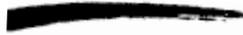


NOTRE DAME REVIEW



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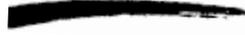
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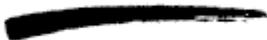
CONTENTS



Facing the Music <i>poetry</i>	1
<i>Duncan Wu</i>	
Magpie <i>poetry</i>	2
<i>Robert Gibb</i>	
Thunder and Lilies <i>poetry</i>	3
<i>John Linstrom</i>	
Bad Moon Rising <i>essay</i>	5
<i>James Davis May</i>	
At Ala Moana Bowls; A Hike to the Ka Iwi Coast February 2009 <i>poetry</i>	7
<i>Derek Otsuji</i>	
Shoes Painted by Van Gogh in 1888 <i>poetry</i>	9
<i>Judith Fox</i>	
An Oyster Shell <i>poetry</i>	10
<i>Hilary Sallick</i>	
A Chore Undone <i>poetry</i>	13
<i>Gil Arzola</i>	
Lymphoma <i>poetry</i>	14
<i>Ayrton Lopez</i>	
Julie Anne Long in Conversation with Taylor Thomas <i>interview</i>	16
<i>Julie Anne Long and Taylor Thomas</i>	
Amphibious <i>poetry</i>	24
<i>Betsy Bolton</i>	
Our Sorrow <i>poetry</i>	25
<i>John Poch</i>	
Dives: On Vegetables <i>poetry</i>	26
<i>John J. Ronan</i>	

On the Listowel Road, County Kerry, 1996; Walking to Omev Island <i>poetry</i>	27
<i>Jason Irwin</i>	
Memorabilia <i>poetry</i>	30
<i>Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto</i>	
To be the ghost of <i>poetry</i>	31
<i>William Archila</i>	
SoCal <i>poetry</i>	32
<i>Michael Homolka</i>	
My Indian America <i>poetry</i>	36
<i>César Dávila Andrade translated by Jonathan Simkins</i>	
Contagion; The Liberator Laments; Despise for Good <i>story</i>	42
<i>Matthew Pitt</i>	
Bats In the Attic/Abu Ghraib; For the Greater Good <i>poetry</i>	49
<i>KateLynn Hibbard</i>	
The Womb I Knew <i>poetry</i>	52
<i>James Shea</i>	
Fruitlands <i>poetry</i>	54
<i>Charles Byrne</i>	
Blood and Soil <i>poetry</i>	56
<i>Jenny Husk</i>	
Lola Begins <i>poetry</i>	58
<i>Richard Ryal</i>	
Shell <i>poetry</i>	59
<i>Alex Stanley</i>	
Under Clouds <i>poetry</i>	60
<i>Todd Robinson</i>	
Derby Day <i>story</i>	61
<i>Andrew Malan Milward</i>	
Cairn <i>poetry</i>	77
<i>Therese Gleason</i>	

Thoughts and Prayers <i>poetry</i>	78
<i>George Witte</i>	
The Painters Who Were Not Masters <i>poetry</i>	79
<i>Forester McClatchey</i>	
About Hollywood and the Path of Silver-Gold <i>poetry</i>	81
<i>Susan Terris</i>	
“And From Where I Sit, No One Else Can See It”: Review of <i>Me Gone Home: Collected Poems</i> <i>review</i>	82
<i>Lea Graham</i>	
Contributors	87



GRAVE NEW WORLD



Isabella Castellanet, *Invasion*, ink on paper, 2021, courtesy of the artist.

FACING THE MUSIC*Duncan Wu*

Dark-timbred, metallic-toned, the katydids
and crickets, in their thousands, possess
the night, draw me deeper into the forest
that their music might cut through my eyelids

mouth and brain, raising me up on paper wings
into the flight of insect song. They propel
me above the trees tonight, compel
me through the freezing air, so careless fling

their souls aloft as to make me want to
close my eyes forever and forget, forget,
forget. But it won't take, slips back—regret,
self-harm, self-hatred bloom, entwine, bleed through

their grating rasp, enter the nostrils, drill
to the brain and lay their eggs. I'm fine,
and stumble backwards, out of line
of sight, and lie here, lie here still.

MAGPIE

Robert Gibb

My own exhumed scrap of papyrus:

the surviving parts of a story I once knew by heart, friends
fetching Ginsberg and Orlovsky for a local poetry festival,
most of the passed-along details having been lost along
the way.

Allentown, a rental van, Ginsberg's small toy piano...

Memory's a magpie, dressing its nest with so much second-
hand stuff. What are we to make of that? Or do about the
nest's attritions?

Something to do with them getting lost in the industrial
swamps of New Jersey, mazing their way to the interstate.

Something with the "red star of Peter's cigarette" which
Ginsberg glimpsed burning in the dark.

THUNDER AND LILIES*John Linstrom*

Four-thirty Thursday morning and the atmosphere
rips, shudders, and blows over the city,
patters the window, booms close enough to make
something in the ceiling buzz. I think again

of ancestors who immigrated from Ostergotland's
woods and speckled lakes, seeking better roorage,
to "New Sweden," State of Iowa, land of sky
and grass and tarpaper shacks, nothing they knew

to build a home with. Imagine the heavy
wetness and crash of a thunderstorm
in a sod house. They took a new name,
a cipher evoking a stream that flows

through blue flax blossoms. Linseed cultivation
was not for this New World. Grandpa Linstrom
recalled the subsequent Nebraska farm, the nightly chore
of irrigation: he'd lift the wooden check to loose

the water from the co-op's ditch,
then walk to the bottom of the cornfield
to lie below the swaying stalks and stars and wait
for the trickling water to reach his ears

and wake him. Tonight, the sky
in New York roars, Grandpa is dying
in suburban Illinois, and smart people tell me
we might not survive the atmospheric effects

of our machines, of a kind of hunger.
Could that dreaming boy beneath the stars,
on a farm that ran without electric lights,
have contemplated such a thing? His father

would die soon after from a heart attack,
he would be the one to leave for college,
then seminary, and when he married in Illinois,
no family from Nebraska came. I knew him

as a gardener, a lover of hostas
and lilies who planted much and hopefully,
who in thunderstorms would think of the rain
and remind us that the plants would be glad.

BAD MOON RISING

James Davis May

My wife and I are walking to the faculty Christmas party when I feel it coming on, a heavy cold that gathers in my forehead then travels down my chest like a low pressure system on a meteorologist's map. I try recreating the morning: did I open the SMTWTFS pillbox where I keep my antidepressants before I went to the kitchen to pack our daughter's lunch? I can't remember. Then again, I don't remember brushing my teeth, but I'm confident I did. Maybe this is just a bout of fatigue coupled with sadness—sadness over what, I'm not sure. I feel like I'm in the limbo between a sore throat and possibly something worse. I've stopped walking and so has Chelsea. We're in front of a stained-glass window; the chapel's the last building before the president's house. It's eerily quiet.

"Could you check to make sure the party starts at 5:30," I ask.

She takes out her phone, pauses, then smiles. "The party was last night," she says and laughs, and I laugh too. We're giddy with our flakiness, that we've so dutifully fulfilled the absent-minded writer stereotype, but also grateful for the reprieve from socialization, albeit mildly mortified that we RSVPed to the event.

"Well, we're paying for a sitter," I say, "let's go for a walk." And so we do, arm in arm, laughing at how close we came to ringing the president's doorbell twenty-four hours late. We round the quad, and see the few remaining students leaving the last of this semester's exams.

We come to a courtyard with a fountain that stretches the length of one of its walls. It's lit from underneath and sounds and smells like those fake rivers at amusement parks: overzealously loud and coppery sweet. We debate walking to a restaurant or just going home. Home is cheaper. We make to leave, but then I notice that while I was distracted by the delirium of our mix-up, the depression has spread. I have an urge to double over.

"I think I forgot to take my pill this morning," I tell Chelsea, and we stop again. It's night now, with an impressive full moon shining like a rogue Christmas ornament above the administrative building's bell tower. Often, she recognizes an episode before I do. She tells me my face gets long and old.

Chelsea watches me as I watch the moon.

The part of the movie that scares me isn't so much the wolf the man becomes, but the moment of transition. Compared to what the motif has evolved into, Lon Chaney's wolf-to-man scenes are downright placid. In *The*

Wolf Man, he doesn't notice the change until he takes his socks off and sees his hairy legs. Decades later, David Kessler's writhing, screaming, and sinewy contortions in *An American Werewolf in London* became the standard. It's what we witness in *Harry Potter*, when kindhearted Professor Lupin, who's forgotten to take his wolfsbane potion, sees the moon climb over the mountain and the malignant light enters his eyes. It's the knowing what's about to happen, that it's at an irreversible point, that haunts me. A man in excruciating pain stops yelling because he's horrified at the sight of his hand swelling, extending, and growing hair.

Tonight, the moon is coincidental. Since the medication stabilized things, my depression hasn't been a serious danger to me, and it's never been a danger to others, though it certainly made me an irritable jerk at times. But when I forget to take my pill, something latent awakens, emerges, tries to take over and does—it's as if I've let myself turn into what I fear is myself. I feel the bodily changes I've tried to describe variously as the flesh falling off my face, a vacuum in my torso, an increase in gravity's pull on my body. There's a little comfort in knowing that these episodes now tend to last as long as the flu—three to seven days, sometimes more, sometimes less—and the symptoms are never as severe as they were years ago when I was suicidal for months and had trouble standing up, let alone walking. Still, there's always the worry that this time will be permanent.

We walk toward the car. Instead of holding my hand, Chelsea is more or less holding me up. When we get home, I'll find the untaken white pill in the compartment marked F. It will be too late to take it if I want to sleep, so I won't take it, and I won't sleep, and the moonlight will be a thin blue, beautiful, and terrifying.

AT ALA MOANA BOWLS*Derek Otsuji*

Watch the fleet of surfers who watch the sea
—or keep an eye out for the secret tell
the ocean gives when it's about to swell,
heave its bulk, and, rising rapturously,
pitch to froth and foam, cap then curl, folding
as it falls, and its force propels the man
to lift, launch and—if only for a span
of blissful seconds—glide on, as the molding
water rolls into a barrel of fire and glass,
down which he drives, and through the narrowing pass
emerges—a miracle! Or off the lip,
with feet glued to the board, turns—no, whips
around, carves a brash signature, a name
writ in water, a momentary fame.

A HIKE TO THE KA IWI COAST FEBRUARY 2009*Derek Otsuji*

We started up the trail to the sea cliffs
 of the Ka Iwi coast, early. The light,
 thrown high above a cloud bank touched the sky,
 a patchy mouse-fur grey, then fell back
 to the sea, splintering into pieces,
 like Icarus's sun-dismantled wings.
 A woolly off-shore wind buffed the cliffs,
 tousled your hair and as you swept a strand
 that had blown across your face, tucking it
 behind an ear, you said you'd had a dream.
 In it, a pair of whales visited you,
 bowing shyly like tame and kindly horses,
 and I thought of that poem by James Wright
 but said nothing and turned back to the sea,
 as you went on wondering what the dream
 might mean and the water's hard dark shards
 in a shifting field, went on sliding, jostling,
 to a glittering indifferent rhythm,
 when a vaporizing cloud signaled *whale*—
 and before an alerting word could drop,
 he breached! Like a silo tower he stood
 straight out of the water, then, as if stalled
 at an edge—tilted, and, arcing back, collapsed
 through tiers of air, like falling in a dream,
 till burst ocean bloomed! White flowers of foam!
 And then the sound, a muffled thunder, reached
 our ears, followed by a shattering noise,
 annihilating aftermath of spray!
 The drenching spectacle of it, the glee
 —what we'd imagined and what, seen—drunk in,
 through eye and ear and mouth and prickling skin.

SHOES PAINTED BY VAN GOGH IN 1888*Judith Fox*

They stand on tiles whose red and yellow pigments mirror
slowly ripened peaches, palmed here and there by sun.

Unattended, smelling of crusted hose and loamy soil,
the shoes lean at their heels, one against the other,

waiting for the familiar slope of the farmer's feet.
After years spent hitching horse to plow—cultivating

fields of wheat, oat and barley under a fierce swirl
of gaseous sun—the peasant's shoes are worn.

But this oil on canvas, this still life, isn't still.
These shoes vibrate—

ready to rise, break into a jig.
The leather laces that tie them, twitch.

And who's to say these shoes aren't *his* but *hers*;
molded by the feet of a rawboned woman

who scrubs these tiles, stokes the fire, tends to pigs.
Paces this room with a wailing infant who draws milk

from flagging breasts. When the fire in the hearth
turns to embers, when she tugs off her shoes and sleeps,

may she dream of climbing on the horse's back
and may that horse be flying.

AN OYSTER SHELL

Hilary Sallick

What is it? once
 one of two together hinged
 to hold a being something
 alive

such an inner
 wall! with a dark patch
 like a fingerprint smudge
 or a bruise purple blue-black
 on the silvery pearl the whole
 face utterly
 smooth with a bit of bend *yes*
I run my finger over it
 and on the other side texture
 concentric from the thicker
 tip

The oyster grew this shell
 in rings as the tree does
 but first was sperm and ovum then
 fertilized thing swirled
 through light and dark by the nourishing
 wave and careless maybe joyful
 within it

soon possessor of cilia swimming
 soon of eye and foot able to choose
 direction location to seek
 the surface that called it the substrate
 the home to be
 attached! attached! attached!
 with the others

The shell holds my vitamin pills powdery
 white disk soft yellow capsule
 I swallow them study the shell's
 history protein matrix directing
 crystal formation calcite aragonite
 and the oyster kept filtering

the mineral for months years
 the shell growing as the oyster
 grew

We opened them slid the knife
 smoothly severing oyster from shell
 raised each to our lips took the oysters in
 to our warm bodies never
 till now did I imagine
 organs one heart two
 nerves the mouth the gut
 that the creature within
 possessed parts

*What is consciousness
 to an oyster Does it
 know us how primitive
 how beyond me
 the mind of the oyster*

Once we found little crabs inside
 whether guests intruders or friends
 we didn't know and set them aside
 with the empty shells

I use the shells to decorate
 my garden and this one
 on my table is a small open palm

Oh those circles of
 growth! those rough petal-like
 folds! the shells are too good
 to throw out

I'm thinking about the oyster
 and the words about
 the oyster and the ocean
 full of seedlings of all sorts

There's a kind of contentment
 with a thrill built in
 I see how my intelligence
 flows like water where it's needed
 and is shaped by how
 it's needed not just mine
 anyone's even the oyster's

I picture my intelligence
trickling into situations soaking
dry places making them
wet the intelligence of water the
trickles of mind as it drifts
through cycles

A CHORE UNDONE

Gil Arzola

Bob feeds the hogs with one hand since he lost the other.
When he had two it didn't take as long and he could sit at the tavern
in the late afternoon trading lies.

When he had two hands he could carry twice as much.

He could point at the sky with one and keep the other in his pocket.

But Bob only has one hand and so he feeds the hogs with it and carries wood,
while the stump of the other hangs as useless he says "as tits on a boar."

The combine took his hand a harvest ago.

He was alone in the field and put his hand where hands don't belong.

The combine didn't know the difference between corn and a man and so,
to be on the safe side, it took them both.

After that, every morning, as I drove by

I would see Bob trudging through February snow speckled black with mud,
to make the ten trips that used to be five.

Ten that used to be five but he doesn't complain.

