

Garfield Lake Review 2026

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A Letter From the Editor

Dear Readers,

As we have for over fifty years, a small group of undergraduate students at The University of Olivet came together to make this year's edition. I am so thankful for the opportunity to be Editor for our small, yet mighty, team for three years.

For my final year as Editor, I chose a theme that was close to home. Grief & Recovery felt like the perfect way to end my years in this position. Last year, I lost my mother in the middle of my Spring semester. I was propelled by the love that she put into me growing up. I dedicate this edition to my fearless mother, Sarah Schreiber.

We chose to solicit submissions revolving around grief and the growth that can come from it as a nod to the heaviness that can be left behind after loss. It was such an honor to read the submissions that were sent in to our team from all around the world.

I am beyond thankful for all of our contributors. They trusted us with their emotions. They left it all on the page.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the 2026 Garfield Lake Review. We are glad you are here.

We hope you are able to find yourself in these pages.

Logan Schreiber
Editor

Editorial Board



Logan Schreiber - Editor

Logan is on her fourth year at The University of Olivet pursuing her Bachelors in English. She is currently a full-time student and a part-time event coordinator and social media manager. She is on her third, and final, year as Chief Editor of the GARF and has enjoyed every second of her leadership role. In her off time, she enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her family, fiance, and puppy.



Paris Taratuta - Editorial Board

Paris Taratuta is a junior at the University of Olivet majoring in Writing & Publication. She aspires to be a freelance copyeditor so that she can travel to other countries (specifically, Japan and Greece), and she is currently writing the first draft of a fantasy novel, which is currently untitled. She enjoys fantastical worlds, tragic heroes, eccentric satire, and most importantly, her relationship with Christ. She has been on the editorial team of the *Garfield Lake Review* for three years now, and has published two poetic works in the 2025 edition of the journal.



Kali Sutherland - Editorial Board

Kali Sutherland is a junior at the University of Olivet who is majoring in Writing and Publication and minoring in Psychology. She is currently a member of the Clay Target team, the Carpe Diem writing club, and is the acting treasurer for the University's board game club "The Guild." After graduation, Kali plans on becoming an author with a focus on fantasy while bartending for a sustainable day job.



Jae Shelton - Editorial Board

Jaeonna is a sophomore at The University of Olivet who is majoring in Writing and Publication. She loves to listen to music and to creatively write what comes to her mind. Her favorite book is *The BFG* and loves the movie Coraline. In her future, she would like to successfully be able to use her writing abilities in the career she picks.



Faith Fluker - Editorial Board

Faith is sophomore Writing and Publications major at the University of Olivet. In her free time, she loves to read and write to her heart's content. Whenever she's not doing those two hobbies, she hangs out with her boyfriend, family, and friends as well. She's the captain of the Esports team as well as a volunteer at Comet's Cupboard. Currently, she is a part of the editorial board of the *Garfield Lake Review*. One day, she hopes to achieve her dream of becoming a bestselling author and publishing a few stories. Before that, she wants to become a first-grade teacher.



Da'Vayah Jordan - Editorial Board

Da'Vayah Jordan is from Lansing Michigan. She is a sophomore student at The University of Olivet. She is currently an MPC/Communications major, one of her career aspirations is to be successful and make it further in life by have better opportunities when coming out of college. The vibes she likes within art is its meaning behind the art and the way the image or painting is trying to explain a story. She also makes content on TikTok sometimes.



Elizabeth Trueblood - Advisor

Elizabeth has been the GARF faculty advisor since fall 2023, when she started her career at Olivet as an assistant professor of writing. She has a background in creative writing and has been excited about the project of the journal and helping students achieve their creative vision for the GARF since day one. Outside of the GARF, Dr. Trueblood primarily teaches composition at Olivet.

2026 Abbie Copps Winners

Shattering - Paris Taratuta

First place winner

Unfold, o diamond in the noon.
Like a peony, open,
slowly disperse into glistening
fireflies like small suns.
Lovely, you transmogrify,
delight my eyes. I
idly touch my dusted cheek;
fey glances scatter my divided likeness.
Pollen falls here like seraph cries.
Your petals strike me
wondered and blind.

Dance With Your Dead - Grace Chase

Second place winner

The Muses may sing of the rage of Achilles
But it was his grief, not his rage
That led him to his final battle.
It was this grief, all-consuming
Black clouds rolling across a summer sky
Shadows pawing and clawing
Until there was no other direction but down.
Until there was no other option
But to fight, and to lose.

You cannot fight your grief.
It lives inside you,
In the nooks and crannies of your veins,
In the air in your lungs
In every beat of your heart.
You can try, but it will consume you,
Pull you down into the deepest depths
Of an ocean of tears.

You can try to run from your grief
But it will always find you.
On the bus, in your bed,
On a bright sunny morning in the middle of the street.
You cannot run from it
Because grief is love and love is a part of you
And try as you might, you can never escape
Yourself.

When you cannot run and you cannot fight
All that is left to do is to face it.
To stand your ground
And look your grief in the eyes.
And you will find the faces of your dead
Looking back at you.
Because grief is not some intangible thing.
It is loss, the loss of a presence
But it is never the loss of love.

So dance, my dear.
Dance with your dead,
Bow to them and hold out your hand.
Let them take it.
Let the uncertainty and the sadness roll over you
Let them spin you around
Until it feels like you are flying.

Your dead are never really gone.
Because you are here,
And you are dancing,
And as long as you are dancing
So are we.

You Read My Poems and I Still Wonder
(if you wouldn't like the close rhymes). - Faith Fowler
Third place winner

You read my poems and I still wonder
If my account of lightning and thunder
is telling of the faces I cover
with pseudo names and forgiving mothers.

You read my poems and I still question
If my words are just a mere reflection
of the pain I felt with new directions
stabbing rhymes revealing earnest lessons.

You read my poems and I still ponder
If any phrase could make you grow fonder
of my feelings that can't help but wander,
lifting and lost, like a wounded condor.

You read my poems and I can't decide
if you'd notice stained pages where I'd cried.

The University of Olivet's English department hosts a poetry competition for students in honor of the late Dr. Abbie Copps.

Submissions are taken from students in March of each year and are announced at the annual Abbie Copps Poetry Event in Dole Hall.

Congratulations to our three winners, Faith Fowler, Grace Chase, and Paris Taratuta.



Non-Fiction

Such Beautiful Things - Erin Jamieson

My life still feels like I'm on a suspension bridge. It looks steady from the outside, or at least somewhat functional, but every day I wonder if some weight will send it collapsing. I feel like there are infinite possibilities for tragedy, for failure, and precious little to find my way.

I am functioning most days. But that doesn't mean I am anywhere near becoming truly happy. Or even just content. I don't need to be happy all the time. I just don't want to feel like this any longer;' so many years of pain and guilt; so many years of feeling I am not worthy of love; so terribly many years of feeling like I am only trying to survive.

If you really do read this, I just want to say I'm not telling you this to heap guilt on you. I don't want you to feel sorry for me.

I just really need to talk to you, silly as this.

I need to believe in new beginnings.

We drive with the window cracked. Not all the way down because it is the highway after all, and we're headed to Cincinnati--not exactly a place with the cleanest air in the world. But it still feels freeing. I may not mind winter at first, but by the end of it, the signs of approaching Spring always reawaken something in me, however faint. And right now, wedged in the backseat with Mom and Nana and Dad and Papa up in front, there's a tiny part of me that feels hopeful. Not because it's my birthday. Not because we are going to see butterflies. But because we are going together. Because there is a tiny bit of joy in me.

You didn't call, or text or Facebook me, at least not yet. I've been told Happy Birthday by many people online, but not by you. I guess that's what I expected, because I don't feel upset. Just numb, and it's easy enough, right now, to pretend this is how things have always been.

Krohn is packed, but by some miracle we're able to get a spot right by the door. The past several times I've been here, we've had to park up on the hill and go down a bunch of steps--something that would have been undoable for Papa and certainly not great for Nana.

"And here I was thinking we should have brought our parking pass," Nana says.

It looks so strange without the shelter that's usually there for the live nativity. The path is lined with bursts of just barely blooming buds and a polished log of petrified wood. I know how beautiful it will be in a month's time, but even now with the tinted sunlight, it is still beautiful.

The walkway to the exhibit of the butterflies is packed with people leading to a display table selling shadow boxes with preserved butterflies, all stunning hues of blue and purple and even green, which Dad seems particularly taken with. I am drawn, instead, to four butterflies, varying shades of blues,

small in comparison, nestled against the frame.

“Are you guys coming?” Mom calls. She’s already moved on, and it looks like Nana and Papa have too.

I linger for a moment, and Dad does too. I am not normally a patient person but today I find myself enjoying this moment--I actually don’t spend much time with just the two of us, and to see him opening up, even if it is just about butterflies, feels like a gift I’ve shoved away or ignored too many times. I am always too busy or anxious or upset to notice.

“There’s a bunch of people right behind us,” Mom says. “If we want to see the butterflies, we better go now.”

My instinctive irritation ebbs and I realize she’s right: we make it in line just before a crowd of people join us from behind. I chose not to wear a coat and am a little cool but not terribly so; after the heat from the car ride it actually feels nice.

And then I see you. Up in the line ahead of us, nearly at the door.

At least I think it’s you. In the bright sunlight, I think it is. You have the same mannerisms, the same way of bending your head, the same way of shrugging and sort of slumping against the railing leading up to the door.

But then a cloud passes over and I see it is not you, cannot be you. It’s a man that’s ten, fifteen years your senior and besides the mannerisms, it honestly looks nothing like you.

“See something?” Papa asks. Of all them, he is the only one that noticed.

“No,” I say.

“Thought you were looking at something.”

I force my gaze away from the door, worried I will be tempted to see you all over again. “No,” I repeat. “It was nothing.”

It’s humid and beyond warm; I also joke that it feels like a sauna here even though I honestly wouldn’t know since I’ve never really been to a sauna before. It’s even more crowded than I’ve seen it in the past, and that’s saying something. We’re handed stickers with a butterfly, all different colors; I select blue of course and it kind of cracks me up when Papa reaches for the pink one. I guess it’s as close to red as he can get.

We have to wait before we go to the next room, which is actually not the butterflies yet but that atrium with the bonsai trees in training. I’ve always wanted to have a bonsai tree; whenever we visited here in the past that desire would reawaken in me, seeing the gnarly roots, the speckled bark. The stranger the better, though I’d always be drawn towards the tree that has so many trunks it looks like a mini forest. Most of the trees have been in training longer than I’ve been alive.

