all-encompassing.

Yes, this was the place. There was first her grandmother's, then her grandfather's name there on the fallen stone. She sank to the ground and pushed the leaves away with her hands, wishing she had brought tools to make the place tidy. But she had never visited a family grave before and hadn't thought to do that.

“Fresh white roses caught Billy's eye, gleaming softly.”

She wept to find them here, and yet was so thankful that she had. These were her people, her family, generations of them here along with her grandparents, whose names she knew and whose faces she had only seen in black-and-white photos. A timeless interval passed as she sat looking at the headstone and thinking of them. Then she tidied the grave as best she could and laid the flowers, finding a stone to weigh them down so that the wind would not carry them off.

“Goodbye... dear ones. I hope you know I came to find you, after so many years,” she spoke to them quietly, although she was alone in the cemetery. “I'll try to... get the stone raised up, so I can find you again when I come back. And I will come back, I promise.”

It was hard to go, so hard, but leave she must. She walked back to

the noise and life of the road as the sun set, away from the quiet and peace of the grounds, to continue her strange journey.

Later, when darkness fell, a group of teenage lads climbed over the wall to hang about, drinking their cheap lager obtained with fake I.D. and smoking stolen cigarettes. They thought themselves a gang and talked of nothing comprehensible to anyone over twenty years old. But the fresh white roses caught Billy's eye, gleaming softly in the moonlight. *She would like them*, he thought, *the girl he was in love with...* She'd never know they had come from a graveyard. Maybe she'd even—

“Hey Billy! Billy, man, d'ye ken whit we're sayin'? You comin' wi' us tomorrow, ye gonna be lookout fer us?” Kel demanded, expecting compliance.

But Billy was growing tired of this, aware he was on a precipice with a toe or two already over the side. If he took another step, it might set him on a path that could only lead down into darkness, and he was only seventeen... and in love. She wouldn't want him to go down that path, and he knew instinctively that it would be over between them if he got into trouble with the police.

“Well?” Kel demanded again. “Billy!”

“Aye... aye, I've said I'll be there,” he said reluctantly, watching Kel throw an empty beer can at a headstone for fun, starting up a game. *What have I ever found appealing about this lot?* Billy thought, and he imagined his girlfriend's face if he were to give her the roses.

Growing bored, the boys left after some time, and Billy picked up the flowers from the grave and hid them carefully inside his jacket.

Maureen looked at the faded white roses in a jam jar on her daughter's bedside table. Connie certainly set a store by them, treasuring them ever since Billy had given them to her, but enough was enough. They had gone all brown, the shrivelled petals starting to fall all over the carpet, but still her daughter wouldn't give them up.

Why teenagers couldn't tidy their rooms was beyond Maureen—who wanted to live in a pigsty? But it seemed Connie did. She opened the bedside cabinet drawer to put away a random selection of pens, earphones, chewing gum, and lipsticks so she could clean the table when her eye caught sight of a packet of pills. *Pills*—no, not just pills, it was *the Pill!*

Had Connie gone all the way with that boy for a bunch of white roses? Maureen thought as she seethed with rage. After all the careful mother-daughter chats she had had with the girl, the embarrassing advice on protecting herself, and Connie had promised—she snatched the roses up and marched out of the room, thinking of all the things she would say to her daughter when she came home.

Downstairs in the kitchen, she jammed the flowers into the green waste caddy and put it outside to be collected in the morning. The little piece of paper still lay hidden amongst the decaying stems, never even noticed by Billy or Connie. But life-giving air, light, and water were now things of the past for the roses.

Moisture seeped further through the paper, and the ink of the last legible letter began to run and blur.

It was now December, and in the cemetery, the groundsman was mowing the grass around the old stones on his ride-on mower. The low winter sun had been shining all day, sending out fingers of pale yellow light through the leafless trees, and some of the birds who lived there had even begun to sing, thinking that perhaps it was early spring.

“Long way to go yet, wee ones,” the groundsman said, not caring if folk overheard him. He often talked to the birds, and the squirrels, and the dead; there was no harm in any of them, and he was content in his work.

It had been his turn to take charge of the compost delivery from the local recycling centre that

day, a thing that his colleague loved to tease him about. “Rather you than me, Harry, messing about taking in that stuff, full of leftovers and all sorts,” Tom would say, but Harry just laughed.

“Aye, all sorts, from caring people who wannae do the right thing by the earth, puttin’ their scraps and garden waste out to be used again—it brings new life to things.”

“Oh, Harry,” came a voice from the lower end of the grounds, “Can you come down here a minute, please?”

He looked down the path to see one of the Sally Army volunteers who helped keep the graves nice.

“You’ve made a good job of this,” she said as he drove down to where she was working, “but I’ve got just the thing for it too—I just need a wee bit of compost, if you’ve got any left...”

Dear Miss Dunne,

I am sorry that you have had to write on several occasions regarding the repair of your grandparents’ headstone. Our resources are stretched, but at last we have good news. I attach a photo of the repaired stone, now upright again, and hope that when you come back, you will be happy with it.

One of our volunteers from the Salvation Army took the opportunity to plant a white rose bush that was donated on the grave, as she seemed to remember seeing white roses laid there around the time you visited. I hope you approve. White flowers light up the last of the evenings here, just as our Lord Jesus is a constant light to us in dark times.

With best wishes,
Bereavement Services Manager,
Glasgow City Council

Hailing from West London, UK, **Zoe Caryl** is stage school educated, 56 years old and has been a professional singer all her life. She has been fortunate enough to work in TV, film, radio & musical theatre, playing the title role in the musical *Annie* in the West End of London amongst other credits. After appearing in *Starlight Express* for five years she decided to become a solo singer, taking engagements all over the world. In 2014 she and her husband fellow musician Kenny moved to France where they continue as full time musicians. In 2024, Zoe completed her first novel which she is currently pitching to publishers of historical fiction.

Alan Swyer

King Of The B-Sides

Eddie Epstein's initial response was negative. "No!" he thought. "No way! Not a chance!" He'd turned down other attempts to reunite him with his erstwhile songwriting partner, and those were from organizations like ASCAP that meant something to him. So why in hell would anyone think that he'd consider being re-teamed with Lenny Scaletta for a group he'd never heard of, the Southern California Songwriters Hall of Fame?

If Mortie Zuckerman were still alive, a reunion with him would require no urging. But sadly, honors and awards never arrived for the team of Epstein and Zuckerman. During the heyday of the record business, through some ups and even more downs, the two of them managed somehow to cobble together a living as "Kings Of The B-Sides." Though there were celebrated cases where the supposed "other side" of a 45 rpm record fooled the know-it-alls by

"There was magic coming out of there."

becoming a hit – "Rock Around The Clock" for Bill Haley & the Comets, "La Bamba" for Richie Valens,

"Green Onions" for Booker T & the MG's – that was never the case for the team known in the business as Ep & Zuck. Their would-be A-sides, if recorded at all, invariably remained even more obscure than their B-sides, remembered only by a handful of friends and family members, plus an occasional rock & roll "completist" or geek.

Qualifying as both completist and geek – he knew Ep & Zuck's records, as well as those by forgotten acts like Napoleon XIV, Soeur Sourire, and Kyu Sakamoto – Lenny Scaletta became the catalyst for the unexpected hits that came late in Eddie's career.