The chores don't count hands he says.

There is work to do.

And so he does it.

The hogs holler and complain, pushing at each other like old women at sale
racks and

the February wind bites at Bob's whiskered face.

Every now and then the wind goes still and the world is quiet.

But wind and hogs don't ask what happened or how he's feeling.

It's all the same to them.

There are chores yet to do.

There are chores undone.

Bob died a week ago and so the neighbors feed the hogs now.

And at the bar where they leave his stool empty, they tell the story.

He was alone when the combine took his hand so no one knows if he
screamed or yelled or just said "fuck." They only know that he showed
up at the hospital,

driving himself with a shirt wrapped around a stump where his hand
should have been. Four weeks later he was back feeding the hogs.

And no one ever heard him complain or ask for help.

Bob did his chores until his heart told him to stop.

LYMPHOMA

Ayrton Lopez

platelets queue up
in miles and miles of sticky resin
like crumbled myrrh
building a map of yellows
a courtyard of directionless desert

so blanched and lonely
you could even see it from space
below you
ripe and for the taking

and from this vantage point
you can make out the
proud borders of this bodily atlas

continents placed perfectly
like elixirs
medieval in their primitive
rich rendering

flourished with
delicate birds of paradise
gold-ribboned Florida Water fauna
and oversized one-eyed royals
draped in lithe crimson

yet in the diseased uncharted depths
slinking in wicked watery shingles
icy sea creatures with exaggerated tongues
lash out and punch holes in
this beautiful world

tattering latitude lines with the kind of
malice you'd need either a telescope
or a microscope to see

despite this danger
the blood batter
congeals in its naïve
confectionary afterglow

more offering than self-portrait
a wealth troubled and hot to the touch

JULIE ANNE LONG IN CONVERSATION
WITH TAYLOR THOMAS



NDR: *I want to start by asking about your journey to historical romance. What kind of journey brought you to this genre?*

JAL: I always wanted to be a writer and the whole point of learning how to write seemed to be so I could write stories. I remember sitting by the bookcase in my family's living room (where the books had no pictures, you know, and just endless words) and just going through them and making up stories for them. So when I finally learned to read and write it was like, "Yes! Time to write stories!" We lived in...a house that was stuffed with books and it was very egalitarian in that we had every kind of book you could imagine,

and I read them all. We had Wallace Stegner and Rosemary Rogers and all the 70's books from *Chariots of the Gods* to *Bhagavad Gita*—I read them all.

It was the [books] in my mom's nightstand drawer that were the most intriguing; the ones you sneaked out—the Laurie McBains, the Rosemary Rogers novels—they were fascinating, and I got in trouble for sneaking them out. I loved them all and we didn't differentiate. There wasn't any sort of hierarchy—all of the books were considered equal in the house.

I wanted to be a writer, but I also equally loved music—I was passionate about music. So, I started a band, and we were fairly successful in the San Francisco Bay area. I played guitar and wrote songs and while I did that I worked a series of corporate jobs. I worked in global finance and I worked as a communications specialist—yeah not very exciting—and a graphic designer. Then there came a point where my band broke up, we were doing the first dotcom wave and it imploded, I was working part-time, I was a little broke, my friends moved away, you know it was one of those things where this was the time where there was nothing else to do. So I applied myself to writing my first novel and it was *The Runaway Duke* and I based it on a book in the 80s, and it was huge, it was called *Through a Glass Darkly*, and that's what I was thinking of—I wanted to write something sweeping and fun and rich and so that's what I set out to do. And I finished it and I sent it to the only agent in San Francisco (where I was living and where I still live at the moment) and she took me on and we sold it to Warner Books, which is now Hachette, and the rest is history, I guess. Initially it was like 500 pages long which apparently is a no-no when it comes to romance so it was “genre-fied”, significant changes were made, and uh, yep, that was it. I've been doing that since 2004.

NDR: *What is your writing process like for each book and/or series?*

JAL: Let's see... I sorta sit with an idea and wait for something to occur to me like an inspiration: Who do I want to write about? What kind of people do I want to spend an entire book with? And I wait for that idea to occur. Once I know who I want to write about and what the conflict will be, I wait for them to start talking to me, if that makes sense? Because it always starts with dialogue—that's how you get to know your characters, and that's how your story will unfurl from there once you know your characters. And often when you are writing a romance your plot is very emotion-centered and centered around the hero and heroine and so it's helpful to start, um... I almost never start at the beginning, but I will start with what we call a “love” scene or some kind of argument because that's how I'll start to get to

know how the characters are together. But I always write out of order—I almost never start at the beginning.

The way I've found it useful to describe—there's a couple of ways I've found useful to describe it—one is that it's like an archeological dig, like you know the entire story is there, but the pieces are out of order and you don't know quite how they are going to fit yet, but you're gonna unearth them a little bit at a time. Or the other one is kind of like when you're filming a movie and when they're filming a movie, you wait for the conditions to be right—like they never film in sequence, right? It has to do with how you're feeling that day, where the inspiration is, where the light is, you know? You work on a particular scene on a particular day because you're really feeling it and it's really, um, you have a certain momentum or a rhythm surrounding that scene.

And I often jump from scene to scene too. If I'm writing something that's fairly intense emotionally and I get overstimulated or stuck or it's very nuanced and it becomes a little bit persnickety, I'll just move onto another scene cause it's like getting a fresh point of view.

And it all goes into one document—I skip around a lot—and it's an open Office document and I only write one draft because I edit it as I go because that's the fun part for me: getting the words right. You know, it's the fun, delicious part for me so that's what keeps me motivated to write. And I listen to music all the time when I write. Lately during the lockdown, it was Brown Noise plus music because brontosaurus live upstairs. (laughs).

NDR: *What is the historical research like when tackling a new novel and has this process changed for you over time?*

JAL: Usually it occurs simultaneously with whatever book I'm writing. How much, or the degree required, depends on whatever I'm writing about. There are some that are very house party centered, for instance, and you're not going to do a lot of research about that necessarily, but others, like the one I wrote most recently, *You Were Made to Be Mine*, was interesting. It was fun to research that—about espionage and the alien office during the Napoleonic Wars and there are things you would need to—there is a base-line degree of research that needs to take place before you can start writing and there are other things you can look up as you go. It's usually a combination of books and there's such a wealth of information online now and usually I will find it online and verify it with a couple of sources.

NDR: *Which character, if any, do you feel most connects to you as a person and*

why?

JAL: They all do. I've always maintained that every work of fiction we write is autobiographical right? Because we can only filter it through our experiences or our voice so everything we write is an interpretation of the world through our—whatever lens we are equipped with, right? So, I'm all of those characters—there's some aspect of me in every single one of those characters. For instance, like in *After Dark with the Duke* you know I'm the opera singer who does a shot when she's nervous and is excited to get hothouse roses and I'm the duke whose starion?? (13:20) and has had so many experiences and has no patience for foolishness or “BS” anymore but he likes to be in a room with people who are talking—as long as he doesn't have to, you know—he just wants to be around people and not be bothered. So every single character is an aspect of me, but I wouldn't say that any of them are based on any other specific individuals. It's not fun that way—it's more fun to make them up. They take on a life of their own once you start writing, but...

NDR: *But you're right. There's a little piece of you every time even if you try not to, there really is.*

JAL: And it's based on empathy too! Once you start writing the only thing that makes characters feel authentic is if you are actually living that character. And so empathy makes them feel real and empathy comes from you: empathy for that character, understanding of that character, embodying that character comes from you.

NDR: *Sexism and misogyny still manage to find a home within our world. Particularly within the romance writing world, we often face criticism—both warranted and unwarranted. As a longtime romance writer, do you still find yourself defending your chosen genre or does it become “easier” as you publish more novels?*

JAL: You know the notion that romance needs to be defended—like the word defend means, to me, implies that something needs to be justified or rationalized. And romance as a genre is a juggernaut, right? It's the most popular genre. It's arguably what keeps the lights on at publishers, you know? And millions of people around the world have enjoyed romances and it's a prevailing genre because people want to fall in love; it's a commonality that we all have. So, I don't defend it. It doesn't require defending—sometimes it requires explaining. I'm puzzled by someone's perception of it, but

no, romance has nothing to apologize for or defend. It's a—I think one of your questions addresses whether it's "legitimate" or more or less legitimate and it's like, "What is that? I don't understand." (laughs).

NDR: *I completely agree. When people bring that up, I think, "Why are you asking me this? Would you ask this of me for any other genre in general? Especially the male-dominated ones."*

JAL: Right! There's some of that—and I have a lot of theories, but you have another question that ties into it—but it's probably rooted in some form of misogyny or sexism because it's something that women usually enjoy, but when you pan out from that, the way that people understand romance... I mean the reason bestseller lists exist and the reason ACT scores exist is because we like to rank ourselves. The way we understand our world and the way we understand ourselves is through comparison so the notion that something is "better than" or "less than" something else is a product of marketing. And that snobbery is a product of marketing too.

There's this lovely quote from Peter Schjeldahl, who's an art critic for *The New Yorker*, and I remember he said something about, "Snobbery is center stage for the insecure until we acquire taste that admits and reflects the variety of experience." So, it's really a form of immaturity. (laughs) And I feel like if kindness is the ultimate maturity, then snobbery is—implicit in the word is that in order to elevate one thing you have to be derogatory towards another thing—and it's possible to be passionate about one thing without negating another thing. It's possible to be passionate about one thing without trampling on the joy other people are taking in something else.

NDR: *Going off the previous question, the literary world can also be isolating in its pretentiousness and snobbery. Do you find any difficulty navigating the literary world as a writer especially when romance is often seen as "less legitimate" than other genres?*

JAL: Mostly, no, and part of that is because in our little silos that we have on social media and in our writing world, you know, I associate with other romance authors and other authors in general and they know how hard it is to write a book period. (laughs) And so, once you know that, that tendency to view something as "superior" goes away. The other thing is there's a perception that writing a romance is "easy," but once people try? They find that it's not. I think it was Nora Roberts who said that it's like danc-

ing *Swan Lake* in a phone booth. (laughs) It's difficult—it's not easy. It's the challenge to keep it emotional, to keep the pacing tight, all that is actually very difficult within the lines, so I think once writers discover that that also eliminates the aspect of or any temptation to describe it as "less legitimate" than another genre.

But also, it tends to come from people who don't know what romance is. We were talking earlier how it's rooted for some reason in the Fabio era and so when I encounter that usually I say, "Oh so you formed your opinion, but you must have read a lot of romances to arrive at that opinion?" It brings people up short because they are spouting something like where did that originate? Where did your opinion originate? They often can't answer the question—it's just been an accepted, for whatever reason, just an accepted way to discuss romance.

I think a useful way to describe it to people who would denigrate it or who are unfamiliar with the genre is to picture a buffet table the length of a football field and on it is every imaginable kind of food. There are heaping bowls of Cheetos and there are delicious Lumpia (Filipino food) and there's kebabs and gorgeous vertical, fancy food from French Laundry or Alanya—everything. And so, if you walk up to the table and sample one thing and don't like it and you walk away and go, "I don't like it." I mean, you can't say that about romance. Romance is too vast and diverse at this point—that is what romance is. You can't draw a conclusion about the genre from reading one book. There are hundreds of thousands of voices and every imaginable subgenre—so that is what romance is. Quality is subjective. I tend to read for voice, but other people read for story or for trope, and it's all good. It's all relevant.

Another thing is that the romance community, and the people who read it, are passionate readers, voracious readers, and they don't just read romance. They are smart, they're connected, they're super organized, they're creative—you know all these people—it's fantastic. I don't know why you would want to alienate, if you're a writer or a bookseller, I don't know why you want to alienate any of those people because they are book buyers and consumers.

NDR: *What advice would you give to emerging writers?*

JAL: I would say read a lot. Read widely—read every genre... well you don't have to read *every* genre. (laughs) But read beyond your genre because you can learn from every writer. You can learn about voice, about pacing, about word choice, about plotting. You can absorb through osmosis, or you can

study it. I find that reading writers that I find are fantastic are kind of the way I put a sort of music in my head as I write. I want to read really wonderful writing while I'm writing and it's usually something different every time.

Finish what you write I think is a main thing. If you want to be a writer, you need know how to do that. You can always fix what sucks, if you think it sucks, or you could always move on to the next thing. Just finish it. Don't write in a vacuum. There's a community out there of people who can answer your questions, be supportive, tap you into books you can read, get feedback from your own work, et cetera, I think those are the main things.

NDR: *Finally, can you discuss which writers you believe are doing good work in the literary world, particularly within the romance genre?*

JAL: I read less romance now because it feels like homework. (laughs) Because I can't lose myself in it now because you're looking at structure—it's kind of like when I used to play in a band, when I'd hear a song on the radio and I'm like, "Why's the baseline buried?" It's that kind of thing. You see it as its component parts.

And I read my friend's books—KJ Charles, have you heard of KJ Charles? She writes *The Will Darling* series and *After the Great War*—I love her voice: very smart, very elegant writer. I love Lorraine Heath—she is very emotional, interesting plots—I enjoy her work. Loretta Chase is another writer who's voice I really like. I tend to really read for voice.

NDR: I am the same way. (laughs)

JAL: I want to give a shoutout to Julia Quinn because what she has accomplished and the joy her books have brought to so many people around the world—I mean, she is a sweetheart and *Bridgerton* is a powerhouse. I love her and her voice.

But as I'm reading, I tend to read a lot of things that are romance-adjacent like Amor Towles—love his work lately and I've been enjoying that a lot. Kate Atkinson, love her work—those are people who are defaults, just instant buys for me. I like Louise Penny, I like Elly Griffiths, and I love Peter James and Ruth Rendell—they're writing mysteries but their characterization and their voice and the way they write—I can't get enough of it. I have also been delving into Laurie Colwin who died in the mid-90s and when I found that out it made me so angry because I was like, "I don't get to read anymore books?" I just love her and her voice is fantastic and warm

and unique. I even discovered another writer who's fantastic and she started writing in the 30s named Margery Sharp and she wrote books for adults and for children—but her adult books especially her ones, the Martha series, about an artist. They are fantastic. So, I do a lot of, I call it, esoteric exploring. (laughs) I like Faith Baldwin who started writing romances in the 30s through the 70s, and it's fascinating because not only was she a great writer—she's very sparkling—they made some movies of a couple of her books in the 30s like *Skyscraper Souls*. When you think of the 30s screwball comedies and things like that, it's fascinating to see how tropes and things have changed and how they are reflections of the mundane lives in many ways of women so romance has become a sort of important historical document.

AMPHIBIOUS

Betsy Bolton

Turtle beds, I imagined, seeing turtles bask
on a sunny log, their shells the shell game
missing from the sand below.

But no—
a friend, mother of a budding fisherman,
taught me to see instead the fish sweeping
debris from the creekbed: male fish, sculpting
with their tails these ovals a little longer
than their bodies, building stony nests
to woo a mate, to host a swarm of eggs.

Once you know to look, you can't help but see
that whole line of nests, down where the creek
curves south and the shallows catch full sun.
For years I passed, blind to those fish
nests sketching an amphibious world,
the same rules in force above and below
the water's blazing, blinding surface—

a world where today we might see sunfish
sail through the clouds, or tomorrow discover
a swallow of bluegills nesting on the river's bed.
They sing of summer in a different key,
as we startle, unsteady, our constellated
bodies recreating their watery swirl.