There's a line filing to the next door, ostensibly to see the butterflies but I'm enjoying my time here in this sunny but cooler room. Unlike the first room, this one is connected to a screened outdoor nook, and cool air comes in. It's the kind of place, with buttery sunlight streaming in the clear glass windows and simply furnished, that would be perfect for writing in, minus all of the people.

We're handed these paper flowers and told that if we scratch the label, it'll have a vanilla scent to attract butterflies. We all scratch it, but none of us can smell much of anything, and that includes Mom and her acute sense of smell.

"Probably just use them so people don't try to pick the butterflies up with their hands," Dad muses. Maybe he's right, or maybe so many people have been here already that the scent's died off.

We're led into a tiny intermediary room, where we are instructed by a man with a white mustache that rivals Dad's gray speckled one, that we must not try to touch or chase butterflies. If we need to leave, we have to go all the way around to re-enter, and before leaving we'll be checked twice to make sure no butterflies are clinging to our clothes.

And then he opens the doors and we enter the room with the butterflies. It's like stepping into the scene of a live action Disney movie, with butterflies fluttering no matter where you look, an explosion of different shades of blue, and pops of orange from the grapefruit and kumquat trees in the far corner.

It's even more humid here but right now I don't mind. I'm too busy watching the frantic butterflies, and the resting ones, all of them heavily patterned. There's a group of butterflies whose underside is brown and spotted like an owl, but when they open their wings, you see a rich royal purple.

I wander around, we all do, mostly watching and giving up on trying to get butterflies to land on our little flower shaped paper. That isn't the beauty of it to me anyway. I love watching them in a way you normally don't get a chance, the vibrant blues and more subtle pale pinks and oranges, how stunning they are in motion, against the luscious shrubs and trees.

"Look!" Mom says, pointing at Dad's leg. A butterfly, one with those deceptive owl spotted underbellies, has landed on Dad's jean leg. "Don't move," she warns him.

He lifts his leg gingerly, glances back, and somehow manages to walk without disturbing the butterfly. It opens its wings once or twice; a few people nearby look at the purple velvety wings in awe, and yes, it is beautiful, but it's funny that no one thinks it's beautiful when its wings are closed.

The butterfly clings to Dad almost the entire time. One lands on Mom's navy and ocean blue patterned blouse but not nearly as long as Dad's butterfly. Nana, Papa and I never do get a butterfly to land on us, but I honestly don't mind.

I don't need a butterfly to land on me; I don't need to see the most vivid ones. I just need to know that such beautiful creatures exist.

Remembering Andrew - Katie Kent

I was three years old when my brother Andrew died right in front of my eyes. We had just come back from a walk with our mum. It was a cold day in February, less than a month after my third birthday, and Andrew was wrapped up warm. He had been quite still in his pushchair. Mum left him for a minute to sort me out and when she turned back to him, he was gone.

It was only a few years ago, at the age of 41, that I learned these details, after finally plucking up the courage to ask my parents where I had been when he died. I always knew that he'd died from SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (referred to as 'Cot Death' back then), and that he had only just turned three months old when he'd died. But I was so young; I had no memory of the details (even if I had, I would probably have blanked them out due to the trauma). I had no idea he'd died right in front of my eyes. I'd assumed that perhaps they'd found him in the morning.

I really wish I could remember Andrew. It's hard knowing we spent three months together as brother and sister, but not having any conscious memories of that time.

Despite my lack of memories, Andrew's death changed my whole life. Putting the pieces together, it's clear that my parents treated me differently after his death. They were grieving, of course, and that affected how they brought me up.

Mum has also told me in the past that I became much more clingy after his death. My parents had trouble settling me at nursery as I would constantly cry, and they'd have to take me home. Perhaps I was afraid that I would lose my parents as well as my brother. I was probably too young to understand why my baby brother had suddenly disappeared, and I'm sure I must have picked up on the sadness in the house.

In a way, I feel like I've been grieving for Andrew my whole life. I grew up with mental health problems. I was a shy and anxious child, finding it hard to make friends and worrying about everything. I'm pretty sure looking back that I suffered from social anxiety, and when I was 17 I was diagnosed with an eating disorder. In later life, I have been diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and borderline personality disorder (BPD). OCD, like eating disorders, is really a way for someone to take control over their life when things feel out of control. My OCD has led me to try and control- by counting, timing or measuring- pretty much every aspect of my life, including exercise, walking, and writing. I think my OCD took root partly because I couldn't control my brother dying. One of the main traits of BPD is fear of abandonment and this triggers many of the other traits, such as self-harm and suicidal thoughts, paranoia and mood swings. BPD affects relationships and one of my biggest challenges has been to learn to relate to people in a healthy way.

I have had a tendency to become too attached to people and treat them almost like a parent, thinking they will care about me and becoming very depressed if they ever do anything that I perceive to be them showing that they don't care. In the past, this has led several friendships to break down as it's become too much for the other person. It seems obvious that my BPD was triggered by the loss I felt when Andrew died and when my parents became somewhat emotionally unavailable due to their grief. Growing up, I had lots of emotions, and came to realise that I couldn't really express them. I suspect this was because my parents had had to try and bury their own emotions after Andrew died.

I'm glad I spoke to my parents about what happened. Discovering the missing pieces has allowed me to finally grieve for my brother properly after all these years. I learnt that Dad was at work when it happened and had to come home on the train to go to the hospital. I have so much compassion for my parents being in that situation, especially as they weren't together to comfort each other when it happened. I can only imagine how they felt having to say goodbye to their son only three months after celebrating his birth.

In a group therapy programme that I was a member of for a few years, I explored my feelings around Andrew's death and started to heal from the trauma that it caused. The group also encouraged me to ask the difficult questions about his death. They reassured me that, as his sister, I had a right to find out this information. When I spoke to my parents about it, they advised me to put it behind me and not dwell on it or let it ruin my life. They meant well. I know that they deal with things by trying to push them away and not talk about them. Yet that doesn't work for me. As a cripplingly shy teenager, I did keep things to myself, and it led me to have psychosomatic seizures. Despite tests showing no signs of epilepsy in my brain, I was put on epilepsy medication. It was only when I went for the assessment for my group therapy and mentioned them that I learned that people can have them through psychological rather than physical causes. When I started to have counselling for my eating disorder, the seizures stopped. I was in therapy on and off for more than half of my life. The past few years are the only years I have felt anywhere near mentally healthy, and I still struggle sometimes.

I wonder how different my life would be if Andrew had lived. Most likely I would not have struggled with mental illness, at least not to the extent that I have. I would probably have a better relationship with my parents and more self-esteem. Yet I can't say that I would change things if someone offered me the chance. It would have been nice to see how Andrew grew up, what he made of his life, and to have had that relationship with him. But I have another brother, born after Andrew died, who may not have been born if Andrew had lived, and I wouldn't change his existence for the world. He has his own son now, a happy little boy who has just turned a year old, and who has been given the middle name Andrew. It seems fitting. I know my brother feels like he

owes Andrew his life.

I will never forget Andrew, and nor would I want to. He was an important part of my life, of my past. A few years ago, I visited the crematorium where his ashes were scattered and saw his entry in the remembrance book. It was an emotional day, but I really appreciated the chance to say a proper goodbye. I also came across some photos of Andrew, a few of which also had me in. It was the first time I could remember seeing photos of the two of us together, and they are really precious to me. I also got a tattoo on my ankle- star-shaped because they had stars in the Children's Garden at the crematorium- with Andrew's initials in, so that he is always with me. Finally, I remember my brother by writing about him.

The Weight Behind The Door - Jane Moore

With my key still half in the lock, the heavy, black waves billow through the opening door, making my stomach clench. My feet refuse to take that next step, and my heart urges me to turn and run, but I know I can't. *Where would I go?*

“Please - no!” I silently plead. “Why can't it be one of those family days that I know we can have? Games round the table, shared meals?” Even those days, though, are laced with tension. Will someone take too long? Laugh too much? Want too much? What isn't spoken is so much more powerful than any words. I'm unable to relax, my shoulders hunch at the slightest twitch of eyebrows drawing together.

This insidious silence, the pounding in my head the only sound, is more damaging than any raised voices or slammed doors. Stomach aches my only way to express excitement or fear. I retreat inside my shell, trying to make myself unnoticed. The few spoken words - twisted, open to interpretation. Unheard, misunderstood by those near to me. Leaving me drowning in confusion and self-doubt.

I walk quietly upstairs to my room, changing out of my grey uniform that lets me fade into the background. Unsure if it's my fault - what have I said or done? I grab my book so that I can curl up and lose myself in its solace. The smell of the pages a comfort blanket. The Secret Garden giving hope that even an unhappy child can bloom.

A child alone, not knowing how to make friends, too quiet to bother with. Compared and criticised – not smiling, not clever, never enough. Playing silently, lost in imaginary worlds full of kindness and love. But always wondering when the voices will stop, and the pacing begin.

Just once that silence cracked open. The hand round my throat. Head forced against the wall. The one that should protect me standing, watching. That was enough. After that, I no longer pleaded for the silence to end.

Years have passed. Time has mellowed you. Still, I doubt myself. Was it really that bad? But the damage is real. Even now, if we spend time together, for holidays or coffees, I find myself watching your mood, tensing at the slightest shift. That old fear still stirs in me. I think it always will.

I couldn't heal alone, although I tried. I found my courage long enough to ask for help - through a screen. That distance allowing me to feel safe. Now I walk, step by step, *but sometimes, I still glance over my shoulder, half-expecting the weight of that door.*

Keeping Time - Penny Nolte

Mom always joked that she bought herself a wedding present because Dad didn't. Although I thought that was unfair because he gave her a silver wedding ring that he designed all by himself.

But anyway, she went to a jewelry store and picked out a dainty silver watch with a delicate black ribbon wristband and tiny Roman numerals, doubled behind a beveled glass top. Schooling me to carefully pull out the impossibly small stem and wind it, only a few times, she warned, "Stop when it stops."

She always took her watch off to do the dishes, along with her wedding ring. Then put them both back on at bedtime, pulling out and winding the impossibly small stem.

Later in life, after the stem was broken, she wore her fancy watch as a bracelet and bought a new battery powered Timex at the drugstore to wear as well. Her watches are together to this day, fastened around the base of my reading lamp. One frozen in time, the other still ticking.

Mom's Place - Maria Odessky Rosen

I visited my mom at the nursing home the other day. It was her birthday. I brought a balloon. With a smiley face on it. Last time when I brought her roses she took one and tried to eat it. So this time I wanted to be safe. A balloon was too big to fit into her mouth.