After reaching out unsuccessfully first by email, then by phone, Lenny showed up announced at Eddie's his Hollywood bungalow one Monday morning in September. "I write for a bunch of music websites," he explained while introducing himself, adding that his primary focus was on songwriting teams: Leiber & Stoller, Goffin & King, Pomus & Schuman, etc.

"And now Ep & Zuck?"

"I really like your stuff," insisted Lenny.

"You and eleven other people."

"Got time for me to ask you some questions?"

"Time? I got plenty," answered Eddie. "Money? Not so much."

"Tell me about the Brill Building," said Lenny once he and Eddie were seated at the kitchen table.

"What you think of as the Brill Building was actually two buildings: 1619 and 1650 Broadway."

"Was it fun working there?"

"Squeezed into a cubby hole, worrying that Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, or Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry might be coming up with a smash while my mind was empty?"

"So it was brutal?" wondered Lenny.

"Brutal, but great. There was magic coming out of there. *Save The Last Dance For Me, Be My Baby, Yakety Yak, You've Lost That Loving Feeling.*"

"Did you folks know you were creating music that would last forever?"

"They were creating stuff that would last forever. Ours had an expiration date."

"I like what you and Mortie wrote," protested Lenny.

"C'mon, " countered Lenny. "We were Eppie & Zuck and nobody gives a fuck."

Lenny chuckled, then shook his head. "But I do."

Lenny spent a couple of hours bombarding Eddie with myriad questions – about his writing process, about Don Kirshner, about

competitiveness between the writing teams – then noticed that the older man was fading. “Any chance I can come back tomorrow and quiz you some more?”

“I’ll have to check with my social secretary,” Eddie replied. When Lenny waited, Eddie shook his head. “That was a joke.”

Lenny shrugged. “Even better, how about I buy you lunch?”

“Where?”

“If you’re on some restricted diet –”

“It’s my taste buds I’m worried about.”

“Tell me what you’d like.”

“Once upon a time I used to cheat on my wife,” Eddie joked. “Now it’s on my cardiologist. Been to Langer’s?”

Again Lenny shook his head.

“This may sound like heresy, but better pastrami than New York.”

As the two of them nibbled on sandwiches, coleslaw, and pickles the next day, Lenny resumed his questioning.

“Did it ever feel strange,” he wondered, “a bunch of young white songwriters coming up with teenage anthems sung by Black groups like the Coasters, Drifters, and Shirelles?”

“First of all, it wasn’t all Black groups. You had Dion & the Belmonts, the Shangri-Las, the Righteous Brothers –”

“Still –”

“And as a songwriter, Otis Blackwell could stand with anybody. *Great Balls Of Fire* and *Breathless* for Jerry Lee Lewis. *Don’t Be Cruel* and *All Shook Up* for Elvis. *Fever* first for Little Willie John, then for Peggy Lee. Plus you had

Sylvester Bradford, who wrote *Tears On My Pillow* with an old-timer named Al Lewis.

Lenny took a sip of ice tea. “So why,” he then began, “did so many of you make your way to this coast?”

“The British Invasion,” answered Eddie. “New York was over, plus we were sick of the weather.”

“Still see any of ‘em?”

Eddie shrugged. “Like Mortie, too many are gone. Others became

royalty, which doesn’t leave time for B-siders like me.”

As they pulled up in front of his bungalow, Eddie noticed that Lenny had become strangely silent. “What?” Eddie asked.

“Can I ask a favor?”

“If it’s 100 grand you need, the answer’s no,” joked Eddie.

“I’ve been writing some songs.”

“And?”

“Any chance I can play a couple for you to see what you think?”

“Let’s try one,” said Eddie. Then with a chuckle, he added, “And only because you sprang for pastrami.”

Seated at Eddie’s piano a few minutes later, Lenny played and sang:

*Love is making me crazy
Bugging me night and day.
All I do is think about her,
All the time, and every way.
You can say that’s kind of
foolish and silly
Makes me act like a fool.*

*But to me it’s kind of special,
Kind of wonderful, kind of cool.*

*I’ll take love over nothing,
I’ll take love over nothing at all.
I’ll take love if I can have you.
I’ll keep waiting for you to call.*

“Good,” said Eddie, as Lenny looked up nervously in search of a reaction.

“Good-good? Or good-only-so-so?”

“Lots of songs that I thought were far worse made it to the charts.”

“Still –” murmured Lenny.

“How much do you know about songwriting?”

Lenny shrugged. “A fair amount.”

“But that a song is not just a song?”

“Not sure I follow.”

“A song,” Eddie said, “is not just what you think you’re hearing. It’s melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, plus dynamics, texture, and form. Then there’s something called lyrics. Your head spinning?”

“Kind of.”

“On top of that, you’ve got what I call rhyme schemes. AABB, ABAB, AAAA, ABBA, and on and on. Now your head’s really spinning?”

“You bet.”

“To be able to reverse-engineer a song doesn’t mean you can suddenly write *Take The A Train*, or *Hound Dog*, or *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*. There’s form and content – which together mean craft. Then there’s something more elusive: art. That’s what separates Leiber & Stoller, or Willie Dixon, or Willie Nelson from mere mortals. With me?”

Lenny nodded.

“So,” continued Eddie, “let’s dive

*“ Do you remember
your childhood
dream? ”*

into the song you played for me.” With that, Eddie gently started picking the song apart.

After thanking Eddie profusely, Lenny got up and started to leave, then suddenly hesitated. “After I digest all your criticisms and do some fiddling, okay if I come back so you hear the results?”

“You know how to find me.”

A week went by without a peep from Lenny. Then another. Then a third. When an entire month had passed, Eddie was surprised when Lenny popped by.

“I’ve been struggling,” he admitted. “Driving myself crazy and getting nowhere. So I was thinking –”

“Always dangerous –” interjected Eddie.

“Remember when you told me an old-timer was matched with a young guy and they came up with a hit?”

“Tears On My Pillow for Little Anthony.”

“What if you and I did that?” asked Lenny. “I mean if you think my song is worth it.”

“You and I teaming up doesn’t guarantee a hit, or even that it’ll get recorded.”

“I’ll get it recorded,” insisted Lenny. “Can I twist your arm?”

“Even if I say yes, I’m pretty rusty.”

“Please?” begged Lenny. “We can share credit.”

“Or blame? There’s no certainty someone’ll want it –”

“Somebody will –”

“Or release it –”

“It’ll get released.”

“Don’t be so certain.”

“I promise,” said Lenny. “I know people who know people. Please?”

Eddie sighed.

Eddie spent the next day, then the day after, stalling, dawdling, and wondering why he’d let himself get talked into something he wasn’t really inclined to do.

But on the third day he listened once, twice, three times to the link that Lenny sent.

After wandering through his neighborhood in the hope that inspiration would somehow materialize, he made himself a cup of green tea, then sat down at the piano.

For the first time in ages, Eddie started creating.

Two days later, Lenny paced nervously as Eddie began to play and sing for him.

*Love is making me crazy
Bugging me both night and day.*

*All I do is think about her,
All the time and every way.*

*Some might say that’s kind
of outrageous,
That it makes me a special kind
of fool.*

*But to me it’s really special,
My kind of wonderful, my kind
of cool.*

*I’ll take love over nothing.
I’ll take love over nothing at all.
I’ll take love if only I can have you.
I’ll keep waiting and praying
you’ll call.*

“It’s brilliant!” gushed Lenny.