OUR SORROW*John Poch*

Even though I hold you
I long for you
like a swan neck sneaking
under an ancient bridge in Seville.
Your sorrow moves me like
a post-storm broken palmetto fan.
I touch it so it cuts me.

We two become in our embrace
one flamenco dancer crouching
over her own red shoes,
a mosquito drinking a song of blood.
You might imagine a shelter
of a park of trees around us
thin and sad as supermodels
on a smoke break.
Our sorrow is only the rain
of our exhausted heaven.

DIVES: ON VEGETABLES

John J. Ronan

*There was a certain rich man who was clothed
in purple and fine linen... Luke 16:19*

Increasing age has meant I think of sex
The way I've always thought of veggie virtù -
A food that's never quite what one expects,
Though served a dish as guest, I'd take a few
And being kind endure the lettuce, sprouts,
Or tasteless spinach, rutabaga, beans,
The fodder faced as kids—dessert was out
For skipping mother's gussied up cuisine.
A free adult, I carnivored. Unwed,
I dated once or twice a day—the male
Ideal's pursuit and conquest, passion, meats.
When now and then my wife presents a spread
Of herbal salad, roots, cruciferous kale,
The child returns to guarantee his sweets.

ON THE LISTOWEL ROAD, COUNTY KERRY, 1996

Jason Irwin

Shocked by the flame of orange curly hair & beard
that licked the edges of his plump potato face,
I mistook his *Are you saved?* for Safe, & fell
into the passenger seat, relieved to be off my feet,
to feel the warmth of the car's heater.

I'd been standing an hour at the roadside, trying to hitch
a ride to Galway—rain & wind lashing my face
like a million thistles, the straps of my backpack
digging into my shoulder blades.

Gravel shot from under the tires as we pulled onto the narrow road.
Out of the corner of my eye I saw a tiny bird, like a smudge
on the windshield, sputter across the sky, then disappear,
like a magic trick, into a hedgerow.

Are you saved? the man asked again, after a mile or so,
& suddenly I was annoyed by this breach of silence,
the lilt in his voice, & the conviction it flaunted.

When I was a child my mother spoke of her faith in public—
arms raised, swaying like I'd seen on TV, her voice high
with that same naïve certainty & I bristled
when her hands—that once protected me from all I feared—
clasped mine, & she nudged me to sing along.

What was it I expected to find here,
where the road signs read *Tarmen, Tarbet, Ennis?*
Was I traveling in the right direction?

No one can enter the kingdom, John writes in his Gospel,
unless he is born of water & the Spirit. I was twenty-five
& on my own for the first time, three thousand miles
from anything I could claim as my own.

I want you to meet my wife & daughter, the man announced
& parked his car in the driveway of a stone house.
I waited until he slipped behind the front door before I ran.
I ran & ran, until my lungs forced me to stop; until I found myself—
if not saved, then safe—aboard a ferry boat headed for the Shannon's far shore.

WALKING TO OMEY ISLAND

Jason Irwin

We set off two hours before low tide, just as the guidebook suggests, & follow the signposts across the strand, where an archipelago of black volcanic rocks rise above striations of wet sand & rivulets of standing water, & all that the tide left behind: jellyfish, upturned crabs & fronds of brown & gold seaweed—a mermaid's abandoned wedding bouquet.

At midafternoon, we stop & eat a lunch of chorizo, Swiss cheese & two-day old bread against a stone wall overgrown with grey & orange lichen, amid fields of Woundwort & Willowherb. Birds swoop & call in mismatched counterpoint—the skylark's busy chatter, the gull's pompous Sforzando.

On the trek back across the strand, we watch a tractor in the distance rescue a van stuck in the incoming tide swell. I find a Merlin's feather & put it in my pocket—a reminder of the gleam of sun on sand, the warm rush of wind, the sputter of salt-spray on our faces.

MEMORABILIA*Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto*

Last week, I dreamt.
 First, the dream began in a lower octave,
 then picked up speed till I was sitting in a bar with my father.
 We rattled about the reeds at home and the things he had missed.
 When I looked him in the eyes, I found a shrinking thing.
 The first time I saw the shrinking thing was when he
 had been down with cancer and looked eaten from the inside.
 His body had peeled from itself just like white colour peels to become black.
 Then, he started growing distance. Each day, my father was grad-
 ually pulled away from me, from us. Then he traveled.
 Because health. Because work. Because Cambridge.
 Because he was a father and had to do father things.
 And that was the last he sent me to buy some newspapers for him,
 sent me to wash his car, sent me to clean his boots.
 I never had had the chance to ask my father where and how he grew up,
 what his favourite colour was, and what it means to woo a girl.
 Wooing a girl was something learnt from standing on my shyness.
 On another night I saw my father again in my dream, I
 told him that people on hearing what I do often say,
In this country, you mean you are a poet and nothing else?
 My father smiled at me after listening and said,
Flowers never grow knives; the world can only adjust for you.
 Today, I am in my father's jacket. Putting it on
 feels like I am having a chat with him, like we are in a long
 field, holding hands and watching butterflies bouncing in the air.

TO BE THE GHOST OF*William Archila*

To be the ghost of a sonnet one must consider a mind
 of hauntings, witchcraft encrusted in branches, there
 & not there, apparitions, spooks, duendes aflame that come
 boiling like a fever to separate the sheer light from dark.

To be the ghost of this sonnet one must make an appearance
 look like a mask, all its brief imperfections, fault or no fault line
 to divide the diamond from the diamond in the mud. Heard
 or unheard melody, how do you detach the urn from the crack?

I know it's not easy to see how this ghost's feet fit these lines,
 how his bulging gut stretches from inside. No three sisters
 can explain the lime or stems that terrify his mouth. I know
 haunting laurels, hunting nymphs doesn't mean he belongs here.
 Oh, I know his work is not right for your house right now,
 but he's casting a shape, all the black sounds dotted on the page.

SoCAL

Michael Homolka

1

Limestone eats away at itself, studying
the ancient unfriendliness toward pock-marked outsiders.

I have every right to be alone, I tell myself
on the bus ride home from the Self-Help section.

To L. A. I came, solitary as a lake, inward-oriented
as dark eucalyptus. At last, my father and I discuss

what is meant by boundaries and self-care,
what our thoughts are trying to convey when they jerk

us awake in a sweat to the crashing of waves.
It's fair to say ninety-five percent of those in need

twist New Age terminology to suit their schemes.
No exception, we stroll the shores separately till dark,

in the end agreeing it is to L. A. one must travel
to flit among matters philosophers have long toiled over.

2

The thirty-first runner greets the thirty-second
on the road to Beverly Hills with a message
for my father—how 3 A.M.

upwellings of remorse over phone numbers
decades' defunct are soon to condense into a single
white-hot molecule. *I'm part of the greater*

system of things, the script suggests
 from its spiritual paper. A white leather wallet
 fashioned from white leather cows

slips from my father's valise as, panting over
 the three-quarter hills, messengers sense
 themselves only more deeply alone. As soon as the weather clears,

my father will send them back with the news—
The Border's on Centinela has shuttered at last.

3

Though the rest of the coast resists their influence,
 I think it's good we embrace their customs
 as far as sustaining the spirit in cerements.

When theater operators wish to run the gutters with wine,
 they go right ahead. What to make of this?
 Or if, before embalming, high school sophomores are led

straight from the arcades to trails in Calabasas
 where merely their cerebellum—as opposed to,
 for the wealthier classes, intestines as well as mind—

are to be extracted. Thus, I've grown to accept
 the treatment of this middle scion, of which my father
 once was part. The offices of Los Angeles

have all been clear—first you bow to the water
 basilisk, and then your entrails filled with spices.

4

Alfa fields strain onto infinity. The couple selling bagfuls from lawn chairs isn't a \$400/hr analyst or a grad student on the fritz, nor are they an artificial lake in a David Hockney, nor a post-modern take on the signifier

versus the signified. A blue car idles while the engine cools. Alfa strains, the highway ages. Somewhere inside their gingham shirts and cowboy hats, their ability to sit still in the sun for hours moves me to tears, which my father and I

intellectualize. *More like symbols than people*, he proposes. *That's how best they come to nourish the unconscious. So be it*, I concede. *If someone's got to be the lake in Hockney, I guess let it be us.*

5

Owl in remotest branches of the Santa Monica Mountains—owl whom I encounter with my father when he asks me please to talk a little quieter (*to protect the moment's sanctity*, I always add in memory)—I've never forgotten your intimation about how no time passes between decades, how if it did, our natures wouldn't be our natures.

Any chance you can explain what draws me, hot around the eyes, always to the Self-Help section in pursuit of that sticky sobbing child within? My father and I rely on gurus whose wisdom we enjoy spouting off at the Border's on Centinela like so much pollution at twilight. No oracular calm here.

Adolescence forced me to depart from my inner self, or to create one. Or it forced my father to create his inner self. No time passes. For your immobile pupils, owl, God adores you. I'm here to ask again about my failures with my father. Just don't repeat the thing about having to field idle questions.

6

The pair of bluebirds from 1986, two of us alone for the weekend,
has swooped down again into the canyon from which coyotes
crept up onto the street, and which was always catching fire.

The intervening years have seen us rubbed raw, talking past each other.
The thing about my sister's allowance, the thing about my
tone of voice. But this weekend, something translucent and eternal

enters the twig-like legs descending onto the patio then hopping
across in a span of microseconds, just outside the glass where,
over Hershey's syrup and fried chicken, we plan our lineup of W. C. Fields.

Our father-son relationship has little to do with the world at large.
The bluebirds' trails leave pinging sounds that go on forever like a
dying family. Fires burn storefront to storefront across San Vicente—

so we flex the blithe lack of awareness into which we were born.
What matters is the trauma of bluebirds floating up over the lawn.

MY INDIAN AMERICA

César Dávila Andrade

Blemished beauty, oblique navel of Paris,
I reject you. I am opposed. Opposed.
Here, America heart of an iguana, the sun
ensconced in adobe, the redheaded sprinkles of sunrise,
the drizzle, the immemorial chrysanthemum of your mist.
Here, America unalloyed.

Your wool of a vicuña, America of bitter chlorophyll
and manganese and the quartz of tombs.
Your subsoil's trembling loins of petroleum
with their baggy eyes of oil-bearing lakes
under the Sign of Leo.
Your acrid skin of quinoa, your flanks
of pelican guano, your tears
of iron on the nails they cross themselves with
at the school of Warisata.

Yesterday fleeing amid the primal stones
of a city erected against humanity
and its image,

I refused You. Forgive me.
Today, from Mérida, from Oaxaca, Cuzco and Paysandú,
I gaze from rock to sun in Aconcagua,
moist, violet Anaconda
of a single thigh
gleaming with semen and petals,
on to Lemuria, and at last
entering now into deep Apure,
America, America, my America.

Scoured, scored by my nails in your hair
your cries engulf me
as I wet my five fingers of the stonemason
in globules of the spooled silence of your belly.
America, my America.

I sink into you, and for me you lift your veil.
 Your kneecaps burning in the horse's pupil,
 and my hands bloated with cinnamon and pollen
 on the rumps of tapirs,
 tapirs of America and of the silt,
 swollen water in the verdure of swamps.

I'm on the ridge of your muleteer trails
 through the Andes, sleepless and hungry; I'm
 where the copper miner's yellow hands
 creak in the profile
 of the bottomless coffin of stone; I'm
 on the guanaco upland; the plateau of the condor's
 besotted eye overlooking the circular veal
 of the heavens. I'm on the spine
 of the mud and tannin of the Pastaza
 and the waters of its seven rivers
 broken on the trays of gold panners.

Now with you, within you my American Indian
 weeping glass beads and the tin resin
 of Bolivia without a stone slinger
 in her laboratories.

Now I'm in your hands,
 in the hub of your six hundred whirling hands,
 breadfruit tree,
 coca bush, prickly pear, agave, black brush
 of the Indian lashes of your earth.
 I'm
 in your reed canoes and your hourglass
 that preserves the navel of stone,
 the mystic gizzard of Tiahuanaco.

Tapestry of skin and stone. Tapestry woven from hemp
 and dust you crest and crater, ascend and recoil
 in the needles
 and the chisels of your stone embroiderers.
 But above or below you are the same, America
 of abysses and plateaus.

Maverick corn, hand in hand, woven
with the ovum of helium, my corn without a storehouse
consecrated in the daily host,
the solitary bread of rebirths.
Ah, my Indian America.

I don't know what to say to you. Only this.
I love you. As I'm able to love you, eternally.
Your thousands of Indian women with their sons
on their backs, skyward world of the Andes
amid your red and black pots of steaming corn.
Your Collas of vicuna lashes,
and obsidian breasts
atop the panting yeast of chest and back.
I say I love you.

I'm with you in the cord of water and blood
that's always siphoned
from the breast of my mother to my navel,
the solitary liquid of hunger.
I am with you, America.

Your alleyways lit up with mutton fat
and rods of elder wood
amid the glittering rocks of Chimborazo
and of Illimani.

Your shuckers of cob and grain,
weavers of the fiber of water bleeding
from the Mapocho,
from the Orinoco, from the Amazon, deep within.

Ah, your gaze of dusky dew
on Sumeria, Mongolia, and Oceania.
Ah, your sacred thighs of a towering beast
interred in mud,
trodden by heels and carpeted in seeds of the black,
red, torrid road of the Incas,
stone by stone in your snail's leaf coiled within itself.

I who have ground the honeyed color of a nail
 and gnawed on pallid coca leaves
 until my lips, eyes and hands were numb;
 I have witnessed the abyss and the white ecstasy of your airs.
 High plateau in the glow of my soul,
 America, my America.

I who tracked your drowsy packs of alpacas and clouds,
 I have trembled
 under the thread of wheat, wool, and feather
 of your wailing. Rain of America
 here in the caves, in the alleys, on the peaks
 with a fixed eye
 on your nimble whiteness of a poisoned arrow,
 I cherish your raging rain.
 Enchantress of water and hail,
 America, my America.

And now, what silence; but I hear
 the snuffed furnace of your pottery,
 I crane my ears and like a spinning top beside my cheek
 the hip of the first Indian woman
 whose dancing forged
 the vessel I drink from:
 frail and slender water of the deer in the mist.

My ceaseless weaver spinning on every path of the puna,
 furnish me a strand of your milk and affection
 so I may kiss through your nipple the deep and bitter
 heart of your America. My America.

Harps of silica hoist your hips,
 your feminine column of torment. Harps
 of grass nibble your smiling
 groins of the vihuela,
 slow groins, luscious, swirling.
 And I ascend singing to you the music
 of obsidian hair and of the flame.
 My filly slumbering on a peak
 protruding like the neck of a guitar.

Where are they—I say—the millions of eyes
that beheld you naked, pecked at by foreign ships;
eyes that sealed you in the milled mire of their affection
with the saddest music on Earth?

Where have you stashed the dwarfish sign
of the goblin's boot and the smitten crucifix
of the Captain Bolívar of your dawn?
—In you, my America.

You, eminently solitary, arduous, dolorous. This very day
you are my Tibetan woe,
my Galilean, Andean, Aztecan torment;
my elusive thorn of Judaea,
and you are my Arabic affliction sealed in the sand.
You likewise are my Black African death
encased in cotton and drowned in whiskey.

You are my Caribbean, Oceanic anguish,
and you are, above all else, my ancient and lonely Atlantic
blunder
in the middle of the world.
My America.