When I got there, she was sitting in the recreation room, one of several zombies sitting in a wheelchair with her head hanging down in front of a television that wasn't on. Her roommate Judy was sitting against the wall behind the row my mom was in and chatting with a resident whose eyes were closed. Tim was seated next to my mom wearing the same stained shirt I saw him in the last time I visited. I wondered whether Tim's loved ones know that he has a shirt whose stains don't come out. I wonder if Tim has any loved ones. I never see any other visitors when I come. Surely Tim is someone's dad or brother or uncle. I smile at Tim when he manages to raise his head. I say hi. I wish I can visit with each of the people here.

Upon seeing me walk up to my mom, Judy remarks loudly how I must be my mom's son. "He's never been here before," Judy announces. I turn around and smile, this isn't the first time Judy mixes up pronouns. "Hi, Judy," I tie the balloon to the wheelchair and wheel my mom to her room so we can have alone time. I am not going to hold Judy's dementia against her. I have visited my mom many times in the three months that she had been living at the nursing home and had seen and greeted Judy each time. Some days she remembered me. And some days, when I sensed her hesitation upon seeing me, as though I was a word at the edge of her tongue that she just couldn't pin down, I reintroduced myself. Sometimes I was "she," sometimes, "he." I didn't mind. As my husband always reminds me about our daughter's ADHD, you can't hold a person's illness against them.

I first met Judy when my mom was moved from rehab to permanent living, when we determined that my mom wasn't returning home after my parents' last bad fall. I made sure to introduce myself and offer Judy some of the goodies I brought my mom in an effort to ingratiate my mom to her roommate since my mom wasn't capable of doing it herself. Thankfully, Judy, with furrowed brows and searching eyes was so focused on trying to place me that she ignored my hand holding a ripe, fragrant peach. I say thankfully because it occurred to me just then that I had no idea what her dietary restrictions might be. She may suffer from the birch-fruit syndrome and be allergic, or, she may have diabetes and the high sugar content in a nice ripe peach could send her into diabetic shock after she comes down from hyperglycemia. Surely, I wouldn't be able to visit my mom again if I accidentally killed her roommate. I carefully moved my hand away from Judy and dropped the fuzzy fruit back into my bag.

They really should have signs “Do Not Feed the Zombies” on the walls of the home.

On the way to mom’s room, past the elevators that beep and require a secret code to get them to comply (secret because some of the residents still have their memories intact and try to escape), I couldn’t help but think how this nursing home looked like a hospital, contrary to all my expectations. It had rows and rows of rooms, some single-occupancy and some double. In front of the rooms were narrow hallways that led to the offices of the social workers and aids and other staff. The nurses were at a nurse’s station in the middle of the floor. The rooms themselves were tiny with just enough space for a bed, a chair, a tiny hole-in-the-wall closet and a bathroom to the side. There were no pictures on the walls, no rugs on the floors or throws on the chairs. The color of the walls and the floors and the bedding were different shades of off-white. The furniture and the bedding and even the doors to the rooms all seemed to recede and disappear into each other. Only the nurses’ maroon and blue uniforms and the occasional floral or paisley top of a resident stood out against the unremarkable surroundings. The feeling the place gave me reminded me of a time in high school when in response to an art teacher’s question of what was my favorite color and me replying “grey,” he scoffed, “grey is a noncolor.” That’s how I felt about my mom’s new home. It wasn’t a hospital. It wasn’t a home. It was a nonplace. I tried to liven up my mom’s half of the room with too many picture frames of us, but after a while, I wasn’t sure how many of us she remembered or if the pictures made any difference.

My dad died six days after he fell. My mother fell first, in the bathroom, and he fell while trying to help her. He had been on home hospice with stage four bone cancer. My parents had aids twelve-hours a day seven days a week. Before my dad was diagnosed with this cancer, the aids were solely for my mom. Her Parkinson’s was progressing and over time she needed more help, to cook, get dressed, walk and eventually think. I gently fought with my dad daily for at least one year before he died to get my parents around the clock care but my dad refused. Since he still had his wits about him and was dying anyway, I wanted to respect his last wishes for as long as possible. My father and I are both willful people and I was careful not to impose my will on his too much at the end. This left my father, who was suffering from heart failure and inflamed lungs and whose cancer had spread to his spine and hips and legs and pancreas and liver to care for my mother on his own at night.

Since I wasn’t there, I could only piece together what happened the night my parents both fell from their beloved aid who on her day off ran to my parents apartment as soon as she heard they were in distress. Weeks later while cleaning out my parents’ apartment I ran into their next door neighbor who told me that she heard a loud bang at around midnight and then nothing more until

eight hours later when aids and paramedics and building security all descended on my parents' tiny one-bedroom apartment. My parents had lain on the floor where they fell all night.

In her room at the nursing home, I try speaking with my mom but as usual can only understand about one percent of what she is saying - a word here, the beginning of a sentence there. Never a full sentence. Either her voice disappears back into her throat and she resorts to just mouthing words, or say nonsensical things that I can't piece together. She begins one story by telling me about her haircut and then I hear something about a new car and friends going for a ride. I think. It's hard to make sense since she doesn't just have difficulty speaking from Parkinson's but is also slipping away into dementia. I can't really tell anymore when she is lucid. I try not to get frustrated reminding myself that this isn't about me. I remind myself that as bad as it is for me being unable to understand that it must be much worse for her not being understood.

Before I leave, I tie the yellow balloon with the smiley face to my mom's wheelchair. I wheel her back to the room with no doors, no pictures on the walls, no carpet. Just an old TV leaning perilously over a worn credenza. In a room full of zombies in wheelchairs like her. I squeeze her festooned wheelchair in the corner by the only zombie who makes eye contact. Then I walk away. Our visit is over. When I look back before getting on the elevator, her head is bowed again. The balloon is swaying slightly back and forth, the only thing to wave back at me. until eight hours later when aids and paramedics and building security all descended on my parents' tiny one-bedroom apartment. My parents had lain on the floor where they fell all night.

Bittersweet Memories - A Wedding in the Hospice - Dale Scherfling

The day my wife watched our son get married from her hospice bed was one of my happiest—and saddest—moments. It's been eleven years since then, and I can finally face it again.

Mary fought the good fight for five long years, never giving up—until she ran out of miracles. The calls went out: If you want to see her, better come quick. Our son Scott flew in from California, bringing his fiancée with him. They decided to marry then and there so Mary could share the moment.

The nurses jumped in full tilt—some staying overtime, others coming back from home. One brought a bottle. They scurried around, hastily decorating the room into something warm, festive, almost chapel-like.

Our future daughter-in-law, Osiris, held Mary's hand and talked to her. Mary, unable to speak through the oxygen mask, scribbled back—upbeat, excited. Outside, it was a soft, golden afternoon; sunlight poured in, and birds sang through the open window.

Randy, our “second son”—he'd spent as much time at our house as his own—was there, as we knew he would be. Nate, Scott's other best friend, was flying in from Tucson. Total opposite of gentle Randy, Nate was a cop, tough as nails.

The hospital chaplain stood by, waiting.

“What's the delay?” Mary scrawled on her notepad.

“Just waiting for Nate,” Osiris told her.

Hate Nate, Mary wrote—just as he walked through the door. He took one look at her, ran to her bedside, and dropped to his knees, sobbing.

Mary stroked his head and comforted him with one hand. With the other, she crossed out her last entry and wrote:

Maybe not.

Held in a Pocket - Andrea Tate

My father loved pockets. His hands were inside them when he stood or walked, but not when he talked. His pockets held Hall's cough drops to help him breathe better— asbestos. Roloids to manage his ulcers—stress. A gold-engraved money clip filled with bills he ironed—a façade of wealth. He always carried a few business cards that said Tate Construction—never a license number.

He was a tough guy, a funny guy, maybe even a charming guy, or perhaps not a “made” guy. As a kid, I'd ask about the “M” word. Was he part of it? Was his father or grandfather? They were Sicilian, after all. My one aunt, who looks and sounds like Joe Pesci, said, “Your grandfather was Cosa Nostra.”

If my siblings and I fought over something trivial, like who ate the last Chips Ahoy, we would leave the bag empty on the counter, disappointing the person reaching in only to find crumbs.

“When your mother and I are gone, you will only have each other, so get friggen along!”

His mother died of breast cancer when he was a boy, leaving ten children without their primary source of care. His father wasn't the affectionate type and was found dead by my father at seventeen. When asked how his father died, the answer was: “suspicious reasons.” My father's main mood was anger, followed by annoyance, and third was a threatening demeanor, which included the penetrating stare that suggested something was brewing. Back then, hitting a kid with a belt wasn't considered reportable, especially if it left no visible damage. When I complained to my mother that he must hate me, she reminded me of how much he loved me.

“He was too afraid to hold you as an infant. He'd sit with a pillow on his lap; then I'd place you on top of it. He thought he could break you.”

I wanted to tell her that he did break me, but not by holding me.

When my sister called to tell me my father was in hospice, I asked her to repeat the word. Hospice didn't compute. He was too strong and stubborn to die. My two sisters and I walked down the hallway, holding tightly to each other's shaky arms. As we approached his room, we clutched each other's coats as if we were entering a haunted house. When we reached his door, we took a collective breath. Inside, the air felt different—cool, static, and permanent. My mother appeared small, scared, and deflated. Her first words were apologetic, as if somehow it was her fault. It wasn't. He suffered from Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis, or hardening of lung tissue. No cure. Once diagnosed, it's just a matter of time until your lungs can no longer allow a breath of any size.

Carefully, I walked over to my father, half-wondering if it was possible to wake him. When I was younger, I had done the same to avoid disturbing him. It was best to keep my distance as much as possible. In this dimly lit room, I placed my hand on his forehead and held it there for a long time. I never remembered touching him for any length of time. As adults, hugs, hello, or goodbye were about all we shared.

He looked as he did in life, except frozen with blank eyes. His strong shoulders were at rest. His mouth hung open. Surely, he wouldn't want anyone to see him like that—vulnerable and weak. I wanted to close it, but feared I'd break something. I tried to remove my hand from his forehead a few times by lifting it up slightly, but the magnetic pull of the illusion of life kept it in place.

My sisters and mother approached the bed. They gently placed their hands on different parts of him. My mother rested her hand on his strong, folded hands, a diamond pinky ring still on one and a fifty-year-old wedding band on the other. One sister touched the dark skin on his arms, while the other sister, at the foot of the bed, placed a hand on his ankles, which were covered in hospital socks—the kind with rubber on the bottom that no longer served a purpose.

My brother went directly to our mother. My father's two brothers and two sisters arrived, walking in with sadness that felt like the heaviness of a thick, dark velvet curtain. People began to move slowly around—heads bowed, hands touching shoulders. I approached my brother, and we hugged longer than we ever had. My mother slumped in a corner chair, with her sister kneeling at her feet.