“Whoa!” cautioned Eddie. “If this is brilliant, what’s *Please Send Me Someone To Love*, or *A Change Is Gonna Come*, or *What A Difference A Day Makes*?”

“Still, this is going to put me – us – on the map. What’ll it take to get

you to tinker with another one?”

Years later, Eddie would occasionally wonder how he allowed himself to be coaxed into working on another song, then another, then several more. But in truth he knew the answer all too well. It was either that or grabbing morning coffee with Nick Grillo. Or lunch with Herb Jaffe, Carl Gardner, and Pete Dudek. Or hoping that his son or one of his grandkids would call.

Writing was a far better reason to get out of bed than watching a Dodger or Laker game with Herb Jaffe while chomping on take-out burritos.

*“For the first time in
ages, Eddie started
creating.”*

It was his sports-watching buddy Herb who called one morning with a strange announcement. “Looks like you’re losing your title.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“King of the B-sides. My daughter says that song you helped on is on iTunes.”

“Holy shit!”

“Next it’ll probably be Spotify, Youtube, and the rest. How’s that, Mr. A-side?”

Unable to sleep that night, wondered what Mortie Zuckerman would have thought of the turn of events. During their prime creative years, the two of them toiled, hoped, and dreamed of airplay, all to no avail. They tried to write classics, and did their best to write hits, yet the result was continued

obscurity – the neglected and unnoticed other sides of 45's.

What could be more ironic than that years after his career seemingly ended, a song on which he played Mr. Fix-it was, through the wonders of streaming, getting listeners?

Eddie thought of calling Doris, his ex-wife who, after years of prodding him to write a tune that would at least give her bragging rights, left him for a guy who wrote jingles. He thought of phoning Greg, the son in whose eyes he'd longed to shine. He thought of reaching out to his grandson Eric and his granddaughter Lily in the hope that they'd be proud.

But to do something like that, Eddie realized, was not who he was, or who he wanted to be.

It was his buddy Herb Jaffe who again was the bearer of strange tidings some months later. "What's the last name of that Lenny guy you wrote with?"

"Scaletta."

"He's on TV right now, making it sound like he wrote that song all by himself."

When confronted, Lenny initially was evasive. "I never actually said I wrote it all by myself."

"Omission rather than commission?" Eddie asked.

Lenny nodded. "I guess."

"We both know that's bullshit."

"I-I didn't think you'd want to be bothered with interviews."

"Because I'm so busy flying my private plane? Or doing open heart surgery? Did you ask?"

Lenny shook his head guiltily.

"So should I inquire about royalties?" continued Eddie. "Or who's listed as writers?"

Lenny cringed, but remained silent.

"Something tells me," stated Eddie, "it's time to call my lawyer. Before I do, anything you've got to say"

After pacing nervously, Lenny spoke. "Want to help me with another one?"

When it was time for the award ceremony, Eddie decided at the last minute to show up. Lenny, however, was nowhere to be found.

No further collaboration between the two one time collaborators would ever take place.

Alan Swyer is an award-winning filmmaker whose recent documentaries have dealt with Eastern spirituality in the Western world, the criminal justice system, diabetes, boxing, and singer Billy Vera. In the realm of music, among his productions is an album of Ray Charles love songs. His novel 'The Beard' was recently published by *Harvard Square Editions*. His newest film is "When Houston Had The Blues."

Poetry

Daphodille

Shore-gazing, Longing

I sit by the grey ocean,
Salty as my tears.
An eerie calm has settled,
Not a single wave appears.

Saturated frames of summers past,
Fade into rusty silver hues.
Started as two runaways,
Got lost in the palest blues.

Familiar rocks, once warmed by sun's embrace,
Stand sharp, cold, and unforgiving.
When all is said and done,
Perhaps our story lost its living.

Now on my own Odyssey,
The waters took me far from you.
You still hold the key,
If only I believed you would remain true.

Daphodille, a sociology student and a girl of many thoughts.

HR Harper

Gravity

At evening we made a fire at the edge of a blue lake high in the mountains near the border. We made the camp to heed the songs of robins and night herons — you would not admit you were cold. The stratocumulus sunset stayed until dark, and then a black sky of chilled stars fell down upon our world. A rat rustled in the reeds near us, but that night nothing could scare us.

The dust of a windy day, covered us. We looked up at the black dome of emptiness. I said, “maybe wonder will solve us.” You scoffed, the white puff of cloudy air, the denial inside you, fell into the fire. You would not admit you worried about your death. Instead, you pulled me to it breathing with the fading birdsong and letting a mysterious force draw us together, then to the ground. We lifted arms, heavy as stones, and knew gravity would not leave us alone. Pulled to each other for warmth, our brave fear made us complete and lovely, and we lived by the unspoken trust in what heaves us home. After another wave of gravity you snored like a duck in your down bag. I stayed up as the night got colder and the stars rushed away, pulled apart in all directions, their causes and effects chiming with the chemistry unleashed at the moment time began. From here there was no place that did not pull us to it.

Tomorrow we climb the ridge in front of us and cross into a new country. Our weight will hold us on the path until we’re there. But now I raise my hand to the constellations above. My finger traces Orion’s belt. My hand is heavy. Though your hand pulls it to you.

HR Harper

Alchemy

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth...

The ingredients for happiness change in time, but all the elements you need are already at hand - it's habit that weeds out what you think you can use. Myriad vials will fill with what you miss. In the first half of the 21st century elixirs are running out. Don't waste them, don't flip coins. When can you cook gold like this again?

Soon the intelligence we made will make our native intelligence fade. Soon the habitual moon will deny us love. Yet even true love loves cosplay. So go in fancy dress for couples' therapy, in a shaman's get up of Bantu cloth, eagle feathers, vipers' skin, and Dzi beads. Nothing is off the table. Orpheus holds the fire extinguisher in the lab late at night promising he'll be open to how he's hurt you. (So much is learned in our 50 minutes.)

Play with the world, steal its gifts, for a last supper. Raise a clay cup suitable for rain, hemlock, ayahuasca, wine or vinegar. (Though among these occult magic tricks a sponge soaked with vinegar works wonders too.) Pursue new wounds to break open the sounds of your purple heart. I guess the old ceremonies fail to ease the ache of underused awareness. So your swollen feet make the pilgrim's journey. The phonemes confess it. Make up a chant; who will know? Perhaps it makes the perfect lotus grow from mud. A bloom is exactly the golden art you need and seek, the secrets hidden in caves for future emergencies.

Because, rest assured, the red lights are blinking.

Listen. It's real. You thought you could answer and did not need to steal. All bets are off. The prophecy's not wrong nor dated. The common cup matters because it's empty. Might as well fill it with gold, a singing emptiness extracting essence and a suffering that is horribly overrated.

HR Harper

Luxembourg

Before puberty I brought piles of atlases home from the cold marble library, before the screens tunneled me away from the world with the fear of missing out. Historical atlases – page after page of mysterious oblong shapes unheard of: Savoy, Wallachia, Zimbababas, Xiongnu – delicately colored geometries of Golden Hordes, Knights Templar, Caliphates. The calm seas surrounding the ever-melting forms, joining, disappearing page after page. Luxembourg, a shape without history, tiny and blocked in a low land, inspired my imaginations. So I carved out new countries – counties, states, duchies, electorates rearranged in orders invented by alternate history and my pencils.