But in this moment you return in me, through my hands,
as a pupil of your scarlet spike, hummingbird of the moors,
of your boundless tremor of starch and rhizome,
on the knees of Mayan Indians. You return.
Now, forevermore, the harp
stabbed in the stone of my two thousand tendons
and their rod of vertebrae. Now.

From gods and idols engraved like kisses
on your haggard jug,
from the lunar ovary of your Indian women
of Cuzco, Potosí and Cojitambo, you return
to me, America.

I am opposed. At this very moment I am opposed.
 Yes, I am against all who have offended you.
 Against all the grave, shrewd thinkers
 who wrote laws, documents, ideas
 against you.
 I am against all the Monroes
 and against every insect assembled
 in those capitals.
 I am with you, America, my Indian.
 I am with you. I am with you.
 Today.

—*Translated from the Spanish by Jonathan Simkins.*

NOTE

Dávila Andrade's anthemic love hymn to Indigenous America, "Mi América india" was first published in 1961 in Mérida, Venezuela (Suplemento Literario de *Gaceta Universitaria*). It was not collected in book form until the posthumous *Obras completas* (Quito, 1984).

In "Mi América india," and throughout the oeuvre of Dávila Andrade, I have translated "indio" as "Indian." "Indígena," the equivalent of the English "Indigenous," did not enter into Ecuadorian Spanish until well after Dávila Andrade's death. When Dávila Andrade's speaker uses "indio," there is a self-referential quality that points to the Mestizo identity central to Ecuadorian selfhood. Unfortunately, the English word "Indian" does not carry over these connotations, but it is closer to "indio" than "indígena" as it functions in mid-twentieth century poetry to describe the Indigenous peoples of the American continent.

CONTAGION

Matthew Pitt

We are proving powerless to stop the blight. A blight beginning in urban centers. No surprise: claustrophobic conditions have long been breeding grounds for plague; this pathology, in particular. Plus, that metropolitan thrum confounds us in another way: the sheer anonymity of such dwellings compels residents, we believe, to raise their voices, to rail, out of desperation, linking them in an active, collective fantasy that each individual opinion matters. Deserves to be in on decision making.

This time, however, the condition has spread to truly remote areas, a disturbing anomaly. Even citizens under such wary isolation, retiring by nature, exhibit frenzied delusions. You may have seen disquieting images: of long lines of the afflicted, casting ballots left and right. Smiling with sickly confidence, index fingertips pulsing with purple ink. Slapping those stickers on lapels and jackets, decreeing the disease has been transmitted through them as they exit fetid school gyms and community auditoriums. Marked as stricken.

During prior outcroppings of the strain, we successfully sabotaged nearly half of potential cases. In off-year elections, we could confidently eradicate the vast majority of the scourge. This time, nothing has worked. After the early onset ebbed, we witnessed a metastasizing of afflicted. The old are always vulnerable; but now cases of those barely turned eighteen are spiking, too.

How to end this disorder? Take heart. We imagine by Tuesday's termination, all will basically blow over. Test results establish no demonstrable change in the body's composition and function. No one's actual will will be done. On the other hand...raised expectations can strengthen immune systems, spurring longer, more severe outbreaks. Concurrent fanciful beliefs that taking a role in government should next be attempted. Yes, I agree. Duck and cover if you dare to take to the streets!

As a trained professional, though, my expert advice? Your exposure risk remains elevated. Again, come Wednesday morning, this crisis should pass. Meantime, stay in. Stay safe. What is safe? Well, boil water, do yardwork (provided proper fencing prevents contact with neighbors). Consider board games. Nothing mind you on phone or computer—you may catch reports of activists launching street marches, spreading germs and opprobrium even more widely, or leaders forced to alter or retreat from earlier declarations. All falsehoods, of course, but even such low exposure *can* trigger secondary

or psychosomatic symptoms. But as for binge watching that mesmeric new show—where kids run their parents' companies for a day? Or that other one set in a test kitchen, where chimps prepare pastries for unsuspecting food critics? Those choices are completely benign, and quite likely, affirming. Broth for troubled times. If you're still on edge, make an impulse online purchase; see if that doesn't diminish the vacuum and void.

THE LIBERATOR LAMENTS

Matthew Pitt

The cost to make me is gone too great. Having grown dear, I have become debased.

In my time I have wrestled torments, to be sure, more woeful than this. Still—to be rent asunder so wholly from genial occasions in general stores, when a child’s petite hands could obtain, through ownership of mere one of me, taffy or peppermint for pleasure. Asunder from eras when a sympathetic citizen might answer an indigent’s plea for alms by removing from breast pocket my singular shining likeness (sunlight’s glow striking my surface cannot be matched by larger denominations), knowing the downtrodden man might soon, thanks to my offering alone, gnaw on a butcher’s discarded neckbone or slurp a soup course, welcome sustenance through cold rootless hours. Or consider the countless courtships I have aided: while strolling, after a lengthy but not hefty silence, electric with prospects of shared affection, possible betrothal, one member in the pair takes a tentative turn to the other, figuratively tendering me to glean the companion’s current mood and mindset. The exchange is not to slight, but elevate, the worth of that companion’s thoughts, a testament to the forthright nature with which countrymen often viewed me, and the values I humbly espoused.

As an orator and storyteller, I pulse with measures of pride that my coin—not dime nor quarter—conceived so many phrases in the lexicon. Even at a time when shoes are sold for obscene amounts, persons will refer irrespective of irony to purchasing *penny loafers*. Should grace cascade into a life, the recipient may refer to discs of me *falling from heaven* to define the provident gift. Too great an expense might *cost a pretty* one of me; those who do *not have two to rub together* are pitied; those who *pinch* me, scorned; those wise with me *yet pound foolish*, eyed warily. I am aware that many expressions attributed to my denomination bloomed first not in our native nation’s soil, but across the pond; well, so too did the seeds of our own democracy’s laws. At any rate, change comes slow to coined idioms—expressions borne of me may well outlive my cent itself. Our nation’s numismatists, even those who store me by the jarful, jaw agreement: I am worth more molten down than in my smooth and rounded form. Mash and stretch me at machines in museums, amusement parks and zoos, crank the handle to engrave new images where my memorial once resided. Commemorative souvenirs; the lot left me.

For I am in winter. Slipping from the national currency’s current,

and slipping, futher, from its consciousness and conscience. Granted, my constitution has altered often: brass at times; at others, bronze; before my visage crowned the coin, a cent was pure copper, to the bite. As happens to the old, my weight along with my value has diminished over decades, my bulk briefer than some grown hummingbirds. If I am waning in phases, I have not waned alone. One-cent kin are extinct already in Canada, New Zealand; our overseas bases no longer stock me. Across the pond, two score and seven years ago, the Prime Minister and Chancellor chatted idly about decimalization, instantly discounting and discarding forever many ancient coin cousins: florin, tanner, half crown and shilling slaughtered, with only sixpence (briefly) surviving the clearcutting of long-logged sentiment. I foresee my own arrested circulation, is what I mean. The curtain opening upon my final act.

Handling me now is deemed a hardship. My value mocked in modern man's version of bygone general stores. There I sit, alongside registers, imprisoned in trays filled with my kin. On pain of perjury I say it pains me when consumers drop without a pause palmfuls of me in filthy cups and ashtrays. While appreciating the action as, at surface, another form of almsgiving—give one of me, take one of me—I recognize also its venal undercurrent: to rid a carrier's pockets of my hollow bulk. Pain rides with me whenever winking cashiers round down customers' costs so as to erase me entirely from a transaction. The greatest pain, though, arrives when I tumble down and clang against ceramic tile or pavement, and then, once spilled, the final affront, am left there, accidentally spilled but intentionally orphaned. I lie in state, only to be scoffed at by passersby, none of whom wish to soil a hand retrieving me though they would soil it freely were it my bill form fallen; no, not even night janitors or watchmen earning minimum wage deign to do so—sometimes, not even the indigent stoop to scoop me—instead I am fated for my final resting place to be swept or sucked into the yaw of broom bristles or mop slop, with the rest of the detritus. I am not being Henny about this particular falling sky. A bad one of me always turns up, but which at this juncture is *not* deemed bad?

And yet...honesty requires me to report this blessing: the crawl of my cashiering is, in its own way, welcome; a slow second death far favorable to the blinding flash of bullet and coma that reduced me the first time around. Yes, this Lincoln laments—his devaluation, the assassination of his worth in American hand and heart—yet to grow infirm and obsolete in peace offers a tone of grace to my final notes; so, play those notes on, sweetly through a worried woodwind perhaps, oboe, clarinet, or, better still, the six holes of the tin whistle that erstwhile bore my name.

DESPISE FOR GOOD

Matthew Pitt

No to the snooze. Don't dare hit snooze. Don't permit yourself the privilege of retreat. Stir when you say you will. Today's a day you look forward to each year. Only—for *this* today, put you aside, for something you can no longer avoid. Even nine minutes more with eyes shut could turn your feet cold, so hop to. You set 7:28 AM as rising time, so honor that. Hustle into suspenders and pants by 7:38, no later.

Battery's fully-charged, you're ready to march, with so much of the world waiting on you. Waiting while jogging their own neighborhoods. While being grilled for operating vehicles they own the titles to. Waiting in parks, dripping from where nightsticks drummed their foreheads. Waiting while they can't breathe.

Today is July 28th (7/28), and you, Ashton, are turning 31. Big whoop and all, but don't think of planning pub crawls with pals or extravagant entertainment. Not even the luxury of cake. Instead, get your ass downtown. Don't check Inboxes and mailboxes for cheery wishes. You need to pen a card—a sign, in fact—to wave high and wild. Adding wishes. Singing chants. Marching on.

Any normal birthday before, you might have drifted downtown today for a drive. Killed an hour jogging in a park. Breathing certainly clean untroubled air. But now you must learn what it means to have to expend your greatest wishes on flimsy yearnings: that fate will carry you safely from any given day to the next. That the safest things won't sabotage you. As so many keep learning otherwise. Only don't say *many*. Don't just spout a number. You have a name, Ashton. So do they. Say the name Michael Brown, say the name Eric Garner, say the name Breonna Taylor, the name Atatiana Jefferson, the name Tamir Rice, the name George Floyd.

Learn them frontwards and backwards.

Because you must add a name. Hendrik King. You two worked together thirty-nine months, badmouthing bosses, throwing back shots in bars after quitting time, dissecting whether exchanges with women sitting beside you qualified as flirtations, brushoffs, or both...? Hendrik King became your tight friend fast. Starred your birthday invite the instant you programmed it in his phone calendar. Wouldn't be a party without him. You haven't yet met the woman you wish to wed, Ashton, but already imagined when it happens you'd have Hendrik King standing by your side. Itching to loosen his tie. Dancing his ass off at the reception. Lightly bruising your ego for laughs

during the best-man toast.

Instead you said words at his funeral.

Which got delayed and held up a while, because—you know. All the necessary arrangements. The arraignment. The crush of press, death threats lobbed against his family members, extended autopsy and coroner's report. The usual.

He died over spilt milk. That is not a typo. Bought in a bodega, told the clerk keep the change, started sipping, got bumped, which made a white stream slop onto the open register and some nearby Karen. Suddenly Hendrik King was no longer a customer, he was *stirring shit*. Hassling owners and innocents. Again: he'd bought a *pint of milk* in a store holding enough liquor on its shelves to disinfect a city block. But try telling that to the store clerk, the proprietor. To the officers. Well, he tried telling. For nine minutes, pressed on linoleum, knee on throat, until Hendrik King could push out no further words.

You tell Hendrik King's many mourners he got you gleefully diving into risks you'd never have attempted without his push: ice skating, ziplining, even literal skydiving. "People say they despise lots of shit they've just retreated from trying," he insisted, each time you two made assclowns of yourselves on mutual dares.

"Okay," you said, sore once, after barely staying on a riding saddle ten seconds before being bucked into a dusty ditch. Already dreaming of icepacks and ibuprofen treating your tailbone. "Can I at least declare I hate *horseback*?"

"Fine." Hendrik King laughed. "But a rare miss. Admit it. You almost never despise my schemes for good." Hendrik King also laughed when you couldn't believe these schemes never scared him, not even for one second: "Get scared? Of things I can choose or refuse to be scared *of*?"

You figured that for bravado until his funeral, when story after story poured out fears Hendrik King faced down his whole life, narrow escapes you knew nothing about. You've never taken part in a protest before, Ashton, and you've turned 31 and it is time to grow up. So say yes to the invite your dear friend's cousin offers after the service. Issued just like one of Hendrik King's dares. Print at 7:38 AM the address you're expected at, then stare at the reminder note Hendrik King programmed to pop on your screen before each adventurous leap, to buck up your nerve: *I enjoy learning new things I despise*.

On your way out, scroll the sappy snapped selfies of Hendrik King, the blurry dancing videos in bars, the carefree office birthday festivities. All of which will ghost your phone forever. Record today only what keeps another

name from going on this list you're marching for. Record only if you're willing to get in the shot too. Getting woke shouldn't require someone else's life snapping off. But that's exactly what this lesson demanded. So wish right now, to learn better this morning, for fury to fill the lungs where easy wants and oxygen should go. Happy birthday.

He is gone, Ashton, the one you believed your best man, so you better hustle downtown to stand by him.

BATS IN THE ATTIC/ABU GHRAIB*KateLynn Hibbard*

No one knows what leads them toward our heat and light.

It was her job to keep them awake, including the hooded one she placed on a box with wires attached to his fingers, toes, and penis.

We woke that morning at four to an alien, buzzing sound

The man in the black hood with wires trailing off of him, standing in the crucifix pose, waiting for a shock. Arms stretched out, arrested in flight.

like a bug caught in a bottle, a fly trapped and battering at the light
our own distant cousins, the bones of their wings the same design as human
arms and hands

Breaking chemical lights and dousing them in phosphoric liquid

How do I live my life in a way

We escaped, called someone else to come & get rid of it

that makes these acts possible?

pouring cold water on their naked bodies

It looked like a black sock, a glove, flung and forgotten.

beating them with a broom handle, a chair

Friends recommend a tennis racket, the better for air to move through

Their flight pattern erratic, in fits and starts, their heart-stopping flight no cause for panic

a guard punched one prisoner so hard his heart nearly seized

as long as the pain is not as bad as organ failure,
it is not defined as torture

threatening men with rape
sodomizing: with a chemical light, perhaps a broom stick, and

the blond, blue-eyed young men who come to pluck the bat from my wall
in camouflage, with weapons,
the evictors
the protectors
barraged as we are by the metallic whir

FOR THE GREATER GOOD

KateLynn Hibbard

I saw the dog grab the rabbit
and it screamed and I made her drop it and of course
it was still alive but too hurt to get away and I couldn't
let it lie there twitching in agony and the dog
picked it up again and dropped it again and I knew
I was being tested, knew I had to finish it off
with the shovel, it was the only humane thing
to do, not that there's anything humane
about keeping a hunting dog in a yard
full of rodents, it was a pretty little rabbit, too,
like they all are, baby soft and grey,
and I brought the shovel down hard and flat
and one blow did not do it, I hit it again, twice,
I did not want to chop it in half and squirt blood
all over the grass, and who can see me doing this?
Is my neighbor watching this butchery? As it was
some guts were spilling out when it finally stopped
moving and I was shaky and crazed as I pushed it
into a plastic bag and put it in the trash, knew I could not
tell my spouse because they would be horrified,
though which would be worse to them, the fact
that I had killed the rabbit, or the fact
that I'd had no doubt I could kill it, I really
cannot say. And maybe this is how it starts,
in an army, or a police force—not the active desire
to make something die, but the calm knowledge
that you can, and you will, if the time should come.