Back with my father, I placed my hand in the same spot. It was lukewarm. He was starting to leave us. I hated that he was all alone, lying there dead, without someone touching or holding him. I noticed his teeth in a jar next to his bed. That didn't seem right. Would the nurse put them back in his mouth even though he no longer needed them?

It was time to say my final goodbye. Unsure of how to conclude, I glanced at the table near his bed and noticed a half-used package of cough drops. I picked up the small foiled package. With my hands in my pockets, I clutched the small, foiled package tightly and slowly walked out the door.

I regretted not having final words with him before he died. I forgave him for the trauma I experienced and the lack of self-confidence he instilled in me. It made me a better mother—a mother who told her son daily that she loved him, a mother who never raised a hand in anger. I believed he loved me, but love was not enough. I understood that he suffered from his own generational trauma, holding it inside just as I held mine, clutching the last thing he might have touched. I tightened my fist in my pocket as I inhaled and then exhaled.

Visual Art



Roger Camp

Toy Airplanes, child's grave, Paris 14°



Pigeon



Little Bear, child's grave, Monparnasse Cemetery,



Sean Bw Parker

Dad & Carol



Christopher Woods

One Last Boquet

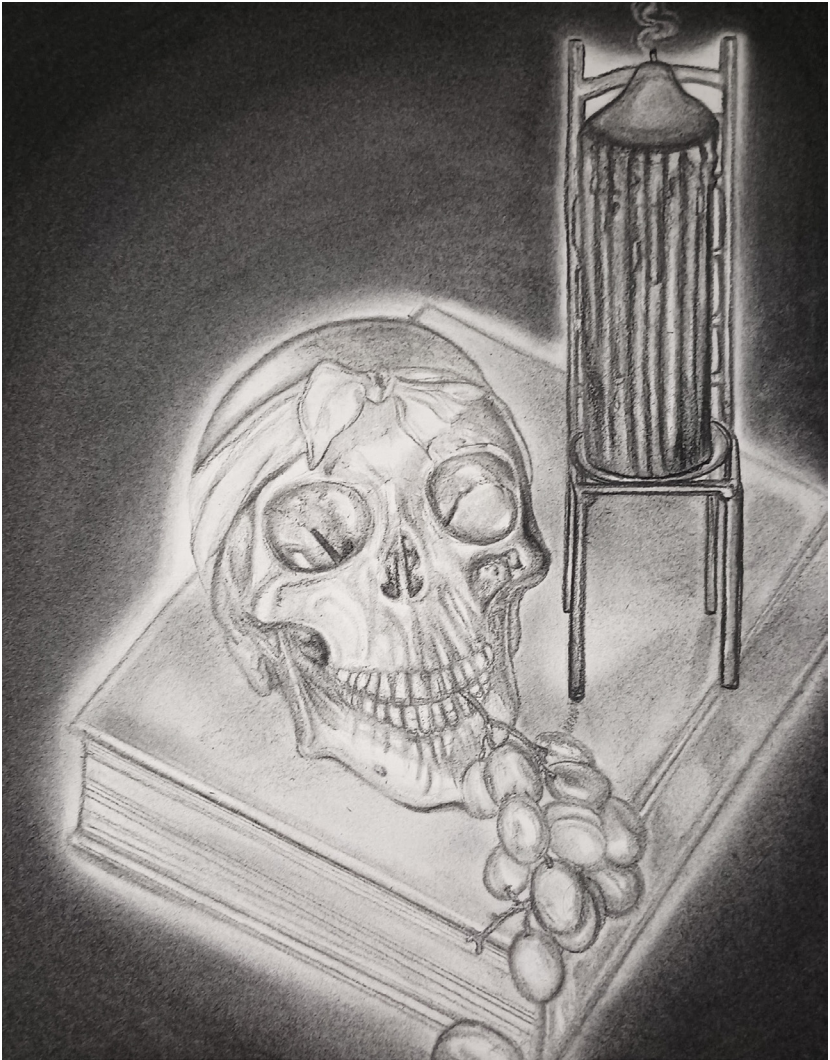


Amyah Walker

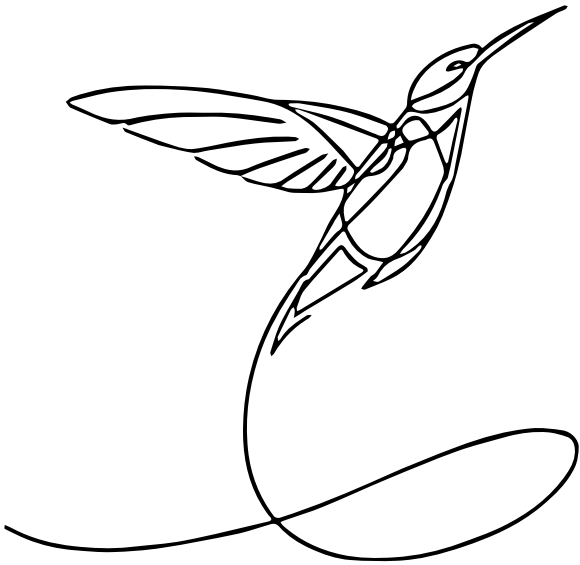
Maria Dolor Maeror



Uvae



Fiction



Dogs and Angels - William Ade

I was an ugly baby.

Not that anyone ever told me as much, but the anecdotal evidence was overwhelming.

Soon after I was delivered, the obstetrician offered my parents a no-cost two-fer: a tubal ligation for Mom and a vasectomy for Dad. If that weren't enough proof, the county supervisors then issued an ordinance forbidding my parents from having any more children.

My folks must've agreed I was hideous-looking. My father was a photographer by trade, and my mother suffered from early-onset hoarding. Yet among all the framed and unframed photographs piled high and low in our house, the only ones with people were those of my parents and BiBi.

BiBi was the rheumy-eyed Pekingese that dominated the household. I resented BiBi for being my mother's favorite mammal, and I could never understand the appeal of such a thing.

My realization that I had a faulty attractiveness gene in my DNA started in primary school. The cruel propagator of that reality was my second-grade teacher, who claimed the Health Department mandated wearing masks in our classroom. She explained it was to prevent the spread of the Dengue Fever virus. That reason seemed strange to me since it was October in our part of the Northern Hemisphere, and that year's brood of mosquitos had died out two months ago. I asked why I was the only kid required to mask up. The teacher said I was especially vulnerable, and she couldn't risk my life. For a week I felt like she cared until she isolated me in the broom closet. Then I knew she was afraid my looks would frighten the other kids into stupefying silence, and she'd never know what, if anything, they were learning.

I might've been repulsive-looking, but I wasn't a dummy.

I soldiered through the rest of my elementary school years, developing the selective hearing that insulated my feelings from the nasty opinions of others. In fact, I became so skilled at blocking out cruel words that the school nurse suspected I was deaf. It was a very lonely time for a child.

My life improved when I was in the seventh grade, and an angel appeared and changed everything. It was a September morning, and I'd left my mother standing on the street corner as I raced off to catch the school bus. Unbeknownst to me, an out-of-control two-ton Buick jumped the curb seconds later, and sped down the sidewalk toward me.

My mother yelled, but since I was so accomplished at shutting out any words delivered in a shrieking voice, I didn't hear her. BiBi broke her leash and sped after me on her little Pekingese paws, maybe hoping to catch me and push me out of danger. Unfortunately, BiBi ended up under the errant car's right front tire, then the right back wheel, before bouncing up and landing lifelessly in the

street. Some folks claimed BiBi was a hero, but others thought she was just your typical mutt chasing a car, and the car got the best of her.

Oh yeah, the angel I mentioned earlier. The BiBi-killing automobile's deadly front wheels were closing in when I was suddenly lifted off my feet as the car passed under me. I was gently dropped into a shrub, and the car crashed into the school bus, igniting the fifty-gallon tank of diesel fuel hanging from the bus's undercarriage. I didn't see the conflagration, but felt the concussive force of an explosion, and the heat of the flames scorched my skin. Luckily, I was the first pick up that morning, and only the driver, Mister Jolly, was on board the bus.

The local firefighters arrived and did their best to put out the inferno, but they quickly learned there was little they could do but stand silently with long faces. It was my mom and a neighbor who extracted me from the shrub. They marveled that I was safe and whole while the fire reduced Mister Jolly to ashes and his Taylor Swift belt buckle. The neighbor said she saw me flying through the air and out of danger and wondered where I'd acquired a kangaroo's leaping ability.

I said I hadn't jumped, that something lifted me in the air.

"What do you mean by lifted?" the woman asked.

I told her I felt a pair of strong hands reach under my arms and raise me out of the path of the out-of-control automobile, before gently dropping me into the shrub.

I didn't know what the word incredulous meant at the time, but I do now, and that word properly described the look on their faces. When I said I'd twisted around and saw a glowing oval that spoke to me, my mom patted my head. It was what she did to calm BiBi when the dog got overly excited. The glowing oval claimed to be an angel sent by God, because the Grand Creator owed me a big favor for making me ugly. The angel said I should expect many more kindnesses in the future.

Mom laughed, wondering aloud if God now had a conscience and would make amends for the cruelty inflicted upon hapless humans since the time of Adam and Eve. Her mocking response convinced me I should never discuss it with her again. If an angel wanted to look out for me and ease my suffering, I wouldn't risk insulting my new otherworldly pal by engaging my mother and her cynicism.

Soon after the accident, Mom brought home a Pekingese puppy that she named Coco. The new dog took up the place in my mother's heart where BiBi had resided, and Mom returned to ignoring me. That was okay with me since the angel would appear and soothe me whenever I felt slighted by Mom or any other human walking the earth.

As expected, my curiosity about angels eventually got the best of me, and I asked questions. The angel said it had neither a name nor a gender, and angels didn't need the silliness of such classification. Their purpose wasn't to educate mortals about things to come or explain life's meaning. Their primary job was to show up when needed.

"Cool," I said and never again probed the angel about its nature.

I wish I could say that my high school years were free of humiliation and hurt, but we're talking about a pedagogical hellscape designed to maximize the worst tendencies of teenagers. The happiest moment of those years occurred when I asked a girl named Eppie, to the Senior prom. She agreed to go with me and that was when I realized that I might not be off-putting to everyone. The night before the dance, however, Eppie's parents had her kidnapped and taken to one of those camps for incorrigible teens. Even though I sat at home on Prom Night, I never forgot Eppie and her kindness.