Why not? I was born in the generation that would see history itself die.

On real graph paper I made up populations, flags, mottos. My childhood hand taught by polity to make uniforms, not yet poems. I sketched broad-shouldered soldiers with music-theater epaulettes to escape our forever wars. My mind muddled by mutations made shadow states in impossible time. Drawings of nothing real, yet as real as Indo-Turkic sultanates now erased. Ah, those secret histories and cherished inventions formed from the same emptiness that will swallow my falling body. Atlases, screens, blue graph paper lose their proud biases in no substance. To manifest history is no error but does not last. Quiet seas bring no lines and mark coasts I've never seen, will never see. So I still limn the lands in their myriad shapes born and dying in time. Small Luxembourg's mind locked in itself, without the distant blue eternity of pliable oceans where history dissolves in the brine.

HR Harper is a writer living in the redwoods above Santa Cruz, California. A student of meditation and the emptying traditions, he writes to understand the nature of human consciousness in a natural world humans seem to be destroying. He began to publish in 2021. Several of his recently published poems and stories may be found at: <https://brusheswiththedarklaw.blogspot.com>

MK Kuol

When I had the chance to be god

after kened ngilse iii

on my way
to the church one sunday,
i crossed paths with a beggar.

she was a bare-footed girl of eleven
with nothing
but a beggar's bowl
& a face creased into a plea.

she stretched her beggar's bowl
toward me & said weakly:
a penny please!
days now. no food. no water
please! please! pleaaaaaase!

having nothing to offer,
for all i had was the offertory,
i turned my eyes off her &
bypassed her hastily.

in the church,
after offering my offertory
i raised my cupped hands
heavenwards & pleaded to god
to bless me with everything
my heart desires

when my prayers went unanswered,
i cursed god—cursed him bitterly.

little did i realize when god
gave me the chance to be the beggar's god,
i heeded not the beggar's plea, too....

MK Kuol

The Disgruntled Griot

there are plastic moons—
how many they are, i cannot tel—
wringing out of their dusty selves &
winging, singing, into my dead eyes.
a dread-locked god—
draped in the drafts of a worn-out taboo,
a tattoo of a strange fish with medusa's head
on his forehead—swoops
through an unnamed street dragging
to their dream-induced deaths
children of men who worship him,
men who now live on in the scents
of the echoes of their children's screams
stitched into the wrinkles of poems
they never lived to write.
a disgruntled griot let me
into the dark depths of his beaten heart
on the whirring wings of his esoteric epics.
i watched the world through his psychic eyes—
watched as sons turned backs on fathers
who turned backs on their fathers;
watched men killed by gods
they killed their gods for;
watched as the whooshing woes
of godlessness: unmitigated disasters
& mean deaths & furious famines & other plagues
my tongue cannot dare tell, wrecked the land.
watched until i wept; wept floods of blood.
“weep not, child, weep not,”
the disgruntled griot said, “worse
is yet to be seen as disasters
beget disasters, more severe.”
come one furious famine,
an ill-omened man, unable to withstand
the haughty urges of his flesh,
launches a sharp-tongued lance
into the thick of his totem's heart &
gathered his kinsfolk to a great feast.
the disgruntled griot reproves them—

better a man who kills his child
than a man who kills his totem for a man
who kills his child has only shorn a branch
that, if gods be kind, has a chance
of sprouting but a man who kills his totem
has killed his roots. he dies—
but his reproofs are sucked into the cacophony
of chitchats of dining & winning.
the night after the great feast,
the flesh & the gums of they who partook
in the feast started nibbling their bones & gums,
powdering them before they turned on themselves
& rivulets of blood & seas of graves &
a rude reek & a stinky silence flooded in
& fill everywhere the air used to fill.

MK Kuol

Do not be like us

do not be like us
who would let a beggar waste away
at the market next to goods wasting away
because if the beggar cannot offer anything
for the goods, it is better both waste away. or us
who would evict our tenants of ten years
because they are ten days behind rent &
let our rentals to spiders for close to ten months.

do not be like us
who would kill another man
because his idea of god
is different from our idea of god
or us who would kill another man
because his skin colour
is different from our skin colour

do not be like us
who would bomb other people out of their lands
so that we can take their lands
or us who would amass millions of dollars
in oversea banks while millions starve back home

do not be like us
who will fill our neighbours' wells
with sand because our neighbours subscribe
to a philosophy or an ideology contrary to ours
or us who instead of building longer tables
for others when fortune favours us
build taller walls instead to shut out the less fortunate

do not be like us
do not be like us
do not be like us
do not be like us
do not be like us

& when you feel it is time to leave,
leave behind a letter as this

for i suppose, rather strongly, had anyone
left behind a letter as this
for the homo erectus; for the neanderthals;
for the dinosaurs; for the pterosaurs,
they would have gotten a way around extinction.
& so would we, too, had anyone left a letter as this
for the seeds of extinction
are sowed in the thoughtless actions
as herein elaborated...
when ~~you feel~~ it is time to leave,
leave behind a letter as this

MK Kuol was recently shortlisted for The Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry and A Proper Poetry Pamphlet Competition. His works have appeared on *Beach Chair Press*, *Spillwords*, *Double Speak*, *Ultramarine Literary Review* and elsewhere. MK Kuol loves dark rooms, coffee, moon-gazing, folk music (Arizona JJ's to be exact) and conspiracies.

E. C. Traganas

THE DEPARTURE — A Haibun

Is it dawn — or is it dusk?
If I linger here long enough,
the sun might cast its shadow
on the empty armchair beside me,
filling out its spaces with your presence.

Have you watered the geranium?
It grows spindly, like the old leg
of a broken wheelbarrow, thinner
and thinner as it seeks out the dying light
for some sustenance.

And the bird — have you fed him?
Why does he stare forlornly into space,
his once resplendent voice muted
like a stopped organ pipe?

It is quiet.
The wall-clock has ceased its ticking,
the candle is snuffed, the hourglass
weighed down by spent,
immobile grains of sand.

Am I coming or going?
Yes, I see. It is evening, after all.
The laces of my shoes are already tied,
my waistcoat is buttoned, hat at the ready.