THE WOMB I KNEW

James Shea

Get inside, he said.
I marveled at its size:
30 feet high and large
enough for 40 men.
Get your sword
and find a spot.
I hate the dark.
I wouldn't say so,
hoisting myself up
on its leg. I sat
near the haunches.
Built in three days
by a master
carpenter, it had
fur on its ribs,
sun-goldened
and clean of slivers.

Chosen by lot,
we heard the voices
of women, maybe
our wives, seized
and suffering.
Our spies said
it was only a ruse.

The men filed out
by a single rope
under night's cover—
I stayed back,
hiding twice: once
from the enemy,
once from comrades.

We were charged
with opening the gates
and murder, but
I confess I remained
in the ass of the ass.
I heard the screams,
indistinguishable cries.
I saw through cracks
mothers wandering,
kissing the doorposts.

FRUITLANDS

Charles Byrne

After puncturing the strawberry in my hand
 that cold spring morning,
 I held the faux berry palm-level, eye-proximal:
 flares of elongated spindles

that buttress the countless tiny ovaries
 glenned in a spheroid tundra of hairs.
 It's all welded together
 with burgeoning vasculature,

it's been *fleshed out*
 with a flare of anthocyanin-red flush
 of the tint that so floods the flesh
 when we happen upon the seed of our affection.

The wild strawberries that my mother and I
 gathered impromptu
 were conveyed so easily from the stalk
 that they seemed votive offerings

on the St. Olavsleden,
 from the red whorls of her fingertips
 to my small blooming red hand,
 before I became the 'hopeful pessimist'—

who saw in nature's abundance
 the chilling overproduction
 of reproductive apparatuses
 that can only be deemed *overdetermination*.

To be but that one seed in thousands
 to skid through the molar occlusion
 and wend one's way through the alimentary canal,
 fending off the grabhanding *E. coli's* gauntlet

like a Busby Berkeley number,
so to be gloriously ejected
far distant from one's conception
in a nurturing pile of warm excrement,

in a favorable sunspot,
and then to extend skyward:
only to be hacked down
in your prime. As we shook

a portion of the ashed flesh
of my mother into the spring wind
like the redwood seedstorm
of a 200-year-old first-timer,

I ruminated our shared utopia:
a fruitarian commune like the Alcotts
ventured with brimming hearts
before the dream miscarried.

BLOOD AND SOIL

Jenny Husk

Burning the wax candle, three wicks aflame,
the smoke a hooded hope that shrouds the battle flag
of the American Confederacy,
staked in the yard across the street.

Tensions, and these flags, have grown like poppies
this year, bright red against sky,
glowing in the pastoral light and the clean, green hills.

The absurd contradiction of this moment,
how blood and pride ripen as the scent of sage struggles
to purify, to wissen.
The earth on fire—here—the earth fire red—there.

Hot white stars bloom in a blue-ribboned X
like a firecracker to celebrate the booms,
accompany the chants of white supremacy.

This salvia film thick in my lungs will dissipate.
The cross, askew, will fade too, with the will
of time. Into the hands of wind, the eyes of the sun
eating its hue. Each element taking turns
to cake it in dirt, to wash away
its vibrant hate, to buffet it against itself.

We will keep coming back, striking our match
to last year's crop, commencing with the ritual
of casting out the disease of race on race,
a blackout. Its dormancy is only dormancy.

Furling the old flag will be your duty,
erecting one afresh to keep your message
singing the masses, an audience scarred
and receiving the wounds willingly. A sacrament.
A symbolic hope to reign over others again.

And soon comes night, soon comes the dampness of death
these symbols leave behind,
the fumes of smoke and windows and fear.

We smoke each other's breath,
fill this land with incantations and propaganda wild as zinnias,
and dazzling. A spectacular season of shrouds, and veils, and blankets

draped upon our souls. The earth suffocates under the weight,
our hate stamps out the persistent weeds as they cling onto hope with
their taproots funneled into tight, dark
dirt—a flag for all of us, drinking up from the gourd of earth.

LOLA BEGINS

Richard Ryal

I drift through my dark, a hull without rudder,
to follow a bell only I hear.
I can't tell you the truth, I can only mutter.

I want to pray but I barely can stutter.
Certain I'm guided, still I can't steer,
adrift through my dark, a hull without rudder.

My heart tests its sails, it races and flutters.
My mouth wants to howl, give wind to this fear.
I can't tell you the truth, I can only mutter.

My faith is too weak. Like a new calf at udder
I take it all in, then stumble back, veer
and drift through my dark, a hull without rudder.

A honey thick current bears me into utter
ruin. In my small mirror, new faces appear.
I can't tell you their truth, I can only mutter.

Then this terrible grace gives me one last shudder
and passes, familiar pains return with their sear.
I drift through my dark, a hull without rudder.
I can't tell you the truth, I can only mutter.

SHELL*Alex Stanley*

Mona Lisa's smile, every time the letters
 flood in from their invisible wire, to tell me
 that my gift is wasted, worthless.
 I print them out, hang them upon my walls,
 for art is no good when I have
 da Vinci's smile painted all over my face.

I live in an oasis, though I do not care
 much for it these days. It is not
 that I am bored of the ocean breeze,
 not that I've taken it all for granted,
 only that there is water elsewhere.

I walk in the woods outside Hell,
 following the game trails to see where
 they lead. I see her on the other side
 of the leaves, peering out at me,
 curious of my origami heart, unknowing
 of the weight that paper holds.

Still, you can't tell me what I am,
 even as the "I love you's" have filled
 the space between us, you can't tell
 that I am only a shell, filled
 with past lives, all that was once lost.

UNDER CLOUDS

Todd Robinson

Ides of August and you confide wanton lusts
to elms and maples under eternal cicada purr,
your beat-up feet purpling pavement,

nothing but concentric circles of marital bracken
from here to forever, God's choir robe of cirrus
clouds just more vapor to flavor wavering

summer. The poem has already whistled past
its subject; her green veins gone mossy
from legal cops and clinical drips, slurred natter

of whatever she said about Rushdie's eye
while you tongued the pebble of a koan:
"When arising and vanishing go on unceasingly,
what then?" A phone you cannot stop touching
holds her faltering face and voice, tallies
particulates and pollen, ultraviolet squirming

through cell walls to light the wick of some
future ontology, but cannot compel you to call
her back after the latest squall's *mea culpa*,

nor measure how much it aches to strain against
the ropes keeping you sober. Here and not here,
you waver through muddy stanzas and starlight,

trying to burn off the crush you have lately
nursed for another barefoot poet with licorice
laugh. When your orphaned dreamboat dozes

through autonomous moon glow or erotic water
thwups and crumples treetops, weather bruising
the city's measly spine again, what then?

DERBY DAY

Andrew Malan Milward

Eddie had ascended from his office in the basement—what his wife Mars jokingly referred to as “the underworld”—when the doorbell rang. He went to the front door and spied a masked delivery man fleeing from his porch into a gunmetal gray minivan with PRIME written in vivid cerulean across the side door. On the doorstep was their regular allotment of Amazon, their daily ration courtesy of Jeff Bezos. Eddie felt a flicker of disgust, a chaser of rage. With the closing—temporarily, they hoped—of Mars’s yoga studio, somehow this had become her job: to make these boxes appear each day. A fresh shipment of crap they didn’t need. That was one supply chain that would never break down: the desire to purchase and her index finger’s ability to click *Submit Order*.

Initially, in the early days of the Great Shut In, it had been a salve, even for Eddie, something to look forward to when the only alternatives were boredom or despair. Mars made a big show of opening the packages each night before dinner, as if they were Christmas gifts, and Eddie went along with it, trying to be a good sport, but then one evening she’d opened a box and removed a red porcelain teapot. She looked at it, confused, turning it in her hand. Eddie thought perhaps there’d been a mix-up with her order, but then she said, “Oh right. I forgot about this guy.”

“You forgot you ordered it?”

“Brain cramp,” said Mars. “Now I remember.”

“You forgot you ordered it,” he said again, thinking. She forgot she ordered a thirty-five-goddamn-dollar teapot? In other, flusher times, he might have shrugged it off, maybe even laughed, but Eddie wasn’t laughing now. He was sickened. They were both out of work, waiting on stimulus checks and small business support for the yoga studio. He looked at their joint banking account each night in anxious disbelief. How were they managing to spend *more* money when they never left the house?

Now Eddie collected the packages and took them to the guestroom, which had been repurposed into Mars’s temporary studio so she could conduct online yoga classes from home. She wasn’t teaching now; it was okay to interrupt. With the door shut and his arms full, Eddie knocked, butting his forehead against the wood as gently as possible.

“Come in,” she said.

“Can you open the door?” he asked, but there was supremely serene music blaring that swallowed his voice. Eddie set the packages down,

opened the door, and found Mars on her yoga mat. She was in downward dog, her face upside down looking at him between her legs.

“What’s up?” she said.

“You got some...” he said looking down at the packages. “What’d you buy now?”

“Oh just some stuff. You can set them over on the chair.”

She stayed in the pose, talking to him as though this were completely natural. That was the thing about yogis. They were the most unselfconsciously embodied people Eddie had ever been around. You could be talking to one and all of a sudden they might go into some kind of flamingo pose or lie down on the floor and start doing little pelvic pushups without interrupting the flow of conversation. Frankly it was unsettling.

“How’s your day going?” she asked.

“Not bad,” he said. “Just came upstairs to make myself some tea.”

Eddie didn’t particularly like tea, but he’d begun drinking it each day, determined to use the red teapot that Mars hadn’t once used herself in order to highlight her wasteful spending. His wife, however, was deft at this time-honored game of nuptial passive aggression and responded with a blithe-some: “Oh good! I’m glad you’re enjoying it. Aren’t you glad we ordered it?” We. He felt himself seethe as she began to pedal out her calves, still staring at him upside down between her legs. It was like both her face and butt were speaking to him at once. He felt outnumbered, wasn’t sure where to look, so he stacked the boxes on the chair and left.

Eddie went to the kitchen and made tea and afterward took the pot downstairs to the basement where he sat at his desk. He logged into their bank account, hoping to find that the stimulus checks had been deposited, but there was no sign, just an endless queue of Mars’s online purchases. He closed out and fired up the TV, flipping through channels. Longingly, hopefully, he stopped on ESPN, but it was just sports punditry with nothing to pundit. He flipped through every one of the network’s spinoff channels, then on to Fox Sports 1 and 2 and the SEC and Big 10 networks, the Tennis and Golf Channels, and the holy trinity: NFL, NBA, and MLB networks. Nothing of interest. The best he could find was some nonsense where professional athletes were playing video games against one another. Even Eddie couldn’t go there.

Then, just as he was about to give up, he stumbled upon CBS Sports Network and found a replay of the 2016 NCAA Men’s Basketball Championship: Villanova-North Carolina. A buzzer-beater classic. Eddie recalled watching the game live four years ago and felt the absence of this year’s March Madness twinge like a raw nerve. The best sporting event on the

planet, cancelled just as it was about to begin. The replay of the 2016 championship was almost over and as he watched the final minutes of the game unfold, Eddie got into it. He started to forget that he already knew the outcome and grew rapt, nervous, excited, experiencing it as if it were real time, as if he were watching it live again right there in the basement where he and Mars had hosted a small gathering of friends—just a few years ago but already what a different world he could see they'd been living in, pre-All This, pre-Trump even. And now, alone in his basement, as he watched Kris Jenkins hit the twenty-four foot three-pointer at the buzzer that gave Nova the championship, the arena exploding as players began to dogpile and celebrate, Eddie began to cry. He was not a fan of either team, had not reacted this way four years earlier when he simply shouted and high-fived others as they admired Jenkins's poise, his nuts of steel. Now he wept. It was just so compelling, so dramatic, so beautiful what these two teams had managed to spontaneously create for the enjoyment all 17.8 million households watching.

How strange, how utterly hard to fathom, it was to live now in a world without sports. The very idea was ludicrous, with its intimations of apocalypse, and yet here they were. When the leagues suspended, postponed, or cancelled, the nation turned its lonely eyes from ESPN to the major broadcast networks to watch the local and national news nightly, their governor's daily press briefings, consuming the dire news cycle ravenously. A world without sports. All but, anyways. There was a suicidal Belarusian soccer league refusing to fold, rumors that the Korean Baseball Organization would soon start up. Nicaragua was doing whatever the fuck it wanted. And here in the US, at least in some states, there was horseracing, thank god, but that was it.



So yes, Eddie missed sports, but that certainly didn't make him unique. What did, at least compared to most of his fellow obsessives, was that he'd been able to monetize his fandom into a comfortable life as a sports bettor, something he took as seriously as when he'd been a young broker playing the market with other people's money. Eddie was a gambler, okay fine. Semantics. But a smart one, circumspect and sagacious. He was good with logic and numbers, had a head for figures. Always had, ever since he was a kid. He'd earned a scholarship to college largely because of it and once there promptly took out student loans not because he needed them but to invest, which he did at a nice profit. After graduation he moved to Chicago to

accept a job at a brokerage, where he soon fell in love with a pretty gal the firm had brought in to help employees manage their stress with yoga and massage as they weathered the first years of the Great Recession.

Playing the market and falling in love with Mars: Eddie had been great at both. One night early on she came over to his place wearing a t-shirt with a quote from Thomas Merton on it: “Love is our true destiny.” She was from Lexington, Kentucky, not far from where the great monk had lived at the Abbey of Gethsemane. She told Eddie she’d take him there one day when they married and moved to Lexington. He laughed, thinking she was joking, and played along: “Okay fine, but only after I take you to Churchill Downs for the Kentucky Derby.”

“I’m not kidding. We’re going to move to there together. I saw it in my dreams.”

At any other time in his life Eddie would have heard these words as though they were twin red flags semaphoring *Get out of this situation ASAP*, but it didn’t sound crazy then because he believed it, too. He believed it because he believed in her. She was the one. He knew it suddenly, viscerally, precipitously. They were married by the end of the year.

They stayed in Chicago six years, Eddie working at the brokerage and Mars teaching at a yoga studio in the city, until the year of their thirtieth birthdays when they decided to move to Kentucky, fulfilling Mars’s prophesy. Having accrued enough savings and courage, they embarked on their second careers. Mars found a good lease on a building in downtown Lexington that she turned into her yoga studio, always a dream of hers, and Eddie, burned out and bored surfing the waves of the market on behalf of others, turned his gift for numbers into something he found much more interesting and fun: sports. That was five years ago. Eddie couldn’t make nearly as much as he had at the brokerage, but with careful investing and sound wagering it was more than enough. Some years were better than others naturally, but the returns never fell off a cliff or anything, and Mars had steadily built up her clientele and staff at the studio, growing her business each year. It was fair to say they had succeeded wildly until they hadn’t. Now the yoga studio was closed and sports barely existed.

Eddie watched a few more minutes of the post-game celebration, the Villanova players hugging one another and cutting down the nets, before switching over to TVG, where they were halfway through a race card at a boutique track in Grand Isle, Nebraska. Normally Eddie wouldn’t have paid it any attention, focusing on the bigger tracks like Santa Anita, the New York race courses, and Lexington’s own majestic Keeneland, but those had been shut down. Without a national governing board, racing rules and

regulations were handled on a state-by-state basis, which at present left only a handful of tracks open, most notably Gulf Stream in Florida and Oaklawn in Arkansas.