I graduated from high school and left home, eager to live independently. Admittedly, having an angel keeping me safe and feeling loved made the launch easier. I eventually secured an office job that used my talent of completing interminably boring tasks, which allowed me to afford a small apartment near the railroad tracks. To my surprise, management assigned me to an office, rather than a stuffy cubical in the bullpen with the other underlings. It was because of my looks, or so went the rumor.

I didn't know how to feel about company leadership, which thought it best for office morale to hide me away, but I didn't argue with anyone. By that time in my life, I much preferred isolation.

Or, so I thought.

It was on a Friday night in July, when everything changed. For no other reason than I had nothing better to do, I calculated that evening marked one thousand, three hundred and six nights of me sitting alone in my living room.

That revelation made me feel sick to my stomach. Enough with my self-imposed loneliness. I had to do something to change my life.

It must've been my angel planting the idea in my mind while I slept, because I awoke the next morning with an answer and a purpose. I quickly dressed, left my apartment, went to where I had to go, and returned home with a tiny Pekingese puppy. I called her Gogo.

Gogo was demanding of my attention, sensitive to my emotions, and the warmth and softness of her little body comforted me to a degree I'd longed for all my life. I asked my angel if Gogo was God's way of making amends for the cruelties imposed on me. The angel said the heavenly realm had nothing to do with my inspiration. My impulsive retrieval of a dog from an animal shelter was a subconscious connection with my mother and her affection for dogs.

Eventually, it became clear to me that Gogo needed more exercise than she could achieve in the confines of my apartment. I purchased a leash, and together, Gogo and I ambled over to a dog park a half mile from my apartment. My instinct was to plant myself on the park's edge, intending not to offend anyone with my face. Gogo's barking, however eventually drew another leashed dog to us. The man holding onto the big yellow dog asked about Gogo, and I reciprocated with similar questions about his animal.

The man and I chatted while Gogo and her doggie buddy rolled in the grass and bounced against each other. At least, I thought that was what we did, having little experience talking to people. That hour at the dog park was exhilarating for Gogo and me, and we returned home exhausted.

I asked my angel, had God sent the stranger and his yellow dog to engage me in an effort to make up for my hideously configured eyes, nose, and mouth? Why had the man not been repulsed and look away? The angel denied that a godly intervention took place at the park. Dog owners, the angel told me, were good-hearted and chatty by nature. Having a conversation with one of them was bound to happen.

Gogo and I went to the dog park every morning before I left for work and the angel's claim that dog owners were a non-judging, garrulous lot proved true. The number of my acquaintances doubled, then grew to three and then four. What was it about those people that they weren't disturbed by my looks? Had I let the cruelties of my early childhood warp my perspective? Whatever the reason, those early mornings were the best hour for me and Gogo.

It was a week into the next month when my bubble of contentment suddenly popped. Scuttlebutt swamped the office, predicting massive cost-cutting measures about to fall down upon our heads. On Friday, the word spread like wildfire that the reduction in force had begun. Being riffed was the euphuism for being axed, canned, or fired; even my immediate boss was terminated. Then, I got a phone call telling me to ride the elevator to the building's top floor. The Senior Vice President of Human Resources wanted to talk with me.

Perspiration damped my shirt as I rode an elevator to the fifteenth floor that housed the Executive Suites. The Senior Vice President's secretary averted her eyes as she thumbed me toward the tall, dark wood doors behind her. I guessed it was more respectful to be fired in person than getting a dismissal e-mail, but I wondered if this corporate executive would regret the courtesy once she saw my face. If nothing else, she'd move through the formalities quickly. I sucked in my last breath as a working man and stepped through the doors.

The Senior Vice President of Human Resources invited me to sit with her at a small office table, where she moved aside a framed photo of a French Bulldog to make space for what I assumed were my dismissal papers. The woman's words were delivered unemotionally, and while certain ones, like expense reductions, twenty percent management dismissals, and closing the office,

reverberated in my head, it was the sound of my rapidly beating heart I mostly heard.

Then, a smile crossed the Senior Vice President's face, and her voice lightened.

"You have been a highly reliable performer and excelled at your job," she said. "I'd like to promote you to supervisor and ask you to lead the remaining staff in your department. With everyone working remotely, it will be an added challenge, but I'm confident you'll be successful."

I also heard her say something about a moderate salary increase.

My memory after that meeting was of a slow elevator descent with my mind in a swirl. The executive wasn't unsettled by my looks, and I hadn't lost my job. Rather, the woman treated me kindly, given me a promotion, and increase my wealth by a small amount. While having to manage people who were once my peers would push me out of my comfort zone, my dog park experience gave me confidence I could do it. Best of all, I'd be working from my apartment. Gogo and I would never be separated for long hours again.

So that is what ecstasy was supposed to feel like, I thought.

I told my angel that God could relax. My promotion and the chance to work from home with Gogo by my side paid any debt in full. The angel swore God had been too busy listening to the praying inhabitants of a planet in the Centaurus galaxy, 25,000 light years away.

The angel said it was my pleasant personality and work ethic that served me.

My life after that momentous day was mostly good. The daily exchanges with the employees who reported to me evolved from cordial to warm and respectful. My department's performance was regularly recognized by senior management, and the company returned to profitability. I somehow became the unofficial leader of the dog park community, scheduling morning coffees and evening wine tastings. I even straightened my teeth so my smile no longer looked like a vandalized piano keyboard.

Best of all, there were new undertakings for Gogo and me. While we cherished our daily routine, I suspected Gogo was more than ready to visit the world outside the city. I quickly learned Gogo was a dog made for bus and train travel, and we discovered the ultimate dog parks other people called ocean beaches.

Life was so good that there were weeks I didn't think about my angel. I was a happy man with a happy dog.

Of course, happiness is a capricious little rascal; sooner rather than later, it slips away and sadness fills the space. I know because when the veterinarian explained why Gogo had become so listless, my happiness was crushed into dust and blown away.

I called upon my angel, begging that it deliver this message to God. “Spare my dog her life and me the heartbreak, and we’ll be even.” I learned that God assigned angels to those unfairly treated by the randomness of life, and those angels only had one miracle to bestow. I’d gotten mine when I was saved as a kid from being killed by a run-away car.

“If your job was done once you saved my life, why did you stick around?” I asked. The angel explained it was obligated to be my reliable source of comfort until I got a dog. Gogo would be far better at ensuring my happiness than any angel could.

It was April, a time of renewal, when Gogo’s long retreat from life began in earnest. The air was warm with promise and the trees bloomed with new life, which made Gogo’s dying harder for me. At the park, the Labs and Boxers and Spaniels ran wildly through the new grass while Gogo laid on my lap, too tired to join them. I didn’t know how to comfort her, but Gogo, like most dogs, was better at dying than people could ever be. There were no last regrets, or unsettled petty arguments. She just needed to feel protected and surrounded by the familiar scents of her life.

On her last day, Gogo held her gaze on me as I cuddled her in my arms, and I wondered why this dog, with her magnified senses, never recoiled from me. Hadn’t Gogo noticed the irregular shape of my face or the harshness of my features? Perhaps dog and human values were dissimilar and Gogo saw beauty differently from people. I didn’t have an answer but I did have a good guess. I figured that maybe, just maybe, dogs were more like angels than humans.

THE END

Afterimage - Victoria Dunn

Luke didn't want to go away, but when he came up number three in the draft lottery he knew he'd be sent to Vietnam. So before the induction letter arrived he joined the Coast Guard, hoping he'd have a safer tour of duty than those who were sent to fight the ground war in the jungles.

Luke was brilliant and could easily have gotten a deferment if he were in college. But in our industrial town outside Muncie, Indiana, most boys went directly from high school to the local meat-packing plant or automotive factory. Luke had taken a different path, earning an electronics certificate at a technical school in Muncie, but he was done in a year, leaving him few good options for staying out of the war. He figured if he joined the Coast Guard, he might at least get some experience working on sonar systems.

I hated seeing him go, but there were no hugs when we saw him off at the airport; that wasn't our way. Gram cried a little, which was strange. She'd always told Luke and me never to cry, so we never did. When Luke turned back at the gate for a last look, I waved to him and he waved back, flashing his elfin grin, the one that made his eyes squint and broke the rest of his face wide open.

Luke and I were cousins—he was 19 and I was 10 when he went away in June of 1970—but despite our age difference we understood one another, having come from neighboring branches of the same decaying family tree. My mom had died when I was six and my dad had been in prison for as long as I could remember, and both of Luke's parents were addicts who drifted in and out of his life. Living with our grandmother gave us the closest thing to a stable family life either of us had ever known. Gram was gruff, a stern disciplinarian, but we felt lucky to have her and tried not to give her any trouble.

There weren't any other girls my age in Gram's neighborhood, so Luke let me follow him around and never seemed to mind when I pestered him to teach me magic tricks and card games. Or I'd beg, "Please do a handstand!"—knowing he'd filled his pockets with loose change earlier and would let me keep all the coins I could scoop up before he lost his balance. One summer he taught me to whistle by blowing on a blade of grass tucked between my thumbs. And when I was in fourth grade, he'd try to help me with my homework even though his advanced math skills were over my head and even over the homework's head. I usually ended up working out the problems myself later using the simpler methods in the book, but I appreciated that he'd tried to help.

After Luke left home, I wandered around most days aimless and morose. In summer I'd go to my favorite hideout—a drainage pond a few blocks from Gram's house, between a Tastee-Freez and some railroad tracks. The pond was hidden in the shade of some willow trees and tall shrubs, and it was quiet and peaceful there except when freight trains rumbled through on the opposite side of the pond. Then I'd wave at the man in the caboose, who'd always wave

back. I often stayed at the pond until dusk, catching frogs and salamanders and letting them go after playing with them a while.

Gram must have noticed I was out of sorts because one day she brought home a dog for me, a little brown poodle.

“His name is Cocoa,” she said as she handed him over to me. I fell in love with the little bundle of curls; he became my constant companion and was pretty good company for a solitary 10-year-old. In winter I’d put on Luke’s old parka, tuck Cocoa under it, and sit on the back porch to watch the sunset and the moonrise before Gram called me in for supper.

Life went on this way, a sort of half-life, really, until Luke’s discharge from the Coast Guard four years later. He came home for a few months with a plan to move to Tampa, Florida, near one of his former shipmates. But something about him seemed off. I’d try to engage him in conversation, but a simple question like “What are you up to today?” was likely to be answered with a sidelong glance and a couple minutes of muttering, followed by Luke slouching out the back door and disappearing for the rest of the day.

If I ever did manage to get him to respond, the conversation often went sideways, leapfrogging from topic to unrelated topic, each more confusing than the last. He seemed unsure of where he was and what year it was, often believing he was still enrolled at the technical school in Muncie.