It is time. I will be stepping out.

shielded from draughts
the wing chair spreads its arms
and flies away forever

E. C. Traganas is an author of the debut novel *Twelfth House*, and *Shaded Pergola*, a collection of haiku and short poetry featuring her original illustrations. E.C. Traganas has published in over a hundred literary magazines including *The Brussels Review*, *The Society of Classical Poets*, *Amethyst Review*, and others. She is a Juilliard-trained concert pianist & composer by profession, has held over 40 national exhibitions of her artwork, and is the founder/director of *Woodside Writers*, a New York-based literary forum. www.elenitraganas.com

ari b. cofer

IF I SEE THE PRIEST NOW, MAYBE FORGIVENESS CAN HELP ME FORGET

father, i am ashamed of the person i have become. i want to confess on behalf of the girl i was in the phi delt house. father, the floors were littered with bottles and the walls were sticky with lust. i chose to be a girl that night, which is my first sin. i believed a song-filled home of men seeking glory to be a church, and that is my second sin. father, i drank so much jameson that the voice of god disappeared, and the quiet was divine. did you know, father, that silence is emptiness undisturbed? do you believe, father, that i would do anything to keep it? father, i danced on the couch and called the spilled liquor my baptism. father, this was paradise. the whole room was looking at me. what an honor it is to be wanted, father, there was a boy who wanted me. who really, really wanted me. and oh, how beautiful a man can make the gospel sound when they learned how to love from god the father. oh, the temples a man can leave in ruins when they are taught how to take like god the father. father, can we be coerced into sin? what happens when we're on our knees, praying, only to be pushed onto our backs? what happens when our body is consecrated by force? i didn't want it, father, but i forgot how to defend the faith. or maybe i did, and my voice was unsteady. or maybe i didn't, because i was drunk, so drunk, father, i called for god so many times while this boy broke me like communion bread. he ate it all up, too. i deserved it, didn't i? father, i can't take it back, can i? father, i need to be made clean, father, please, why is it my sin when it wasn't my greed?

ari b. cofer is a Black and queer author who holds BA in Professional Writing from Baylor University, and is due to graduate from the Randolph College Low-Residency MFA program in January 2025. They have published two poetry collections through Central Avenue Publishing, *paper girl* and *the knives that made her* (Jan 2022), which was featured on BuzzFeed books in 2022, and *unfold: poetry and prose* (2023). Originally from Texas, ari, their husband, and their two pets live in the Pacific Northwest. ari's work has curated an engaged audience across social media platforms and has been featured on sites such as BuzzFeed and TheMighty. Her writing focuses on mental health advocacy, her experiences as a queer, Black woman, and love.

Simon Collinson
Night People

Can you feel a chill,
Or hear growling wind,
When desolation descends,
Under louring skies,
Sending dogs whining,

It's the Night people,
Delivering a warning.
They're coming for you.

Sickening wickedness,
Slithers closer tonight.

Soon they'll lie in wait,
Squirming, squatting, squealing,
All leering,
Upon your creaking gate.

Are you sure that gate is shut tight?

They're not like us,
Those Night people,
Drawn to darkness,
Enjoying all things nefarious.

Have you remembered to leave a light on?

For when the daylight creeps away,
Night people crawl and peep,
out from their wretched holes,
And upon the living do prey.

Are all the doors locked?
Are all the windows secure?
Are you sure?

What's that tall and slender shadow,
Creeping this way?
Could it be a Night creature?

Is that rustling you hear,
Night People
Really a restless wren?
Or are the Night people,
Nearer than you think?

Their desires are insidious and libidinous,
Dismal misery their delight,
Spreading fear and dread upon those they seek,
Excites them,
Drives them crazy tonight.

Are you sure all the windows are secure?

You never can tell when they'll show up,
Emerging from the gloom and gloam,
Roaming amongst us, sniffing us out,
Waiting to snatch the unwary,
Dragging them off into the night.

Are you sure they're not hiding,
Under the stairs?

If you hear a rap rap rapping,
At your window,
Don't go near.

You'll - be - sorry.

With their strange scratchings,
They revel in snatching the curious,
Drawn from unsettled sleep,
who stray too far from their beds.

Are all the children safely tucked up in bed?
Are you sure?

How long can,
You ignore,
Those gnawing noises,
Coming
From your door?

Tap, tap, tapping
What was that?
Watch out for their fierce faces,
Pressed against the pane.

Whatever you do,
Don't open the window,
Or you'll end up snatched and carried away,
To lairs deep in the forest's sunless bowels.

Never to be seen again.

Here they come,
One by one,
Night people,
Knock, knock, knocking.

Are you sure you've locked that door?
Are you sure?

Simon Collinson is a writer from England. He seeks solitude, sorrow and shadow.

William Doreski

The Wind from Ireland

The wind is blowing from Ireland.
You can tell by its pout and sobbing.

It brings a shade of irony
to an otherwise shapeless landscape

of ledge and scrawny hardwoods.
When it wades through the village

it laughs in the lowest register,
shivering the spines of old women

and knocking on thick young skulls.
I hate going out in this weather

with the sun low but emboldened,
the filthy roadside snowdrifts

looking like the source of all disease.
I'd rather slump in my favorite chair

reading Derek Mahon, Seamus Heaney,
Yeats, Joyce, and Richard Murphy

That's all the Irish I can take today,
but the wind insists

on itself, parting hair the wrong way,
whirlpooling in grocery bags,

scattering everyone's first-class mail.
How the wind spans the Atlantic

without petering into a sneeze
puzzles me, but grave sincerity

muddled with all that irony
presses me to its bosom and sighs.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Valerie

Pale red carnations

Dear scarlet lover
Do you ever dream of me?
Like I do you?
Do the stars above whisper my name?
Cherry kisses filled my drawers
Ink strewn over paper, letters I cannot send
Imprinted over velvet
Engraved in my soul
To the worker bees and butterflies I beg
Please, bring me my lover
Sing her my truth
My heart lies on the table, bare
Ripped out, my chest hollowed
Dead
Longing
But as the red blossomed underneath
It still tightens for the crimson on your cheeks
The auburn in your hair
Sweet carnations bloomed
Burgundy spilled over white
Sweet poison, tainted petals
My forbidden fruit, my vice
The rouge I saved
Spilled from my veins
Dripped from my heart
Intoxicated, infatuated
Running faucets, ceaseless rivers of sweet berry
Stain my soul
Crimson cheeks haunt my mind,
Reign my wildest dreams
Deprive me of my sanity
I burn only for your heart
That you hold so dearly in your hand
In exchange for mine
Inflorescences of red splashed over porcelain
They crave your nectar
Your love
Your touch.
I shall be emblazed by the flame

Ignite by the torch which I hold for your eyes
It pains my vitals, scorch my flesh
Ghosts of merlot and strawberry
Torment my conscience

Valerie is a young aspiring teen author who is working hard to get her works published and make a name for herself in the literary world. She is particularly fascinated with floriography and therefore her works utilise the language of flowers to delve into humans and their nature, explore their rawest fervours; the concealed corners within the mind; and usually incorporate various elements of floriography.

Loralee Clark

Stonehenge: Ecology of Flux

Breath is the air where the ancestors live;
they fill your lungs that you may speak
before you sing:
a stitch in the web of us.

With many ascending to the stars
they lay threads of knowing,
cocoon cumulative around us in this cup and ring,
moving this lymph, embroidering
this tapestry of living to itself--
one syllable decay, the next rebirth.

*Settle our spirits
ground us to place*

One tribe begins low, multioctave:
we mirror the stones
which mirror stars moving through our bodies,
our bodies moving through the air,
air through our mouths:
we become the stars.

*Hear us sing
reverberating these stones*

Another tribe begins, another falls along
like a hint, a suggestion:
powerful medicine, a blessing.
We are a tidepool holding the tension and gradient
that comes with the inhale,
before the exhale--
building bones, sheathing flesh:

*Settle our sports
ground us to place
hear the stars sing
through these stones.*

Breath is the air where ancestors live,
a stitch in the web of the collective.