Eddie had suffered a crushing loss at Gulf Stream in the Florida Derby last month. It wasn't crazy for him to be on *Ite Indien*, a three-year-old that was second favorite on the morning line at 4-1. But he'd mistakenly allowed himself to go all in, a deadly combination of over betting the horse and not diversifying his risk. That had cost him. Bad. He hadn't told Mars how bad. But it didn't matter because he was going to get it all back that weekend at the Arkansas Derby in Oaklawn, plus emotional vigorish.

Eddie spent the afternoon betting on races at Grand Isle, doing good but not great, and when 5pm arrived he made his way upstairs and found Mars on the living room couch, watching Governor Andy Beshear's daily press conference. They never missed it. "Beers with Beshear," as it had become known locally. Mars was drinking a wine spritz. Eddie didn't drink—the downfall of many gamblers who let it cloud their judgement—so he grabbed an Ale-8 from the fridge and joined her on the couch.

"What's up with, Andy?" he asked. "Anything new?"

"A hundred new cases. Eleven more deaths today. Armed protestors demanding he reopen the state."

"His hair is getting...interesting."

"He looks very Seventies. Like he should be in a Burt Reynolds movie."

They watched quietly a for a minute, and then, as if proposing lasagna for dinner or a new color of paint in the bathroom, Mars said, "Maybe we should have sex tonight, Le Le."

"You think so, Ying Ying? I suppose it has been a while."

"Just to see if we still remember," said Mars. "I think my hymen's grown back."

They both laughed lazily through their noses. The nicknames were new, adopted after a recent news story about a pair of pandas in Japan that had finally mated after ten years. While others tweeted viral memes of Ying Ying and Le Le in the act, Eddie and Mars had felt kinship. Like the celebrity pandas, they were low-libido animals. And the thing was—uniquely among their friends—it wasn't a problem or source of tension in the relationship. They were loving companions; so what if they weren't torrid lovers. It wasn't a big deal. They joked that they were 35-year-old 85-year-olds.

"What should we do for dinner?" he asked.

"How about we order out. Support a local restaurant. They really need our help."

"Hmm," said Eddie, pretending to take the suggestion seriously as his

brain voice launched into a jeremiad about this genius way to rationalize spending more money while self-congratulating themselves for doing so. “Or I can make us some ten-bean soup. We have some in the pantry.”

“Suit yourself,” she said. “Fart City, USA, here we come.”

That night over dinner Mars asked Eddie how his betting was going. Fine, he said. He asked Mars about what was going on with the studio. Not much, she said. Still waiting on the loan from the Paycheck Protection Program. Any signs of the stimulus checks? she asked, and he said no. Each demanded status updates on the other’s open economic wounds, even as they resented having to address their own.

“I had an idea today though,” said Mars.

“Tell me.”

In addition to the virtual yoga classes, Mars said she would start offering individual sessions with clients who preferred a one-on-one experience. She could charge a higher rate for the individual attention.

“Good idea,” said Eddie. “Hopefully people will start to sign up soon.”

“Actually, I got my first client today.”

“That’s great,” he said with an earnest enthusiasm that nonetheless sounded forced. “Go you.” He offered his hand up for a high five. Mars threw a bean from her bowl at it, grinning slyly. Neither brought up sleeping together again that night.

‡ ‡ ‡

It’s not that Eddie and Mars were without desire. It was just an inconsistent and they rarely felt it at the same time. Eddie could go a few months without feeling the urge and then all of sudden it would overcome him in some strange moment, just as it had that following morning when one minute Eddie was studying the *Daily Racing Form* and the next he found himself on one of the porn tubes. He searched around until he found a video that turned him on. A couple of amateurs on a shaky homemade camera. Not some slicked-up production of a dude with a tenderloin for a johnson getting toxic on a woman with breasts the size of beach balls. Real people, attractive enough, but with small paunches and sagging in the usual spots. It was their unremarkable normality that turned him on.

As the couple on the screen made love, Eddie began to touch himself, getting more and more into it, until he noticed the sound of a television in the background of the video. His attention began to veer away from the couple and their soft moaning to the unseen TV in their bedroom. He listened a few seconds more. Sports of some kind, then, a beat more, he

realized: a football game, professional. He could make out the announcers' voices. Aikman and Buck on the call. Now he was really intrigued, and he wanted—no, needed—to figure out which teams and what game. Suddenly his mind began doing a Terminator-style mind scroll of all available data inputs, narrowing down the options, and before long he had it: a Saints OT win from two seasons ago. He'd bet on it, remembered the relief he'd felt watching the final fifty-three-yard field goal split the uprights, sending him home with three grand and change. He was remembering that day two years earlier and that feeling of winning when suddenly the porn video was over, the couple having climaxed without Eddie even noticing, and he looked down at his lap, his right hand still cupping his penis, now flaccid. He let go of it and pulled up his pants. He Purell'd his hands, X'd out of the private browser, and went back to studying the *DRF*.

‡ ‡ ‡

In some ways Eddie was the ideal candidate to endure this thing the world was going through. Self-quarantine was sort of his jam, his normal. He was used to having the house to himself while Mars spent her days at the studio. But the key part of self-quarantine was *self*. As in alone. And he was not alone. Mars was home too and could get all up in his business, which was no fun when your business is failing. He felt claustrophobic at times. Thank god they didn't have children. Neither of them had any interest in it. So many of their friends were hanging by a thread, trying to work remotely while parenting full time. At least he and Mars didn't have to face that. But it could still be annoying, the interruptions, the little daily indignities and tensions. Itchy. That was how he thought of it. It just made him feel a bit itchy sometimes.

Eddie had felt it that morning not long after his masturbation-fail when he refocused and went into full-on war-room mode to handicap races for the Arkansas Derby that Saturday: the computer humming with PPs and video of morning works from across the country; the Beyer's and the Sheets delivering their faithful, time-worn wisdom; the Weather Channel's website telling him what the wind might be doing two days from now during the race; the television alternating between talking heads on TVG and Twin Spires.

That's when it happened, the first itch of the day. He was taking it all in, datamining all the precious knowledge at his fingertips, when Mars came downstairs with a laundry basket.

"Hi," she said.

“Hi.”

She went to the laundry room and began filling the machine.

“How’s work coming?” she called out.

His eyes moved from the TV to the computer to his phone and back to the TV. Her voice was saying something, but he couldn’t hear what. Things were banging. It was all noise and distraction. He said nothing. Mars exited the laundry room and sat down on the couch. “What are you watching?” she asked as she looked at the television. Eddie sat there quietly, hoping she would go back upstairs. He couldn’t do the seventeen things his brain was doing and have a conversation. At present he was very concerned with recent wind patterns in Hot Springs, Arkansas. “I’m bored,” she said. “How about we watch something on Netflix?”

“I’m working.”

“But you don’t have to.”

“Yes, I do. Got a big race the day after tomorrow,” he said. “Besides, I was thinking maybe we should cancel Netflix. Tighten our belts a little.”

“I’ll get rid of Netflix if you get rid of TVG.”

“I need TVG to do my job,” he said, “especially now that the ponies are the only game in town.”

“I need Netflix.”

“To do your job?”

“To deal with the stress of this situation.”

Well, damn. What could he say to that?

“Okay, fine,” he said. “We won’t get rid of it.”

He needed her to leave so he could get back to doing his thing, get back to being his insane self without feeling self-conscious and watched and distracted, but he couldn’t just tell her to leave, that was mean, so Eddie rose from the desk and came to the couch, leaning down to kiss the top of her head.

“I’ll see you upstairs a little later for our date with Andy. Maybe the governor will have some good news for a change.”

“I can’t,” said Mars. “My new client wants to meet then. Our first appointment.”

“Well, a raincheck then. I hope it goes well.”

He took her hand in his and ever so slightly put pressure on it, a gesture that was both affectionate and intended to suggest subliminally that she leave.

“I guess I’ll go back to work,” she said, rising from the couch.

“Yeah? Okay. I should probably do the same.” Eddie started walking back to his desk as Mars lumbered upstairs with the apathy of a child tasked

with cleaning her room. “Thanks for the visit,” he called out. “Love you.”



Known mostly to serious horseplayers and industry people, the Arkansas Derby was an important prep race that took place three weeks before the Kentucky Derby. However, with racing presently shut down in Kentucky, Churchill Downs had announced it was pushing the first jewel of the Triple Crown to September and now the Arkansas Derby was slotted into that choice spot on the first Saturday in May, the most important date on the racing calendar, the only one even non-fans knew: the Run for the Roses, the most exciting two minutes in sports.

Eddie spent the day before the race bunkered up in the basement handicapping, trying to find the overlays. The bets he placed were called exotic wagers, but he made them almost exclusively. Exactas, trifectas, superfectas, quinellas, daily doubles, pick 6s, future bets. It’s where the real money was, but to make the score you had to bet against the favorite. He was running numbers and scenarios for the race when his phone dinged with an alert from his bank. Some sort of activity. Quickly he logged into their account, exhaling a gale of relief when it materialized on the screen. There in their joint checking account were twin deposits of \$1200. The stimulus money had finally come through.

Instinctively, he started to call out to Mars but stopped himself. She was busy with her new client, so he decided to tell her later. But as the afternoon wore on Eddie began to think of what he could do with an extra twenty-four hundred in his betting arsenal. It was intriguing, the possibilities. Something to consider. No, he scolded himself, that would be dishonest and unfair. He shouldn’t even entertain it. He would tell Mars about the money over dinner. But what would she do with it? A vision came: a Leaning Tower of Amazon on the front doorstep. Surely she wouldn’t. Of course she would—she already had! Maybe he should rethink this. Maybe it was more responsible for him not to tell her about the money. For her own good, which was their own good. As a couple, a unit. Man and wife. Partners. He wouldn’t tell her about it. At least not right now. Maybe a little later. Like, after the race tomorrow. Like, after he’d used her share of the kitty to increase their payday. He could easily double—maybe even triple—the money he’d thought he could if Eddie was smart about it. If he was careful. If he covered all the angles. If.

That night Eddie worked through the governor’s press briefing as well as dinner, stopping only once to go upstairs and grab a granola bar to keep

up his energy. When he got to the kitchen, he saw the little red teapot in its normal spot. He hated to admit it, but he was coming around to it. His spite-usage had morphed into something resembling actual enjoyment. He was starting to look forward to it, the ritual of preparing tea, the warmth of it going down his throat. It was soothing on the nerves.

“How’s it going?” Mars asked from the living room where she was watching a movie. “Any news from the underworld?”

Sometimes he did think of his life downstairs as another world, apart from this one he cohabitated with his wife, and apart still from the ethereal clouds where Mars kept her head, one full of prophesies and premonitions, one of pure experience and feeling. He watched the kettle on the stove begin its slow boil, thinking of the stimulus checks arriving that afternoon.

“Eddie?” she called out, pulling him away from the thought. “What’s the news from the underworld?”

“Not much,” he said. “Gonna go back to work for a few hours. Don’t wait up for me.”



Eddie woke with a start, eyes darting from wall to wall like he was following a point in a game of racket ball. Morning light filtered through a small window that wasn’t the window in his bedroom. He was on the couch in the basement, he realized. He’d lain down, just for a catnap a little after two, and now was awake, whenever that was. He looked at his phone. It said 7:09. Still groggy, Eddie didn’t yet know what that meant. His heart-rate was elevated. Had he missed the Derby? No, it was still morning. He’d just fallen asleep. Quickly, he hurried upstairs and crawled into bed with Mars, spooning for a while before her alarm went off at 8am. He loved this, snuggling in the new morning. They were both affectionate people, if not romantic. He kissed her neck.

“Hey,” she said, smiling, as she rolled over to face him. “You were up late.”

“I fell asleep downstairs.”

“Sleeping on the couch will mess up your neck and back. Are you sore?”

“Not too bad.”

“Want me to give you a massage?”

It was so kind of her, her concern and generosity. He felt his love for her anew, palpably. He shook his head and kissed her again. Twelve years into their marriage, it was amazing the vacillations of feeling, the way love could dip into annoyance or anger and then back to love several times again in the

space of a day. If not constant, the love was consistent and overrode all the small moments of discord.

“What have you got planned today?” she asked, and Eddie reminded her about the Derby. “Oh right. That’s a big one. Who are you betting on?”

“You.”

“Smart move, horseplayer. I always pay out.” She winked at him.

“While you’re watching the ponies I will be on a date.” Eddie raised an eyebrow, arched with innuendo. Playfully, she slapped at him. “A walking date. At the Arboretum. With Vi.” Violet was one of her closest friends and taught at the studio.

“That sounds nice. Say hello to her for me,” he said, adding: “and be safe, okay?”

“I will,” said Mars. “I’ll wear a mask.”

‡ ‡ ‡

Later that afternoon, Eddie sat before the computer, ready to place his bets. After all the hours and days of studying, he was ready to make his play. There were so many entrants that the race had been split into two divisions, giving Eddie a sexy daily double opportunity on the horizontal whose winnings he could parlay into a winnable trifecta in the second race. He tried to explain it to Mars before she left for her walking date but before he could finish she called out, “Mumbo jumbo,” and turned to leave.

Now Eddie stared at the screen of the online betting platform, finger poised to click *Submit Wager*. “Scared money never wins,” he whispered to himself, absolutely terrified. But then he went through with it and afterward the fear dissipated, and he felt resolute, confident in his handicapping. And with good reason, it seemed, for the first race went according to plan. He’d correctly keyed Charlatan to win with Basin and Governor Morris to show and place. He was halfway home and in good shape, could almost see the money filling back up their bank account, when it all fell apart at the final turn of the second race: Nadal, the favorite, overtaking Eddie’s pick, Wells Bayou, to win by two-and-a-half lengths. Eddie took it all in with no histrionics, no pleading or yelling at the television. He was calm and stoic, even as his brain ran numbers and thought of the twenty grand he’d just blown.

Afterward, he fell asleep, exhausted from his days of study, again on the downstairs couch. When he woke up in the exact same spot he had that morning, he almost believed it had all been a dream and he could have a do-over on the race. But he looked at his phone and it did not say 7:09 am. It said 6:49 pm. The Derby was over, the money gone. Eddie went upstairs

to see if Mars was home, but she was still out. He took a seat in the living room and turned on the television, not to a sports channel but a news network. Updates on the virus. The newscaster was talking about how the first states had just begun to reopen and no one knew what would happen. The screen showed footage of a masked health official holding a heavy-duty thermometer up to a person's head. It made Eddie think of the famous photograph of a Viet Cong soldier being shot in the head in the streets of Saigon.

Eddie was wondering how he was going to explain what had happened to Mars when the front door opened and there she was, wearing a mask that had a big red heart on it.

"Can you tell I'm smiling at you?" she asked.

"No."

"It's so weird. All this time I've been smiling at people and they didn't even know. It's obvious, I know, but I just realized."

"How was your walk with Violet?"

"Good. How did the race go?"

"Not good," he said.

"You didn't win?"

"I did, but then I lost," he said. "And that's not all." She said nothing as she removed her mask and took a seat on the couch next to him. "I bet our stimulus checks."

"What?"

"Our checks. I bet them on the race. The stimulus money is gone."