Gram worried Luke had battle fatigue—what we now call PTSD—but he hadn’t seen any hazardous duty, and his increasingly erratic conversation and secretive behavior hinted at something more unsettling.

None of us knew enough at the time to recognize what was happening, but Luke had begun a long, slow slide into schizophrenia. Over the years that followed, he descended, unknowing and unmedicated, into an unrelenting series of broken relationships, lost jobs, and perplexing delusions that left his sweet nature and keen intelligence unreachable to those of us on the outside. We rarely saw him after he moved to Tampa, and we heard from him only sporadically.

Luke eventually got treatment, but his lucid intervals were temporary and brief because he’d always stop taking his medication once he started feeling like himself again. He began dropping out of our lives for years at a time and when he’d finally resurface, he’d appear more physically depleted and emotionally fragile than the previous time.

The last I heard about Luke, from a family friend who encountered him a few years ago, he was living on the streets of Miami. He’d suffered an extended break from reality and had no memory of the previous six or seven years, but he was unwilling to reach out to family for help. I don’t know where he is now. When Luke went into the Coast Guard all those years before, I’d felt bereft and abandoned. But as it turned out, when Luke left home it was really himself he left behind, becoming lost somewhere in his mind and out of his time. His absence has left an ache that feels like a hole in my chest, so I don’t let myself

think about it much. He may still be alive, but I have no way of knowing. He'd be 74 now and I probably won't see him again, so I try to remember him the way he was—with a squinting grin that broke his face wide open.

When The Hibiscus Perspires - Carsten ten Brink

On the day the man visited the torturer's grave, a humid midday wind was blowing inland over the cemetery, and Isabelita had been staring out the window wondering whether the wind would deposit leaves on the grave, two rows away, of her dear departed Lirio, eight years dead.

She had been out at Lirio's grave early that morning, with her small plastic rake, secateurs and watering can, as she was now every second Sunday, and she had left the grave pristine, the last daffodil blossoms collected, the camomile leaves pruned into shape, the sleeping pink gerberas watered. The mayor's family visited their paterfamilias's tomb before evening mass and would pass by Lirio's grave, so, if the wind rose, Isabelita would return to ensure Lirio's grave was respectful.

The torturer's grave was never respectful. The visitor stood motionless, his intentions a mystery, but he was the first to come for a year. No one cleaned moss or seagull droppings from the concrete grave-marker, and if there'd once been flowers, the plot held nothing now other than a sullen rectangle of fallen twigs, dead leaves and immortal weeds. A month ago, the wind had deposited a silvery, plastic snack packet, which Isabelita had removed, wondering whether in so doing she was offering respect to the torturer. She decided that she wasn't. It was respect for the other graves.

The country's past had been bloody, brutal and unjust, and bulbs of anger still sat below the surface. Some of her neighbours were nostalgic for those days, for strong men in shiny uniforms who promised prosperity, its blossoming spring always just around the corner, while others felled statues of those very men.

The visitor carried neither crowbar, nor hammer, nor a florist's bouquet. Tall, angular, and not old, in his fifties perhaps, but with movement as stiff and ginger as Isabelita's arthritic uncle.

He was sad, she decided, rather than dangerous, and she in turn was curious, so she pulled on a coat – not the wilted windbreaker of Lirio's she used for gardening, but the black jacket with the velvet lapels – and collected her tools. She had an unobstructed view of the visitor from Lirio's grave, and while she raked, picked up detritus ignored that morning, and smelled the wet soil under the gerberas, she observed him.

His lips were moving. A prayer perhaps. He dressed blandly, like a schoolteacher, and not one from an expensive private school. From time to time he shifted position, as if his back were stiff. There was grey around his ears, but his hair was jet-black on top. He hadn't shaved.

He didn't appear to be speaking in sentences. A word or two and then silence. A poem? He had a poet's mournful dark eyes.

Isabelita returned to her home and, not quite sure why, pumped up the wheels of her bicycle and oiled its gears, all the while watching the man. He had been there an hour. When he left the cemetery on foot, she followed him on her bicycle. If he became dangerous, she could flee. He still didn't seem dangerous. He walked slowly, occasionally straightening his shoulders, and every dozen steps he rearranged his trousers, as if they fit badly, but they looked good on him. She cycled past and positioned herself on the shore road, the sun warm on her neck. Disappointing her, the torturer's visitor did not sit and have coffee or a beer in the shore café, but entered the train station. Minutes later the train from Aguas Negras pulled in on its way into the mountains.

In the kiosk inside the station, Isabelita bought a newspaper and a tropical ice-cream. The man was gone, back she guessed, to whichever mountain town he had come from.

The torturer's grave was undamaged, but also untidied. She suspected, however, that the visitor had brushed dust from the tombstone's inscription. A month later he returned, and then the month after that, every first Sunday, always alone, always around midday. When months yielded five Sundays, she changed her rhythm, so Lirio's grave was always pristine when the visitor came. On his third visit, it rained and he had travelled without an umbrella – and she was guilty at her delight: she brought him a towel to dry his hair and face. They greeted each other after that, exchanged civilities, but he never gave much of himself. In spring, she walked with him to the station, saying she needed her newspaper.

When the first summer Sunday came, Isabelita wore a new dark navy blouse, short-sleeved and form-fitting, and a summer skirt. She'd been to the hairdresser and the night before had shaved her legs. Lirio was nine years dead and the summer offered more, later trains to the mountains.

'Have a coffee with me,' she said, 'before you go. The shore is beautiful today and I would like to enjoy the sun in your company.' Families and couples sat on the beach, their exposed limbs and torsos shiny in the heat.

'Was he family? You visit so loyally.' She held back from adding, 'but you never clean the grave.'

He shook his head. 'I made a promise. To come.' He freed himself of his jacket, clumsily, his left arm barely moving.

'To him?'

'My torturer?' He closed his eyes. 'No.' He unbuttoned a cuff and rolled his shirtsleeve up his forearm. 'To my brothers, those he had not yet buried. We agreed to meet by his grave.'

No one else had ever come. Had his comrades died, or moved on with their lives?

As he rolled up his other sleeve, his arm was a field of circular, edged scars.

‘He was a smoker.’

He undid the top buttons of his shirt and opened it wide to the sun. A nipple was gone, in its place a puckered, star-like whiteness. Its texture, that of an unearthed lily root.

Later, in her bedroom, she saw his back. The dark, rounded scars reminded her of dried hibiscus petals.

Peace Offering - Duke Stewart

Father taught me to hunt. His sable ponytail, the way his skin captured the bronze rays of late afternoon were evidence of his heritage. When we visited Grandfather on the Reservation, I noticed the proud noses and broad foreheads of my people who were unable to contain their joy showering me with kisses and hugs.

My Native American features were less defined, meaning I couldn't be a lead actor on Reservation Dogs: a flared nose, blue eyes, and dishwater hair from my Mom all but disqualified me. Still, I was loved by my aunts and uncles.

I attended a traditional mid-western high school. In rural Missouri, hunting was a rite of passage. Around ten years of age, a son received a shotgun and rifle. But Father refused to participate, considering the shooting of game with a rifle a mockery of killing. He bow-hunted, saving the .22 for gophers, fat field mice or the unlucky rabbit caught nibbling in our garden.

When I turned sixteen, I saved up money bagging groceries and paid the high school janitor a fifty dollar commission to buy me a pawned 30.06 which I hid in my closet, slipping out on weekends to hunt pigs, wild turkey and deer. Later my friends and I would sit under the stars, chugging bourbon, camping out, rising with a hangover, on Monday bragging about our kills to the cheerleaders with the confidence of a seasoned big game hunter.

But hunting with Father was different. Entering the woods we treated the outing with as much solemnity as attending Mass with Mom, an agreement they made prior to their marriage. He never sang, both of us wondering what the offering plates (Mother tithed ten percent while Father and I gave not a nickel), and the balls of sweat rolling down the pinched harried face of the overweight priest, had to do with the concerns we shared: the harmony of spirit and body, the need to nurture nature so that someday she might nurture us, our housing and drug crisis. The poor infrastructure that made disease a constant threat.

Catholicism paled in comparison to Father's belief in a spirit permeating all of life: from dreams, to the blessing of animals, to an awareness that the sun was incarnate and had once walked upon earth. It was not a faith that proselytized, courting numbers, or paying bills and staff. Our cathedral was sky and earth and you were born into it without needing a sprinkling of water.

When we hunted we carried only canteens, knives and bows made from the shoots of sarvis berry, the flint tips ribbed to allow blood to flow. Struck by such an arrow, the prey died faster, suffering less. Father taught me to aim behind the shoulder but if the deer was moving then below the ribs. The same principle gunners used in World War II shooting flak ahead of the plane.

"Lead with the eyes. Breathe. Keep your hand steady," he said.

I would approach into the wind, darting among trees and then crawling. On one

knee, I withdrew the string, taking aim, the spitting arrow striking the side of the doe.

He showed me how to charm the hide from the meat like removing the rind from an orange using only a third of the blade. How to smell the difference between good venison and bad; how to read the colors of blood, the darker the more diseased the animal. All the parts were edible except the lungs and intestines, and if a hunter was desperate enough, he could survive on the offal of others because most hunters saved only the choicest parts. He let me eat the heart and liver, a stormy taste that clogged the nostrils. It only took a couple of bites to feel full. We prayed afterwards in his tongue, informal and simple like a child's bedtime prayer, thanking The Creator.

I tried to explain to my high school friends how hunting with Dad was a ceremony, but they didn't get it. But I wanted to stay friends with them, these non-natives who told dirty jokes, cheated on math tests and made Tik Tok videos of their crazy antics with cigarette lighters and hair spray. Over time they converted me to their way: using a high mag scope, where the deer looked like it was five yards away. With such an advantage, I stashed my bow and arrow in the attic.

Now, thirty-five years later, I stand with a privileged few provided a one day permit to hunt on the Preserve. When my wife asked why I had allowed my name to be selected along with twenty-nine others, receiving the confirmation in an envelope from the Department of Natural Resources, I could only shrug. Selling life insurance ten hours a day, six days a week, with one child in college and another, an honor's graduate visiting Duke, and a balloon mortgage, a man sheds his habits like a snake its skin: softball, basketball (the achilles), later hiking and fishing (knees and rotator cuff) and then after Father died, hunting. But seeing the ad in the newspaper, my memories caught fire. I entered the lottery and won a ticket.

I'd stored my rifle in the attic, its case covered with cobwebs. Rubbing the barrel with solvent, I resurrected a shine. Rummaging further I discovered my bow and a quiver of arrows. I had been into that attic hundreds of times, and never remembered where they were.