Loralee Clark grew up in Maine and resides now in Virginia; her Instagram is @make13experiment; her website is sites.google.com/view/loraleeclark; and her SubStack is nosuchthingasfailure.substack.com. She has a book forthcoming this year, *Solemnity Rites*, with Prolific Pulse Press LLC and has been published most recently in *White Stag Journal*, *Chewers* by Masticadores, *Nude Bruce Review*, *Lucky Lizard*, *Nature of Our Times*, *Unearthed*, *Nebo*, *Choeofpleirn Press*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *The Taborian*, *Superpresent*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *Impossible Task*.

Natalie Hammonds

as i lay me down to sleep

The stars signal the prime part of the day for me.
Hidden behind clouds, they still manage to pierce
Through the dark and onto me.

I can feel the heaviness of it, the absence of light. Weighed down.
But despite the laws of physics, I think that
I'm floating. I'm safe in your confines.

I'm as well equipped for the daytime
As a bat, nocturnal and timid, dripping with blood
That I'm not sure is my own.

All day, I squint my eyes at the sun
As the heat rays blur my vision. I put on my sunglasses
And hide them from this infraction, this fallacy.

I carry this peace with me, cradled in my arms
As it melts away, seeps through my fingers.
I know this feeling well. It happens

Every morning, and it always will. And then I pray
My flurry of words;
Wishes of a world where I do not fear the light.

Natalie Hammonds is an MFA graduate student currently working on her Master's in Creative Writing from Concordia St. Paul University. She lives in Houston, Texas, and teaches theater arts to middle school students. She also holds her BFA in theater from Texas State University. Natalie has had poetry published by *Grey Coven Publishing* and hopes to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a published author.

Christina Zhang

The Quiet Echo of Essex

We drove to a secluded spot in Essex,
the gravel path cool underfoot,
each step cracking the silence,
the sound too sharp in the thick fog.
It was as if the world itself held its breath,
veiling everything ahead,
distant shapes twisting into mirages.
But as I walked, the landscape slowly revealed itself—
a house, old and cradled by a quiet stream,
its vines clinging to a roof that seemed to sag under time.
The walls were faded,
like the feeling I couldn't shake—
that I was still waiting for something,
someone,
to pull me out of this fog.

I stood there,
alone in a crowd,
surrounded by classmates who were laughing,
talking,
living a life I couldn't quite reach.
The house stood in front of me,
both forgotten and alive,
a quiet reminder that nothing stays still.
The plants that grew there
didn't overrun,
but added life to the ruins,
like I wished I could do
to my own heart,
buried under too many miles,
too many days without home.

The stream, calm but restless,
reflected the gray sky,
and the breeze ruffled the marsh,
reminding me of autumn back home—
a season I hadn't seen in so long.
The trees swayed,
their leaves rustling like whispers,

mocking the wind for not being harsh enough,
the way I wanted to be—
strong,
untouched,
untethered to the past.

But the fog—it was suffocating.
A quiet reminder that I wasn't home,
that the future ahead was a blank page
I didn't know how to write.
It felt like I was living someone else's life,
where I was always in-between—
between countries, between identities,
between a past that didn't fit anymore
and a future I couldn't touch.

I breathed in the cold air,
felt my breath rise before me,
distorted by the mist,
before it disappeared—
vanishing into the unknown,
like the comfort of home that had slipped away
without my noticing.

The day stretched on,
a quiet ache beneath every step.
But that feeling of emptiness,
that deep longing for something familiar,
lingered,
echoing softly,
like the mist itself.

Christina Zhang is a young writer based in Shanghai, China. She has a deep passion for writing and social justice. Her academic work has been recognized by *Harvard International Review*, *Princeton Legal Journal*, and others. Her creative work can be found in *Blue Marble Review*, *The Incandescent Review*, *Paper Cranes Literary*, and many more. She finds particular delight in musicals, with *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, and *Six!* being among her favorites. Besides that, she loves spending time with her cat.

Emmanuel G G Yamba

Stories

So we began the night with broken
stories, stories that will do to the night what
the water does to the sea. We listened filled
with silence the way each body, tired of grief
will do. Because it started small and soft, with
happy homes then we lost ourselves to
single parenting. I remember how we ran into
stories almost the same, of loss, of how we
became victims and of our journey into
fatherhood before our time. I was to be the
seventh speaker. I was to tell how God takes
care of a body forsaken by mother and
father. But it's like I was too scare of my story or
maybe I'm still learning how to
reveal the secret one night holds to another night.

Emmanuel G G Yamba is a Liberian writer and poet. Winner of the Abu Sherif Poetry Prize 2024, 2nd place Winner of the Pengician poetry chapbook prize 2024, Shortlisted for the Poetry Journal Prize, 2nd runner-up for the LAW/We Care Essay Competition 2023, Poetry Reader for *PepperCoast Lit* and *Akpata Magazine*. He's a graduate of the University of Liberia with BSc in Biomedical Science and SprinNG Advancement Fellowship.

Will Reger

The Needle

Coiled in me is the interpretation
of lonesome paucity:
a coyote, heavy with gravity.
If you say that I've lost my way
in the flicker of knives,
I will counter that shadows
cleave to blue in dark dreaming.
You don't see crows crying,
after all, about lost feathers.
My frantic scribbles
aren't made by rushing wings—
what I have to say
constellates itself in poetry,
but silence is another way to live.
We are creatures in motion,
and I want my motions
to mean something marvelous,
to have the space to take place.
want my breath to build
out of the basement of my lungs
into the cranium, down the spine,
out to the hand that scribbles
the dragonfly stars or anything
that sloughs from a star.
Think of a needle cast into the sea,
I'll need that to sew up my poetry.

Will Reger

We Stand Up

What is being asked of us,
and what must we prepare to face?
The clocks chime the hour of fate:
we hope our strength does not dwindle!
Which means, of course, we stand up.
We are not fearful, nor do we deny
our hearts; though everything crumbles
around our feet, we still possess
our words which, like our children,
follow us into the battle, flanking
our dimwitted foes, and driving them
from the battlefield, offended, marked,
derided and satirized.

Will Reger

Cat and Mouse

As if a cat
held me down
beneath
its paw,
I became still,
but then one day
I woke up alive
with life flowing
again into my
once nearly deleted
brain. It was enough
to live again in joy
for that moment.
Wait, was it enough?
Will that cat
return again
to hold its claws
bare against
my flesh?
If and when
it does, I cannot
say this brief
respite will be
compensation enough
for what might once
more be taken away.
I am no fan
of this game,
nor the lessons
it purposes.

Will Reger has a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois. He has published four collections of poetry. He has served as the inaugural poet laureate for the city of Urbana, Illinois 2019-2020. For the last decade he has been active in promoting poetry in his community. His work has most recently been or will soon be published in the *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *Spirits Magazine IUNW*, *Poetry South Review* and *Talking River Poetry Review*.

Nattie O'Sheggzy

Licking Candy by the Roadside

Feeling fooled
After a plate of feud
Who gets in the mood
With a taste of mould?
But your love grates my heart
When I don the Christmas hat
Now it's spring time
In your garden of thyme.

But I hate love wars
For I need to whistle more
Above the boom of the valley
To carve out your belly.
I am for a piece of peace
Bought with one pence
It's in the air. It's in the air.
Cheap and fair.