"When did they even arrive?"

"Two days ago."

"And you didn't you tell me?"

"I thought that if I did, you'd spend the money," he said. "I thought I could use it to get us back on track financially and help us get through..."—it was starting to take a lot of mental gymnastics to form a sentence that didn't include some version of the words *these uncertain times*—"...this craziness."

"Oh, Eddie."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have been dishonest." He waited for her to say more, to get mad, to really let him have it, even though he knew she wouldn't. That wasn't her way. "Mars?" he said. "It's okay to be angry with me. I deserve it."

"I think we should meditate."

"I think we should talk."

"I think we should meditate and then talk."

Eddie hated meditation, the few times he'd tried it anyway. It made him feel like a failure. He could never make his mind be still. Thoughts inevitably pinged around his skull as the seconds ticked by interminably. He could only think about what had already happened or what would, never what is.

"Do it for me," said Mars, setting the timer on her phone. "Just ten minutes. We'll both feel better, and then we can talk."

Eddie nodded and they each faced forward, sitting up straight-backed, with their hands on their laps, palms up. They closed their eyes, took deep breathes, and began. And so it went until mercifully, after several agonizing replays of the race in Eddie's head, the buzzer sounded. He opened his eyes and turned to face Mars.

"Well," she said. "How was that?"

"Terrible. I suck at it."

"No you don't."

"My brain won't stay still."

"That's okay. The mind wanders, that's what it does. The point is to become aware when it happens and redirect to the present, to the breath."

"I couldn't stop thinking about the race, about the money. I couldn't concentrate."

"Neither could I."

"Really?"

"Really."

"What were you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about how I've lied to you, too."

Eddie said nothing.

"I wasn't walking with Vi today."

Still Eddie said nothing, feeling the same sense of dread he felt watching Nadal overtake Wells Bayou at the final turn.

"I was with my new client. Ezra. Only he's not my new client. I'm in love with him."

"What?"

"I'm trying to tell you that I've fallen in love with someone else."

"Why are you doing this?"

"I didn't know how to tell you before so I'm telling you now."

"But we're in love. We're married. We're happy."

"I don't want this anymore."

She said this all so calmly. Like something she might say to her class at the studio. Soothing even. Except she wasn't being soothing. She was blowing up their life together. Eddie sat there in shock, listening to her say that she'd met Ezra at a silent retreat out at the Abbey of Gethsemane back

in January. He listened to her say that they'd been seeing each other for a couple months when the quarantine went into effect, listened to her say how much she'd missed him and how they couldn't stand it any longer and had to see each other finally. Hence today. Hence the "walk with Vi." Hence the Molotov cocktail she was serving him up right now. He listened to her say that she'd had another dream, another prophesy, like the one she'd had all those years ago telling her that she and Eddie would marry and move to Lexington together, only this new dream, this new prophesy, told her she would have children, and she would not have them with Eddie, to whom she'd never expressed such a desire, but with Ezra, which was the name of a person who didn't really exist in Eddie's world until ninety seconds ago. He listened to it all, unable to say anything, unable to move.

"I know this is a lot to take in," said Mars, as though she were handing him a menu with a hundred different sushi rolls. "Let me make us some tea so we can talk through it."

Eddie realized he was sitting in the same position he'd been in while meditating, palms open on his lap, except now his eyes were open. He stayed that way. He watched Mars walk to the kitchen and retrieve the kettle from a cabinet. He listened to the sound of the water hitting the metal as she filled it, and he smelled the gas from the stove as the burner ignited. He felt his heartbeat—strangely at ease—in his chest, the movement of air going in and out of his nostrils. There was the stale brackish film on his tongue from the pretzels he'd eaten earlier. Mars's words had done this to him.

When she returned to the couch, she held the red teapot in one hand and the handle of two mugs in the other. She set them on the coffee table and filled the cups with tea.

"Are you okay?" she asked. "Tell me what you're thinking."

"Nothing."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not thinking about anything."

It was true. He was simply feeling, letting his experience be his experience, as Mars might have instructed her class at the studio. He'd finally done it, he finally felt present. It felt something different than great but still really good, like he was aware of everything happening in the world all at once. It was what he imagined athletes felt when they talked about being in the zone. How weird and wonderful.

"Hmm," said Mars, cocking her head at him.

Then suddenly it was gone, and Eddie was not in the zone anymore. He was once again a man who'd just lost a lot of money and whose wife was saying she'd had a dream that told her she would have kids with some cheese

dick named Ezra.

“Are you okay?” asked Mars.

Eddie felt an itch on his left forearm. He began to scratch it, slow at first and then more vigorously when it didn’t dissipate. Now he was really getting after it, his skin red and irritated.

“Eddie?” said Mars. “You’re going to hurt yourself.”

She reached for his hand, trying to stop it, but he kept on. He was staring at the little red teapot—What shade of red was that? Crimson? Carmine?—scratching his arm until he drew blood and finally stopped.

“Eddie,” said Mars. “You’ve hurt yourself.”

He looked down at his arm and then rose from the couch, picked up the tea pot, and threw it at the wall.

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The following morning, Eddie found himself driving through the empty streets of Lexington. He hadn’t driven his car in three weeks and doing so now felt strange, a novelty. The streets were empty. He went downtown, past the shuttered yoga studio, and then made his way out of town to Keeneland. Technically the racecourse was closed, but he knew a secluded spot where he could park and sneak in on foot to watch the horses go about their morning work. There were thoroughbreds stabled there and, pandemic or not, they needed to be exercised. It was one of Eddie’s favorite things to do, coming out in the predawn to watch the horses, then grabbing a bite at the track kitchen, listening to the trainers and jockeys talk about their rides. You were allowed to do this in normal times, though technically Eddie was breaking the law now.

It was still dark, so it was easy enough to sneak past the gate, past stables and paddock, and then up into the grandstand, where he crouched behind a post to avoid being seen. There were a few other people scattered about, but no one noticed him. The first sliver of light broke on the horizon, the purple bruise of dusk shading red. In that moment he felt certain that Keeneland was the most beautiful place on the planet. He stayed there all morning, watching the horses run, wondering if the track would be able to reopen again in time for the fall meet that October, which begged bigger questions: Would it ever be safe enough for sports to be played again? And, if so, would spectators be allowed to attend?

That’s what Eddie was thinking about—not about his wife leaving him, not about all the money he’d lost—when someone spotted him. It was a man in a vest holding a walky-talky. He’d been striding next to a hot walker

on the turf below when he happened to look up at the grandstand and spot Eddie.

“Hey!” the man called out.

Eddie rose from his hiding spot and quickly moved down the aisle toward the tunnel that led to the stairway. He picked up the pace when he reached the ground level, but he could still hear the man calling out to him.

“Stop right there, sir.”

But Eddie kept going, making his break for the exit as the voice continued to call out to him.

“Hey! Who are you?” it said. “What do you want? Where the hell are you going?”

CAIRN*Therese Gleason*

Sea glass, shell fragments,
 my children's baby teeth—
 before I leave the house
 I grew up in
 for the last time, I'll bury
 one of each in the soil
 of the neighbor's yard
 from which the ivy still hangs,
 clinging to the driveway
 retaining wall. I'll wedge
 a St. Francis medal
 in a cranny between gray slabs,
 hide a widowed earring
 from my mother's dresser,
 a coin from the dish
 on my father's empty tallboy,
 and a single rosary bead.
 The scar his death left
 on the cracked asphalt—
 this is sacred ground,
 too hallowed to leave
 unmarked by life, unmarred
 by death. So I'll etch his initials,
JFG, in the friable limestone
 with a sharp-edged rock,
 like I used to do with my sisters,
 and sign my handiwork
 with a cross that is also a *T*—
 the first letter of the name
 he gave me.

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

George Witte

When something happens, and it will,
best wishes coalesce
in posts retweeted to express
polite professional concern.

Hands washed into a filthy bowl.
The past's a tongue we learn
discarding grammar as we go,

conveniently deny
what everyone already knows.
Now storms arrive with codicils;
this begetting that, wind

torrential flood and cleansing fire,
industry unmanned by
God's wet dream of apocalypse.

Companions to stray dogs
we dine on photographs of food
and loiter in the neighborhood
remembering who left,

as swallows circle a garage
that housed ancestral nests
but cannot find an entryway.

THE PAINTERS WHO WERE NOT MASTERS

L'Église St. Croix, Bordeaux

Forester McClatchey

I did not come to see the city's best.
Not for me the glitz of Saint-Seurin,
the pert discernment of la Grand Théâtre.
Give me the crummy church, the jerry-built,
that dumpily broods in bright Bordeaux.

Who shot this gummy stump of Romanesque
into the sky of Aquitaine? Abadie did that.
Monsieur Abadie, architect of imbalance,
restored medieval churches in Bordeaux
with scant regard for taste or accuracy,

so now L'Église St. Croix stands half-and-half:
half Gothic grunt, half Second Empire sigh,
a Frankenstein's Eglise, a funky mutt,
and after four espressos I cross the square
to see what paintings decorate the church.

I do the bovine dance of those in France
who visit churches: once around the aisles,
hands concatenated on the rump,
easing a hoof or two into the chapels
—in search of what?

Some holy flash? Half an hour killed?
I do not know, but what I find is sheer
shabbiness. And this is what enralls
my heart. The unconvincing paintings, yawns
in oil, go vague and crackly with neglect.

There is a bleeding Christ who does not suffer,
a lacrimating Mary who does not grieve.
Deformed angels leer uselessly from a cloud.
The paintings touch me with their clumsiness,
moving me because they fail to move.

Every age must have its unmasterly masters,
those who simply lack the gift. They are
the vast majority of us who write
or paint, who faintly feel the jabbing fact:
I am the gesso on the board, the glue;

*the habitat of genius, not its warm
and darting spark.* Some quit. Can't gulp the pill.
But some go on, feeding years to hope,
loving well what does not love them back.
It does not matter how hard they work.

Their ardors never get it right. Their news
is never news, their truth a jaundiced lie.
Out of pity, I try to memorize
their names, these almost-men, these yesterdays.
But as I leave, I'm dazzled by the day,

and almost trample a waiter. He collects
his legs, espressos jiggling on his tray,
mutters, "*Presque!*" and is right. How close
they were, those men. How hot on beauty's heels.
The almost men. The flightless, staring angels.

ABOUT HOLLYWOOD AND THE PATH OF SILVER-GOLD*Susan Terris*

On the other side of the bay, loons gather to offer
a twilight chorus. As I stand in the shallows, hair blows

in my face, yet, still, I see the sun's silver-gold path ripple
from the far shore to my feet. There's a boat crossing
the beam with silhouettes of three unknowns casting lines.

Somehow, cumulous clouds have frozen to cirrus,
and a tall CHP officer called Hollywood is descending
step by step into the bright path. It's his 58th birthday

or would have been, if a truck driver had not been texting.
Though my vision is blurry, down the beach I see his mother
tugging her white hair and weeping. His father's not visible,

but in the woods, I hear a chainsaw, as he battles birch trees
felled last night by lightning. Hollywood, whom I've never
met, is not watching his mother or listening for his father.

Instead, as a tall silhouette on the silver-gold path, he
heads toward me, maybe hoping I can console his mother,
get his father to shake off his silence. In the air, mayflies

halo around Hollywood. Dragonflies, too, but in arrowed
light of the falling sun, it's hard to see. Winds pick up,
and I again brush hair from my face. Today, Hollywood—

but wait—something's happening. He's growing thinner.
No, not that exactly. But step by step, he begins to
fade and sink slowly into the lake's long fragmented beam.

As the sun vanishes, he does, too. A lone male loon swims by,
a turtle, and above there's an osprey pinked by the afterglow.

“AND FROM WHERE I SIT, NO ONE ELSE CAN SEE IT”:
REVIEW OF *ME GONE HOME: COLLECTED POEMS*

Jennifer Moyer. *Me Gone Home: Collected Poems*. Asphodel Press, 2022.

Lea Graham

In Reginald Gibbons’ *How Poems Think*, he quotes Verlyn Klinkenborg on “how we retain vanished places; apartments we moved out of years ago, dry cleaners that went out of business, restaurants that stopped serving, neighborhoods where only the street names remain the same...places we knew almost by intuition until they vanished, leaving behind only the strange sense of knowing our way around a world that can no longer be found” (87). Jennifer Moyer’s *Collected Poems* embodies this sense of what once was. The world that these poems create is one that feels like it’s vanished while still retaining the contemporary and recognizable. The poems avoid the simplicity of nostalgia through their sharp attention to the quickening image of a moment and then another, the landscapes purging easy emotion. The surprise in these poems moves through the specific perceptions of the poet and what she brings into the space of the poem.

Love Poem ‘74

So then it’s carousels
 running circles in the park, slow like a hawk in the sun
 into a whirl of piping calliopes and painted wooden horses.
 A summer ride down Highway 1
 Aretha real good in your veins the hills high
 the ocean too green to hold.
 The time we dragged
 down in Mason Michigan. Popping the clutch
 and burning out.
 Colored highs
 baby it all depends (13).

The quick layering of horizontal and vertical images moves us from the manmade carousel to the simile of the “hawk in the sun” back into the “piping calliopes and painted wooden horses” before taking us on a new ride down Highway 1 with the previous music replaced by “Aretha [Franklin] real good in your veins”—that combination of sound, speed, wind and view: “the hills high / the ocean too green to hold.” But then, the speaker

leaps again to recall memory of a different ride: “dragged / down in Mason Michigan. Popping the clutch / and burning out.” The collapse of one scene into another past scene recreates the speed of these rides and the rush of the highs—both in the horizontal “ecstatic” sense and that of vertical “rapturous.” We can’t help but hear William Carlos Williams with “all depends” as Moyer both collapses images into each other and leaps among them, spinning the senses in a visceral and joyous way.

This sense of the ordinary moment raised to significance is resonant of Denise Levertov’s later work in books like *Evening Train*. Like Levertov, Moyer “represents a little pocket of well-modulated awe—a contained meditation not just on what’s sensed and felt but also on the human ability to be moved and to perceive at all” (Gerstler). In the section of the book “American Wildlife,” we especially sense the Levertovian attention and this “well-modulated awe.” The poem “La Bonbonniere” begins in the present, walking us back through pasts before ending in a kind of past-present or ongoing moment without end in the infamous NYC diner:

You start out in a dentist office,
wood paneling and fish tank,
a beard and blue synthetic coat,
speaking in clichés.

From there you go up the street
to your adolescence, an 800 number,
store bought bakery cake
the smell of your lover
and the dog’s nose a dent in your cheek.

Days go by
running along, a chain link fence
the sun rising at one rusty angle
and setting on another.

...

The morning will look the same
same fruit, wet avocados and carnations
on the sidewalk stands

...

the bell will greet us
and coffee, regular, in a thick china cup,
rustle of newspaper and hips in plastic chairs,
and the cook comes over
carrying his belly like a box of potatoes,

the rain starts,
 a Petula Clark song comes on
 and I can't remember leaving (154–155).

The poem's journey that begins concretely in a dentist's office continues its way through sensory details set in or proposing a past. It travels—as if we were walking through our old neighborhood, “leaving behind...the strange sense of knowing our way around a world that can no longer be found” (qtd. in Gibbons 87). We understand this loss through the line: “you go up the street / to your adolescence” which is followed by a number of other sensory images: “an 800 number, / a store bought cake, the smell of your lover and the dog's nose denting your cheek” (154). These personal details propel us to imagine the surrounding city that once was and the overall palimpsestic nature of urban spaces. But also, it is the speaker's now-past youth that creates a pressure with what is remembered and “intuitively” known though it is no longer there.