Varnish released the grain. I fitted a new bowstring, and placed the bow and arrows behind my seat below the truck's gun rack. The DNR circular had been clear: no semiautomatics but nothing about bows and arrows. But when I saw the hunters in NRA caps, their hostile eyes, and smirks; torsos bundled up in sheepskin coats, thick gloves and bourgeoisie mustaches; and the women too in camouflage, lampblack faces, wearing musk, hair pinned out of their eyes, I didn't want to amuse them, and un-racked the 30.06.

I mingled with the other lottery winners outside the Ranger Station. The park officer was fair-skinned, freshly shaved. Wind chapped his baby cheeks. He pulled

the flaps of the windbreaker to his ears. He'd been to college and wanted us to know it. He dispersed mimeographed copies, the printing faded, crunch time for the State budgeters who'd scrimped on ink.

"Be back by sundown," he said, the wind fluffing his voice. "And wear your orange vest. It's mandatory. I can't have you mowing each other down. This far out, it'd take a chopper thirty minutes to get to you. In like a needle, out like a fist." Some of the men nervously chuckled at this reminder of how powerful a bullet was.

"Take your time. The census is up. There's plenty. Two hunters per quadrant. That's different than in years past. You don't want to blow this chance by a rules infraction. Anyone found outside their designated area loses their permit and will not be allowed to reapply.

"Like always, it's your responsibility to butcher the kill. You can't just leave it there, okay? We've had some problems with that in the past. I'm sure you're aware, activists are protesting. They haven't been allowed in but it's an open range, they'll find a way. Do your part to uphold our image. Clear your site. We have a taxidermist available at the station. You can arrange if you want the head mounted. Okay, here are your assignments."

My partner was Hank Jurnegan from Sweetwater, Texas. He'd driven all night, stoked on coffee and Krispy Kreme donuts, his hair and beard unruly like after a fierce blow-drying. He talked nonstop. He was nervous or worse, eager. He wore camouflaged pants and jacket, though it made no sense: the prairie was wide open. No heavy brush within miles. He was wired and I didn't like being paired with him, but he didn't seem any worse than the others. The Park Ranger matched the women to women, taking no chances with the men although with the rifles and bowie knives the women carried they could have more than held their own.

Hank suggested we drive both our trucks to our site. He had visions of slaughter. I followed him into the preserve: Yellowstone River to the North, Rockies to the east, the prairie the golden color of wheat, with a few short sturdy trees whose roots were so gnarled they bulged from the ground like varicose veins. A dry unforgiving wind whistled through their branches and howled over the land. Among these fields buffalo were populating but were getting sick to diseases they'd once been able to shake off as easily as a horsefly. Contagious, a threat to livestock, they were now hunted.

Into such a stark wilderness the warrior would come. Compelled out of his lodge, he would hike to an outcrop where he would build a simple shelter of a few sticks and twigs, exposing himself to the elements, no food or water, waiting for a vision. It was not a sin to quit the fast. The only transgression was not to obey the dream.

Moving along the bumpy road, my Bronco's exhaust pipes rattled, The road deadended overlooking a rock field and grass. We cut our engines. The wind resumed its assault. I sidestepped over boulders the size of bowling balls, careful not to break an ankle, convinced Hank would not render aid until the hunt's completion. His prickly face was flushed with excitement. My skin did nothing to bridge the gap between us. He probably thought me Hispanic. Maybe miscegenated. In either case, I was pretty sure I would not be invited to his home. What would Father think seeing me hunt buffalo with a rifle? After receiving defeat from several enemies, the Siksikaus reluctantly turned to firearms for combat. The rifles protected them from all but one: the cavalry soldier whose newer weapons were more powerful, full of exploding ammunition, and accessible to spare parts.

"I'll go this way," Hank said, moving upwind.

With the wind carrying his scent, he'd be lucky to spot a bull with the binoculars he'd strapped around his neck. Men like Hank had no history with the land, taking nature for granted. Driving to the Preserve, I'd listened to another news report, an oil company with too many PCB's in the sludge. The waste management companies had accepted the sludge—no questions asked, depositing it into the earth, poisoning her until someday she would grow sterile and the dry land would fill with flames.

I picked my way through a rock ledge, scree, putting a half mile between myself and a hasty shot that would cause Hank remorse for a month, me for a lifetime. The vest fit securely beneath my arms, visible for miles.

During the Afghanistan War, my customers stopped buying insurance. Glued to their televisions, watching smoldering buildings, bodies burnt to a crisp, a Red Crescent nurse screaming into a thrustout hand-held microphone accusing the US of atrocities; disheveled children, eyes bulging with shock and pasted tears; bereaved mothers dressed in tarblack shawls: How could life insurance compete with smart missiles striking with pinpoint accuracy under joystick control?

The Siksikau warrior got as close as he could to the enemy before killing him. Touching with a club, a bow, a fist or lance, brought points. The more coups a brave counted the more he felt invincible. During the Afghan War, the US got to count coup: drones and missiles with eye in the sky intelligence, and they too felt invincible.

Shapes loomed on the horizon; a herd charged towards us. Overhead, a helicopter beat the air, the percussing rotor, pushing the herd along a course like a gauntlet. Panicking, the buffalo rampaged, tried to regroup, nostrils blaring, overloaded by fear. Shots rang out, several bulls fell, charging the fortified line. The helicopter flanked them into a turn, perfectly orchestrated for Hank's and my benefit. He fired, a muffled discharge, such power that two buffalo fell, others cart-wheeling over them, terror in their stark eyes, the same feeling

Siksikaus probably felt the first time they heard the thunderous retort of cannon. I aimed as I had been taught in front of one of the slower beasts, but the helicopter, the setup, the maddening rush, rid me of joy. This was a spectacle, a massacre. In seconds the pack passed, the helicopter steering them to other stands, their numbers dwindling as they had entered the Ark, two by two.

Hank emerged from between two boulders. His hands trembled; his excited face blustery. "Did you shoot?" he asked.

"I never had a clean line," I said.

"Then they're mine," he said and hurried to the fallen cows, the first shot into her neck, transecting an artery. In seconds she bled to death, kneeling into a this with dignity and grace, I'd be much obliged.

I approached from behind, against the wind, braced one hand beneath her neck and twisted, letting the knife open a half inch chasm through the soft triangle where the muscles met flesh. The blood spurted. She fell, expired, and I hope, feeling little.

We worked efficiently, Hank following my lead, butchering, flies congregating, the message of death trumpeted by the wind. After we'd finished, he removed his soaked glove and offered his hand.

"Thanks," he said. "I couldn't have done it without you. I see why they made us work in pairs."

I refused his offer, holding up my bloody palm. He withdrew his hand as quickly as it had been offered. "I'm sorry you didn't get a shot," he said. "I was just lucky. That's all. Maybe they'll let you come next year." The fortune of the fool I thought; of the drunk driver who survives unscathed from a collision or the gambler who wins just enough to go bankrupt.

Returning to the Ranger Station, I turned in my tags. "No luck?" the Ranger asked.

"Not today," I replied. He shook his head. What a sorry Indian his gesture implied.

As I headed home through a driving rainstorm, golf ball sized hail pelted the windshield hard enough to break the glass, but each time the ice splintered. Layer after layer of opaque balls fell; I struggled to keep the truck on the road. Gradually, fog settled in. The tractor trailer drivers slowed to a crawl and on the winding roads no one risked passing them. I pulled off the road to wait for better visibility.

The murk assumed the shapes of bison. What must it have been like to hunt not against animals but with them? To ride among the buffalo, the horse and rider as one? Arrows were shot from a few feet away at great risk to all, even the squaws who drove the travois; it was unknown in what direction the herd might flee.

I withdrew my bow and arrows. Vehicles passed with the eyes of owls. Everything was lined with moisture. I heard the hoof beats of the ghost pack. I raised my bow, unsteadily took aim into the thick mist and released. I shot all my arrows.

That summer on a trip to Yellowstone my wife and I stopped at the mile marker. My tracks where I'd left the road were baked in the mud. We searched until sundown. We didn't find a single arrow.

I like to think my offering was accepted. In some small way, I quelled the inequities of that hunt. That when the offering plate was passed, I gave what I could and now Old Man, who shaped our earth, and Father no longer hold that day against me.

A Graduation Trip - Huina Zheng

Ling sat on the bench outside the emergency room, the chill of the stainless-steel seat seeping through her cotton dress. That morning, her son had turned back to smile at her before leaving, saying he'd be home for lunch after the interview. That smile stayed with her. An hour later came news of his car accident.

Her phone vibrated in her pocket. She answered mechanically.

"Hello, ma'am, we're offering a family travel package," a young man said, his Mandarin carrying a faint, muffled nasal tone, just like her son's when he spoke in a rush. He described the sea, grasslands, and desert, calling it an unforgettable parent-child experience.

"How old is your child?" he asked.

Ling's gaze never left the red light above the operating room door.

"He'll graduate from college this summer," she said, fingers tracing a shallow scratch along the bench's edge.

"Then it's perfect timing for a graduation trip!" the young man's voice brightened. "It will surely be full of wonderful memories."

The air conditioner hummed, carrying waves of disinfectant toward her.

Poetry



Sharisa Aidukaitis

carrying you

diminutive throng of cells
congealed into an embryonic
human saturated with potential
to write a symphony or build a
skyscraper or sculpt a masterpiece
or be someone's best friend
but instead slipped breathlessly into
the realm of unknowing and I ache at
the dissolution of fingers I would
have held and a brain I would
have taught to read and a smile I would
have imprinted into my heart
and vocal chords I would have tried
to make laugh every day
if only I'd had the chance
but your biology could not
sustain you—could not complete
the creation of a wild and precious
life—and I agonize at the betrayal
of your fickle DNA that somehow
kept your whole self from me
but I hold you still tenaciously defiantly
as a few of your cells yet circulate
in my microchimeric veins each time
my heart beats after yours stopped

effluxion

at some point while we were busy
building fragile sandcastles
and racing across the monkey bars
and sitting around crackling campfires
and throwing water balloons at each other
or maybe while I was tapping on my keyboard
and trying to clear the clog in the drain
and fighting against garden weeds
and sitting in dusty meetings
you lost your baby fat
and baby teeth
and your lisp
and I preemptively miss
you as you fold your gangly
eight-year-old bones onto my lap and
breathlessly explain the food chain in the Amazon
because most days I can't believe that this lanky creature
grew from a miniature infant I incubated
and I wonder how many days we have left
before you are too grown physically
and mentally for spontaneous
snuggles

not the happiest place on earth

sparkling Minnie Mouse ears
on a petite headband adorned with
the trappings of imagination and the
bouncing laughter of magical innocence
glinting red in the afternoon sun,
lie on the silent gray sidewalk
forgotten
dropped
discarded
abandoned
outside the prison gate
and somewhere a little girl misses them
less than she misses a
brother
uncle
cousin
father

Casey Bottono

Soil and Solitude

In the gap between your leaving
And learning of your absence
I put your book down, because I thought I knew
How this story ended.