Nattie O'Sheggzy is a poet who, often accompanied by his loyal dog, Exhale, finds inspiration in the complexities of simple things. He is the author of two poetry collections: *Random Imaginations* and *Sounds of the Wooden Gong*. Nattie's work has been featured in various literary publications, including *Literary Yard*, *The Sandy River Review*, *Masticadores Taiwan*, *Ultramarine Review*, *Heroin Love Song*, *Agape Review*, *SweetSmell Journal*, *Smoky Quartz*, *Feed The Holy*, and *LiteZine*.

Christina Chin & Uchechukwu Onyedikam
Of a Jazz Thing

african moon
sound from the banana tree
kpam kpam golo
punters ask tree spirit
for lucky numbers

searching
moonlit night
boju boju
the dreaded bog koel
a haunting call

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

SPIRIT

consecrated by the men before us
ashes to ashes, dust to dust
the spirit rest upon us –
enabling our collective
will of standing straight,
plumb & worthy before
the Judge

star-shining the image of
the difficult splash of light;
of the vastness of our tongue
functioning on different realm
in the spirit of the ancient tales
of kingdom come – life – death –
jungle in paradise:

hair of snow, bones quite brittle
clear as diamond ice

the unknown imagining of the
afterlife finding absolute rest on
each lining of our enlightening identity
absorbing the god-presence into our
skin covered with fur of the wild beast

to feel ourselves
beloved of
the Òrìsà

over the surface of the beauty of the
ocean blue we cast our dark shadow
bearing the mark of Man's awe in wonder
as we sojourn here & commune in
mystery of the spirit

Uchechukwu Onyedikam

HAIL MARY!

I, ignore the present settling around me
for I have been here and there...
and here again in this retraced
footsteps of time with her Lover
juggling my mind and my soul
into strange mysteries of
this last Hail Mary push

Wish you could sit next to me and...
from my soul you will hear it —
its gentle tenderness, and
bless it if it's in *thy* will

But today happens I walk alone in flames
escaped into fire for the refining
of a place yet unknown to me
and to my mama's dead body laying in the morgue with empty hopes
of my becomingness

Would today be sweeter without
artificial sweetener, just a fresh brew
of pure black coffee from mama's old kettle?

Resting under the mango tree on the sidewalk with tired and sore feet
dripping red sweat —
for the journey from road unpleasant
has dug out my soul and fed it
to the *Taker*

Gleam of heart-wrenching scene
held on replay in my head as
I try to reach out to tomorrow's undying questions of life — and
the slim, underfed chance of waking up
to see the sunshine rise

Would loom so high and
full of grace for the last
Hail Mary push

Chris Bridgen

He takes stock

Tubes clogged with red oil, pumping ragged as steam trains.
Marrow stretched within bone.
Regrets plot behind knees rife with ketamine. Potted
soil overflows a drugged skull.
Sniffing faint praise behind long nose hairs
of I knows and who cares. Throat glugging well,
cleared with high coughs.

Brought low, cell high.

Armory of clean nails, fast fashion falls away.
Toes pale, unable to curl, to golf even arms swing
on an arc as the leash goes soft
and goats chewing par wander off.

The days are like horses, the years are a farm.
Seven spans stretch out time, we reach for
home at dawn.

Chris Bridgen (he/him) writes, thinks, and drinks in Ottawa, ON, Canada. He lives with one spouse, two tabby cats, and three bottles of whiskey.

Kimutai Kemboi Allan

SMILES IN THE DARK

I wander up and down
This city in the dark hours
Lost for occupation and sleepless
I meet the bats smiling at me
And the night witches whistling at me
The apparitions at the cemetery downriver
They are having a deadly carnival
All skulls and red flags flying high
I pass by a late night chemist
And smile at the pharmacist
A ghost of a tall sulking man
Holding prescriptions of sleep inducers
To a middle aged bloke vexed enow
An insomniac of the middle ages.
The moon guides me back to my room
And my bed is littered with nightmares
Little nasty smiles directed at me!

Kimutai Kemboi Allan

WHILEND THOUGHTS

Why want to mount the hills?
Peace and tranquility
Sit at home, in the living room
Smiling at the visitors
And your sweat waters the barren land
The lizards scamper away
Hiding under the rocks on your path.

Why quit the marathon of life?
Victory awaits in the horizon
Clapping boisterously to the participants
Jumping in joy like a happy kid
And your name is partly written
In the Olympic prize medal
The band is playing a song of victory!

Kimutai Kemboi Allan's works have been published or are forthcoming in *RIC Journal*, *DoubleSpeak Magazine*, *MEN: An International Anthology of African and Latin American Writers*, *Redefining Poetry Anthology*, "Best New African Poets 2023 Anthology", "Our Stories Redefined Anthology for African Writing 2023", *The Piker Press*, *Prodigy Magazine*, *Our Poetry Archive*, the *INK Babies Literary Magazine*, *Written Tales*, *African Global Networks (AGN)*, *Ake Review*, *The Active Muse*, *Writer's Space Africa*, *Kalahari Review* among others.

Sas K

the dress

the dress was once the star of the show
now nobody comes and it never goes
its home once the world
now in a drawer with creases and folds
out where it was once meant to be
now left untouched, for nobody to see.

Sas K loves writing poetry and short stories!

Alistair Gaunt

Ennui

How unfair is it, for you to let me grieve you for a second time?
Agony seeps through my bloodstream like wildfire on grass.

Tell me where it hurts and I'll mend it;

it hurts everywhere.

You've hurt me everywhere: in the hallway we used to walk together, the spaces we used to fill in old classrooms, and the paths we have crossed countless of times.

In the face of the mirror where you have decided you were a reflection of me.

How has your pain become my burden to carry? You have hurt me in every possible form, turned me inside out and poured kerosene to the blazing flames.

Tell me where it burns and I'll kill the fire with my bare hands;

it burns everywhere.

All this love was once anger, and all this anger was once love.

Resentment slips like water through my hands; I have nothing left to give after all that I have lost.

Grudge clutches me by the throat and holds my hand—tells me *everything is going to be alright*.

Will it ever, when I have to look you in the face pretending I have not tried to hold you at arm's length?

Now you sit beside me for hours, your somber eyes longing for what we once had.

Are you not sick of pretending you have not held and shattered my heart?

Pried my brain with your fingers with my flesh stuck underneath your fingernails;

tell me how this, and all that is the past too, will become our ruins.

I have mended it myself, woven from the hatred I have tried to replace my love with.

It would be easier to just be cruel than to be kind.

And yet, I cannot say your name without tasting softness in my tongue.

I cannot allow myself to love you again, and so I stare at the ceiling until time passes between us—a clockwork in reverse.

Let our love die with the remnants of our memories,
and I shall bury the image of you when all of this is over.

Alistair Gaunt (they/he/she) is a Filipino queer non-binary poet born in Southern Philippines. Their writing contemplates the queer experience, violent desires, peculiar dreams, death, grief, and catharsis. When not writing poetry, she spends the rest of her free time painting, reading, making coffee, traveling, and watching sunsets collapse into dawn. They may be contacted through @hauntedbythestars on Instagram & alistairgauntwriting@gmail.com.