The ending of the poem creates a vortex of place, time and speaker. The place held within the images of the cook “carrying his belly like a box of potatoes,” time kept within “the rain start[ing]” and the specific name of the singer, Petula Clark and her imagined song (surely, “Downtown”?) and our speaker's memory or lack thereof. This vortex holds the poem in place and time without a definite conclusion, allowing it to linger in minds, helping us to locate ordinary yet significant moments. The name of the West Village diner itself keeps time, having been established in the 1930s and still operating (recently used as a setting in the Amazon Prime series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*). Additionally, the French definition of “la bonbonniere,” a dish or container for bonbons, suggests the delicacy of this memory cupped in place and time. The fore-fronted image of the place with the echoing metaphor keeps this poem both rooted and moving. It is in poems like this one which the presence of another Black Mountain School poet, Hilda Morley, is felt. Her book *Cloudless at First* maps perception's movements, using the page's space as a canvas. While Moyer's structure is more traditionally stanzaic, the disjunctive forces and ability to balance the tension of the static and active shares a kinship with Morley, a poet she knew and published as editor and co-founder of Moyer-Bell Limited Press.

The poems in this collection are relentless in their attention to a range of landscapes: California, Manhattan, Michigan, El Paso, Yellow Knife, Genoa, Linz, Milk Hill, Broadway, and the Minnehaha Road. Yet, often, the poems aren't about the place itself as much as functioning as a container or jumping-off point for perception, a stop on the way to “well-modulated awe.”

“Lake Shore Drive,” dedicated to the late Chicago poet and critic Ralph Mills, Jr., begins with “drinking tea from stringless bags” but quickly moves to the larger, outer landscape:

the snow begins over the lake,
turns it black, doses the view
occasionally scattering on the window (210)

The verb “doses” in the middle of these lines is a small but marvelous decision in what might otherwise be a description of an ordinary heavy snowfall across Lake Michigan. The verb directs us inwardly to a landscape in which the snow is a medicine, something that might help in a healing process. But it is the middle of the poem that gives us both a far-away dreaminess while revealing the poet’s preoccupation which is very much in the moment:

A great lakes ship is passing
exactly on the horizon
obscured by the January front
moving snow across the water
an escarpment of moveable time
which I climb to avoid its movement (210).

The ship that is “obscured by the January front” becomes the “escarpment of moveable time” that the poet “climb[s].” This is simultaneous to its own “passing,” juxtaposed with the January front that is “moving snow across the water.” All these progressions are brought together in this poem’s moment and space as a way for the poem to “avoid [time’s] movement.” But ‘lest the poem stalls out in lament or border on a nostalgic wishfulness, it takes another strange turn:

It moves in behind me
...
Life music around the edges
of the radio (210).

The “it” somehow displaces time that “moves in behind” the speaker and gives way to “Life music.” At the “edges / of the radio” somehow fits with the other peripheries in the poem: tea “from stringless bags,” the snow that “scatter[s] on the window, / perching like...scraps of trash,” the “January front / moving snow across the water” and the “ship...passing exactly on the horizon.” The intersections of what moves and what is stilled, again, are the genius of the poem. The poet both wants time to stop and yields to its

continuation through the music that surrounds the radio—suggesting the locus of the poet’s perception.

Jennifer Moyer was an active member of literary life, serving as Director of the Literature Program at the Illinois Arts Council and later, as Executive Director of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines in New York. She and her spouse established the publishing firm Moyer-Bell where she worked until her death. One of the difficulties of this book is that it serves as both a collection of her work and a memorial, given Moyer’s early death from cancer in 2001. The title *Me Gone Home* is not representative of the poems in this book and comes across as a sentimental gesture—perhaps understandably. Nevertheless, these poems resist nostalgic preciousness and, while they occasionally reference illness and loss, are mostly a celebration of perception and its inherent wonder. But given the publication of this book in 2022 (a time in our history of so much lost to virus and violence) these poems remind us of how a poet’s specific perception, memory and craft can hold worlds together—even those that “can no longer be found.”

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CONTRIBUTORS

César Dávila Andrade (Cuenca, 1918–Caracas, 1967) was an Ecuadorian poet, short fiction writer, and essayist. He was known as El Fakir for both his physical appearance and the mystical and esoteric concerns of his work. His chronicle of Ecuador’s atrocities and forced labor under Spanish rule, “Bulletin and Elegy of the Mitas,” is widely acclaimed, both critically and popularly, as a key text of 20th century Ecuadorian poetry. His telluric masterpiece, “Feral Cathedral” (1951), appeared almost contemporaneously with Pablo Neruda’s “The Heights of Macchu Picchu” in *Canto General* (1950). Had “Feral Cathedral” achieved more than scant diffusion on its publication in Venezuela, it may have garnered a share of the fame and accolades that Neruda’s poem has justly earned. **William Archila** is the author of *The Art of Exile*, International Latino Book Award, and *The Gravedigger’s Archaeology*, Letras Latinas/Red Hen Poetry Prize. He has been published in *American Poetry Review*, *AGNI*, *Conjunctions*, *Colorado Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Missouri Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Magazine*, and the anthologies *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNext*, *Theatre Under My Skin: Contemporary Salvadoran Poetry*, and *The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the US*. He lives in Los Angeles, on Tongva land. **Gil Arzola** is the second son of a migrant worker and lives in Valparaiso, Indiana. He won the Rattle Chapbook Prize in 2022 and Passager Poet of the Year in 2021. **Betsy Bolton**’s recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Hopper*, *New Croton Review*, *Snapdragon Journal*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Lammergeier Magazine*, *Amaranth Journal*, *Split Rock Review*, *Minnow Literary Magazine*, *Northern Appalachian Review*, *Stone Canoe*, and *The Rumen*. Her chapbook *Mouth Art of the Bald-faced Hornet* was long-listed for the Kingdoms in the Wild Annual Poetry Prize, and the title poem has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. A sonnet from the collection (“Sycamores #5: Broken”) won first place in the modern category of the Helen Schaible 2022 International Sonnet Contest. She teaches at Swarthmore College, on Lenape land, at the edge of the Piedmont and the coastal plain. **Charles Byrne** is a writer and teacher in San Francisco with work published or forthcoming in *New American Writing*, *45th Parallel*, and *Clarion*. He has read submissions for *RHINO* poetry journal and Autumn House Press. **Isabella Castellonet** holds a BFA in painting and drawing. She is a 2022 graduate with honors from Indiana University South Bend Raclin School for the Arts, where she was one of six to receive the Raclin School Arts Excellence Award. She is currently a Master’s candidate in illustration with graphic novel at Leeds Arts University. She hopes to inspire

kids and young adults with learning disabilities to find their voice through art. **Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto** grew up between Germany and Nigeria. He currently lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he is pursuing his PhD in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a focus in Creative Writing (poetry). **Judith Fox** is a poet and fine art photographer. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Sugar House Review*, *Typehouse*, *The Citron Review*, *Off the Coast*, *CALYX*, and elsewhere. Her photographs are in the collections of museums including LACMA, VMFA, and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin. **Robert Gibb** is the author of *Sightlines*, his thirteenth full-length poetry collection, winner of the 2019 Prize Americana for Poetry. Other books include *Among Ruins*, which won Notre Dame's Sandeen Prize in Poetry for 2017, *After*, which won the Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize for 2016, and *The Origins of Evening* (Norton, 1997), which was a National Poetry Series selection. He has been awarded two NEA Fellowships, a Best American Poetry, a Pushcart Prize and Prairie Schooner's Glenna Luschei and Strousse Awards. **Therese Gleason** is author of two chapbooks: *Libation* and *Matrilineal*. Her poems appear/are forthcoming in *32 Poems*, *Atlanta Review*, *Indiana Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, Therese lives in Worcester, Massachusetts, with her family. She works as a reading teacher and is a poetry editor for *The Worcester Review*. **Lea Graham** is a writer, editor, translator and professor who lives in Kingston, New York. She earned her BA in English from Westminster College and her MA and PhD in English/Creative Writing from the University of Illinois-Chicago. She is Associate Professor of English at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, where she has been on faculty since 2007. **KateLynn Hibbard's** books are *Sleeping Upside Down*, *Sweet Weight*, and *Simples*, winner of the 2018 Howling Bird Press Poetry Prize. Some journals where her poems have appeared include *Barrow Street*, *Ars Medica*, *Nimrod*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Editor of *When We Become Weavers: Queer Female Poets on the Midwest Experience*, she teaches at Minneapolis College and lives with many pets and her spouse Jan in Saint Paul, Minnesota. **Michael Homolka's** debut collection, *Antiquity*, was published by Sarabande Books. His poems have appeared in magazines such as *Agni*, *Antioch Review*, *Boulevard*, *Colorado Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The New Yorker*, *North American Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Poetry Daily*, and previously in *Notre Dame Review*. A graduate of Bennington College's MFA program, he currently teaches high school students in New York City. **Jenny Husk** received an MFA in poetry from Brooklyn College. Her first book was published in April 2012 and

entitled *Vocalises*. After teaching as an adjunct professor for many years, she became an ICU nurse in the midst of a pandemic in Cincinnati, where she currently lives with her family. **Jason Irwin** is the author of the three full-length poetry collections, most recently *The History of Our Vagrancies*. He was a 2022 Zoeglossia Fellow and has also had nonfiction published in various journals including the *Santa Ana Review*, and *The Catholic Worker*. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. **John Linstrom**'s debut poetry collection, *To Leave for Our Own Country*, is forthcoming next year. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Northwest Review*, *North American Review*, *The Christian Century*, and elsewhere. He is the series editor of The Liberty Hyde Bailey Library for Cornell University Press, and his editions of Bailey's work include *The Nature-Study Idea* (forthcoming), *The Liberty Hyde Bailey Gardener's Companion* (coedited), and *The Holy Earth*. **Julie Anne Long** is a San Francisco based historical romance author and has been a storyteller from almost the moment she could write: Her first completed work of fiction was an illustrated (courtesy of Crayola) opus about talking apples. **Ayrton Lopez** is a San Franciscobased Mexican-Ecuadorian writer. His poems have recently appeared in *Rogue Agent*, *Rust + Moth*, *Cider Press Review*, and the *Spoon River Poetry Review*. **James Davis May** is a 2021 National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in creative writing and the author of two poetry collections: *Unquiet Things* and *Unusually Grand Ideas*. Originally from Pittsburgh, he now lives in Macon, Georgia, where he directs the Creative Writing Program at Mercer University. **Forester McClatchey** is a poet and critic from Atlanta, Georgia. His work appears in *Crazyhorse*, *Pleiades*, *Slice*, *The New Guard*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *Oxford Poetry*, among other journals. **Becka Mara McKay** is a poet and translator. She directs the Creative Writing MFA at Florida Atlantic University, where she serves as faculty advisor to *Swamp Ape Review*. Her newest book of poems is *The Little Book of No Consolation*. **Andrew Malan Milward** is the author of the story collections *The Agriculture Hall of Fame* and *I Was a Revolutionary*. He lives in Lexington, Kentucky, where he is an associate professor of English at the University of Kentucky. **Derek Otsuji** is the author of *The Kitchen of Small Hours*. Recent work has appeared in *32 Poems*, *Crazyhorse*, *Bennington Review*, *The Southern Review* and *The Threepenny Review*. **Matthew Pitt**'s books of short fiction are *These Are Our Demands*, a Midwest Book Award winner; and *Attention Please Now*, winner of the Autumn House Prize. Individual stories have won numerous awards, and are cited in several "Best of" anthologies. Born and raised in St. Louis, he previously worked in Los Angeles on a sitcom, New York as an editor, and Massachusetts as a Teen-

age Mutant Ninja Turtle. These days he operates out of Fort Worth, where he is an associate professor and director of English Undergraduate Studies at TCU. **John Poch**'s most recent book of poems is *Texases*. His first book of criticism, *God's Poems: The Beauty of Poetry and the Christian Imagination*, came out last year. **Todd Robinson** is the author of *Mass for Shut-Ins*. His work has recently appeared in *North American Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *The Punch*. He is an assistant professor at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and caregiver to his partner, a disabled physician. **John J. Ronan** is a former NEA Fellow, Ucross Fellow, Bread Loaf Scholar and Poet Laureate of Gloucester, Massachusetts, where his cable program "The Writer's Block" is in its 33rd season. Work has appeared in *Three Penny Review*, *New England Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Folio*, and other publications. His most recent book is *Taking the Train of Singularity South from Midtown*. A poet, professor, and editor, **Richard Ryal** has worked in marketing and higher education. He stops to read every poem he hasn't read before, and no one can talk him out of doing that. His recent publications include *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *The South Florida Poetry Journal*, and *Survision*. **Hilary Sallick** is the author of two full-length collections: *Asking the Form* and *Love Is a Shore*. She is a teacher in Somerville, Massachusetts, and serves as vice president of the New England Poetry Club. **James Shea** is the author of two books of poetry: *The Lost Novel* and *Star in the Eye*. **Jonathan Simkins** is the translator of *El Creacionismo* by Vicente Huidobro (The Lune), *The Treasure of the Llanganates*, a play by Paúl Puma (Pumaeditores), and *Feral Cathedral: Selected Poetry of César Dávila Andrade* (in progress). His translations have appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *The Iowa Review*, *Nashville Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and others. **Alex Stanley** is a graduate of Boston College, and he received his MFA in creative writing from the University of California, Irvine. He is a former sports journalist, and his sports writing has been featured in *Sports Illustrated*. His published poems have appeared in *American Poets Magazine*, *HCE Review*, *Poet's Choice*, *Helix Magazine*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *RockPaperPoem*, *Limit Experience Journal*, *Beyond Words Magazine*, *Wingless Dreamer*, *Clepsydra Literary*, *Art Magazine*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Quibble*, *Duck Lake Journal*, *The Write Launch*, *Doozine*, and *Hare's Paw Literary Journal*. He is a recipient of the 2021 Academy of American Poets Award. He resides in Costa Mesa, California. **Taylor Thomas** (she/her) is a biracial and bisexual emerging writer from Indiana. Her work has been published in *Bayou Magazine*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *So to Speak Journal*, and many more. She received the Outstanding Literary Essay award from Voices of Diversity in 2021. She currently attends the University of Notre Dame's MFA program

in creative writing. She lives in South Bend, Indiana, with her husband, Herschel, and her dogs, Bella & Buster. **Susan Terris** is a freelance editor and the author of seven books of poetry, 17 chapbooks, three artist's books, and two plays. Her recent books are *Dream Fragments*, *Familiar Tense*, *Take Two: Film Studies*, *Memos*, and *Ghost of Yesterday: New & Selected Poems*. Journals include *The Southern Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *River Styx*, *Colorado Review*, *Blackbird*, and *Ploughshares*. Poems of hers have appeared in Pushcart Prize and Best American Poetry. Ms. Terris is editor emerita of *Spillway Magazine* and a poetry editor at *Pedestal*. **George Witte**'s three books are *The Apparitioners*, *Deniability*, and *Does She Have a Name?* His fourth collection, *An Abundance of Caution*, will appear this year. He lives in Ridgewood, New Jersey. **Duncan Wu** is the Raymond A. Wagner Professor of literature at Georgetown University.

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