John Jeffire

All Stories Are True

*“The man I have become and those
I’ve lost becoming him....”
—John Edgar Wideman*

Whisp thin ghost rising
in the green breath of
thickening moss,
bats scattering on night wings,
shadows flecking the nowhere.
Kitchen lights tucked
along the shoreline of
an unmapped lake,
shagged ice flows
and a tumor brewing
between the ribs.
The promise to sit
a country porch
from coffee morning
until bourbon night
a heavy stone wedged
in the passway leading
to the chipped brick
of a collapsing home.
Lodged in toothy gaps,
they fester, too many
camped on a lone acre,
each demanding a share.
Who are these men,
these iterations, layers
of sloughed skin that
follow like hounds
in the gloaming?
A dozen men or more
hunt one sepia man,
all of them swept in fog;
the abandoned—
who are that man, not
that man, themselves,
and each other,
and no one at all—
obediently follow.

John Jeffire

they always come back

you once told me,
victory smudged
on your salome lips
as you read me
a just-sent text
from
a former lover

yet

here I am,
a state line between us
and no bus fare or
train ticket south,
your number
deleted from
my phone
and forgotten.

Oh, so you're counting
these words.
Okay, you win again:
you can have them
and the soiled wad of
expired promises
somewhere in
the junkdrawer

John Jeffire

SOS

Southern holiday city
lights jiggling festive
in the gulf's dark sheen.
I, torched boat bonfire
distant enough
my drifting menace
cannot reach
the slumbering keels
bobbing in harbor.
Ice cubed safely
in my gin, lifeboats
launched adrift empty,
the other boats look on
as flames throw salvo
of hands skyward,
arsonist face glowing
baleful in the barrage,
surely someone
punching 9-1-1.
I am the only burden
to my bound sails
burning themselves
into the black tide.
Someone ashore will
point and say,
*There must be
someone on board.*
Someone—for no
reason I understand—
will feel an urge
to save me.

John Jeffire was born in Detroit. In 2005, his novel "Motown Burning" was named Grand Prize Winner in the Mount Arrowsmith Novel Competition and in 2007 it won a Gold Medal for Regional Fiction in the Independent Publishing Awards. Speaking of "Motown Burning," former chair of the Pulitzer Jury Philip F. O'Connor said, "It works. I don't often say that, but it has a drive and integrity that gives it credible life.... I find a novel with heart." In 2009, Andra Milacca included "Motown Burning" in her list of "Six Savory Novels Set in Detroit" along with works by Elmore Leonard, Joyce Carol Oates, and Jeffrey Eugenides. His first book of poetry, "Stone + Fist + Brick + Bone," was nominated for a Michigan Notable Book Award in 2009. Former U.S. Poet Laureate Philip Levine called the book "a terrific one for our city." His short story "Boss" appeared in *Cooldest American Stories 2022*, which won the International Book Awards Prize for Fiction Anthologies. In 2022, his novel "River Rouge" won the American Writing Awards for Legacy Fiction.

Terence Young

Seeing Red

My father brought his temper everywhere.
Added it to his field kit when he went off to war,
slipped it into the saddle bag of his pack horse
before he left on survey.

It came in handy as a weapon he could deploy
against disappointment, stupid clerks,
his children, his wife.

Goddam it all to hell, he'd say,
when the gods conspired to thwart his happiness.

He passed his temper on to me,
along with a Waltham pocket watch and
an FS fighting knife. Not much need
for any of it, but I use the knife on occasion
to open the few letters I receive.

(It is true I am quick to raise my fist
in dreams, though. There I will yell and yell,
and pummel a face, kick and scratch.
No holds barred in my sleep.)

Once, when I forgot to return a pen
I'd borrowed to finish my homework,
he phoned from the office to let me know
just how put out he was, what inconvenience
I'd caused him. I stood in the hall,
receiver to my ear, surprised by his voice
coming through miles of wire,
how small it sounded, his words mean,
the way they stayed with me
long after I hung up.

Terence Young

Antecedents

Great Uncle Ernest looks down on us
from inside an oak frame on the wall,
his high collar and moustache belying
the nineteen years he lived
until a gold mine in Mexico put a stop to the rest.

He seems happy enough up there, calm,
smiling stiffly, living the days he has left, as we all are,
beloved by a sister who never got over his loss,
or her husband's a decade later,
wheelchair-bound in grief by the end.

She gave Ernest a diary for the trip south,
which he forgot, leaving her to pencil in a few words
on the day of his departure, his birthday,
the morning the telegram arrived,
all remaining pages blank, fittingly.

His brother Percy lived on,
signed up for the Great War, came home
a much simpler man, cutting cordwood for the wealthy,
giving away whatever he owned
to anyone who asked.

Theirs are the stories I grew up with,
cautionary tales, though about what it's hard to say,
maybe life itself, how expectations are folly,
that dying young
might be the greater blessing.

Not that I listened. The past is merely window-dressing
to the present, a bright and flashy display
that means little.

On my shelf is Ernest's copy of *A Boy's Own Annual*
from 1888,

inscribed by his grandfather
who wished him much joy for the coming year,
a hand-me-down that passed from shelf to shelf

until it came to me, with its wild west stories and colour plates of lakes and endless summer fun.

Terence Young

Mystery Train

Live blues over the back fence.

A local busker hired for the neighbour's B-day

sings to family, friends, former colleagues
from the fire department, who clap after each sad song,

ask for more, which the nameless troubadour provides,
adding stories of his divorce, the hotel bars he's played,

the time he finally met so-and-so, how they shared a pint,
talked technique into the small hours.

When he pulls out his harmonica and launches into
Paul Butterfield, a driving lament from East-West,

I stop my wood butchery, turn away from the tired cedar railings
of our sundeck and pull up a chair to listen more closely.

Lyrics I haven't heard in years bubble up from under my tongue,
as though I'm waking after a long sleep to look 'round for my shoes,

head out walking because what else is there to do
when the one that you love has gone off with someone else?

Minutes seem like hours and hours seem like days
when you're living the misery of her low-down ways,

or so I used to imagine in my parents' house,
cueing the tone arm and dropping it again and again,

memorizing every note in Bloomfield's brief solo,
tapping my fingers to the relentless trudge of bass and drums

as they mimicked the song's title, wishing I knew
just how bad it could really be, this sorrow he was singing about,

what could be so dire between two people that one of them
would want to give up living and go shopping instead,

buy himself a tombstone and be pronounced dead.

Terence Young lives on Vancouver Island. His most recent book is a collection of poems, *Smithereens* (Harbour Publishing, 2021).

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to our amazing writers for shaping Everscribe into an accessible path for remarkable authors. Your unique voices and stories are what make this publication special.

We also want to express our appreciation to our dedicated editorial team, whose hard work and commitment have brought this incredible issue to life. It's a true labor of love, and we couldn't have done it without you.

Additionally, we thank our founder for envisioning a platform for young and emerging writers, as well as our partners for their invaluable support. Lastly, a big thank you to everyone who has contributed to Everscribe in any way. For inquiries or feedback, please reach out to us through our website, socials, or at info@everscribemag.com.

Future Issues

We're thrilled to announce that our next issue, Issue No. 7, *Littera Novus*, will be coming soon! Everscribe releases a new issue every 1st of the month, so stay tuned!

Writers can always submit their works through our website at everscribemag.com. Join our community by connecting with us on our [Discord server](#), where both writers and readers are welcome. Stay updated on issue releases, special opportunities, news, and more by following us on [social media](#).

For inquiries or questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@everscribemag.com. We hope you enjoyed reading Everscribe's sixth issue, and we extend our thanks to all the writers for making this dream come true!

Until next time,
The Everscribe Team