Trying to make sense
Moving through fog
You offered so much peace
Then pulled the rug.

Numbness at the point of impact
Gave way to disbelief and anger
After all this time, the smouldering remains
'How could you?' echoes with no apparent end.

There is nothing 'apparent' or 'suspected'
This loss is the most concrete in some time
My restlessness is a product of your gone-ness
Questions, and no answers.

For now, I tend my grief daily
Like sunflowers on a windowsill
Planted in honour of you.

I am known for stumbling
But this is a different loss of balance

Where you once were, now you are not
And no bright sunflower bloom could take your place.

John Delaney

Cremins

For "Jo" (1914-1999)

First and oldest friend, you were my mother.
What more is there to say at times like these?
You loved your life, and we loved each other.

Regrettably, I never met your brother,
who crashed my crib once, drunk in dungarees.
Oldest, you were his friend, but first my mother.

Nor did I know your parents: I gather
a lady landlocked by a captain of the seas,
who loved their lives when they loved each other.

After you and dad divorced, some other
woman might have fled from this heart disease,
first to her oldest friends. Not my mother.

Such bitter sorrow never could smother
your passion for projects and travel. At peace,
you loved your life as you loved another.

Why then, to deaf death, should I bother
to say anything? Just listen to me, please,
to a grown man who once bounced on your knees.
You were my first and oldest friend, mother.
We loved our lives, for we loved each other.

Michelle M Hartman

Here but not much longer

Flames are gossiping in the fireplace, safe and low.
A length of lovely light laps out of roiling clouds.

November has the most potential.
Poets say Death's wardrobe is as articulated as the Spector he resembles.

Safe is my favorite four-letter word.
What if one never loved, would the potential become weaponized?

Poems are meant to have concrete images.
As though you're driving through a jigsaw box lid.

Mary Shelly wrote of a love one could scarcely imagine.
Tears slide differently on each face.

I saw him today in passing.
Planck cannot quantify the irony in a chance glimpse.

A gorgeous day grows overwhelmingly mundane.
There is someone for everyone, but only if everyone is willing to settle.

Quantum Bayesianism

When it's late, quiet
I make Irish coffee
lite a candle redolent of wood
moss vanilla
and remove piano cover

Starting with Turkish March
my fingers slide
into Chopin Fantaisie-Impromptu

well into
Clair de Lune

I sense your presence
behind me
eyes closed
softly smiling

I play until weariness
bows my head
When a writer falls
in love with a person
they cannot die

In a night or two
praying for silent observer
to attend
I'll play again
until tomorrow
I surrender useless hands

Fiona Hartmann

Keepsakes

We barely even touched
but your hand on my lower back
flayed the flesh
and made a paper airplane
that longed to fly from its bird cage.

I wanted you to strip me certain
how a man does a woman
how hungry eyes lick ink off the page
and a star collapses on itself
and we marvel at the illuminated grave
for years to
come.

Could you help from treasuring
the tragedy of my innocence
unearthing the red-jewelled
answer in my mouth
as I shed skins of versions
that I had promised myself
I would never become.

The curse of my throat
is that it is a flood
of the fractured
and mundane.
I understand
how it is too much work to pick
up the puzzle pieces but I only know
how to make a mess.

I wish I could make the promise
to be less boring next time or else
pledge myself to monk's muteness
but after you
I am trying not to make promises
I won't keep
any more.

Crash

Floating on the sleet ice
you're supposed to drive into the skid
skating the black and blue bruised ocean
though disaster screams
in your bones to wrench away
we are not supposed to want
the crash

but just once
I wanted someone to crawl
through the bone-crunch cracks
glass dragged flesh, tire tracks
of red, air perfumed
with sweet gasoline
to lay down
beside me and
burn.

Discarded

We lost ourselves in this love
of self-annihilation
I wanted to be ripped apart
at the atomic level
spread out
into the irradiated wind
made the seeds of a new world
planted in the green glow
that for the first time
something tender might bloom
from me.

I hold your bones in my arms
reassembled the paper thin
stripes of your affection
we all wanted to escape
our body for a little while
leave behind the old coat
on a park bench for someone
to pick up
and put on.

Dolled Up

This patchwork love
taking the scraps of you
to sew a new coat
that you'll never see

paraded around town
on the arm of another
man
while I wear your lipstick

lips, red like the wound
I left you
a stain worse than wine
and twice as intoxicating.

Riptide

My faith was too weak
even for God
who turned me away
for the ones who sin
grievously but confess daily.

I sin only a little
but stay silent. A little
less than the amount of water
it takes to drown
while you stand
on dry land.

Not only doctors know
that there are ways die
while doing nothing. I was almost
redeemed by loving you but the tide
pulled me under
a mile short
of the shore. You tried
to teach me
to swim but I
never listened.

M. J. Heikkila

miss your chaos

we fought; I yelled; you screamed.

but I'd take that over not having you any day – could you come back to me?

your body is gone, buried, by our hands;
a reminder of what you were, but your soul
it's here – I hope it is – I desperately hope it stays beside me,
touching my palm,
grazing my heart.

the times your stories would fill our drives
are left with silence and an empty passenger seat.
the stop to get coffee together no longer exists;

I go to our coffee spot, ordering your favorite, but it still hasn't brought you
back – a foolish wish. each sip of your favorite recipe
a desperate and last-minute hollow attempt to have you close to me.

every sip of mocha is just as bitter as it is sweet;
sip makes me miss your chaos;
every sip makes me ache;

the sweetness fills my mouth but the tears stain my steering wheel;
the coldness refreshes me, but the exhaustion weighs in my bones,
burying me deeper, drowning me further.
suffocating me
with no remorse

the moon rising, the wind howling;
the obsidian of the night sky bleeding onto me,
into my veins, into my thoughts.

Grieving the connection that remains severed
as the constellations build each passing night,
but i still have yet to recover.

caramel

there's a sweetness to remembering,
sugar on my tongue;
caramel dripping down my chin.

until it burns;
sweetness tastes different when it's touched by loss.

when it's no longer held with care;
but they burn so intricately in my memories.

promises spoken between each knuckle;
done wrong in the past.

i can taste it; burnt coffee and maple —
a hollow need;
burnt inside my memory like
the bitter taste of burnt caramel.

yet, i just want caramel.
scorched caramel that lingers with a bitterness —
between their lips to mine.

seared in my memories;
they burn so intricately.
golden hues and broken smiles;
the loss better in reality than any make
believe ending i could ever gaslight myself to believe in —

now, every memory is molten amber turned bitter;
yet, i want [] back now.
wishing for the taste of burnt caramel,
maple,
coffee,
Again.

actor

you've always been a much better *actor* than me.

you always knew what to say in front of others
and what to say in private.
words of flattery to another's eye;
words of degradation in our private spaces.

together, yet it was a union of grief;

a union of loneliness.

you've always been a much better *actor* than me;

smiling at me while we were at dinner,
choosing my clothes so we matched,
wrapping my hair around your finger,
squeezing my shoulder,
yet, you always pushed my hand away from you in private,
criticizing my movements, my thoughts.
you always pointed out the flaws,
twisting and turning them against me like the roots of an Oak tree.

you spent your time with me
and then wanted to pretend that nothing happened.

that the bruises on my neck didn't matter,
when you kissed them after you
were the artist who painted them.

i agree; we can pretend that nothing happened;

But you've always been a better *actor* than me.

concrete

i searched for them;
searched for love in the heart of someone
who wanted a devoted loved; one to rip me apart,
build me into a new person

the thorns of it pressed into my flesh,
 curling and tightening like living wire,
whispers of softness crawling into my ears,
 before a slap shattered the hush—sharp, crystalline pain,
wrapped in a lullaby that demanded obedience.

i gave it.

this was love _____ the closeness offered was love;
 a brutalist and concrete love,
 jagged and unyielding,
 the kind I have yet to touch outside this wreckage;
 a love disguised as warm, understanding, fair;
which i have yet to find.

a love that brings tears,
years of push and pull;
years of turning me into someone who would follow,
who would cry on my knees,
apologizing for things that deserved nothing.

A love i ache to forget;
A love i refuse to ever endure again.

Jessica Hinds

God's Brunch

you never made me
meals growing up
 -eggs and spam?
 -sure.

sodium sizzles
seduces my nostrils
mom cooked
one year ago today, she sizzled
burned to death

god's brunch?

you won't tell me you are sick
you ramble 'bout coke
as if i don't remember

the white lines
on the glass table
at the diablo
apartment for divorcees
where neither of us
would confess, when mom come-round sunday
how the four-tooth black gap
in my five-year-old smile
come to be.

-all done?
 -sure.

you mosey to the couch
i avoid your good whiskey
sneak only the lesser proofs
inhale the gasoline knife
of your large batch ryes

sunset
cigarette sizzle
speak only of religion
money
politics
'cus you won't talk about your health
or mom
or how she died

Grant Moore

The Origin of Lies

Oh, Ila, don't be weeping,
 my dear, you misconstrue;
The sun is only sleeping
 before it rises new.

I'll wait with you til morning,
 and tell you of the stars,
the memories adorning
 the empty night with scars.

This love that's learned by lacking,
 whose vastness has no chart,
in silent orbits tracking
 the shaping of your heart.

Please trust that nothing passes,
 we only change our form.
The morning dew amasses
 on leaves the sun can't warm.

Child, listen, though you're growing,
 some things cannot be known
until you've grown up knowing
 out here you're all alone.

I'll be with you forever,
 these words will be a lie.
If I could but this deliver:
 To live until you die.

So while you're small, keep holding
 my hand as though it soothes,
The world will keep unfolding
 each wrinkle that it smooths.

Believe me when I'm saying:
 Oh, Ila, darling dear,
No matter what I'm staying,
 I'll always be right here.

Ode to Death

if i am doomed to die, to fade away,
then let the Summer dig for me a grave
so deep beneath her depths of supple clay
to reach the slate my roots in dying crave
so seasons pass and cast
 my bone to hidden stone
 through layers moistened brown,
the loam of ages past
 from gilded breezes blown
 that ancient storms brought down.

in time, my stones will seep through Autumn seams,
the teeth of grinding Earth that gnash the dead,
returning flesh to banks of violent streams
where fallen leaves revive in bloody red
remaining veins encased
 in amber pebble tombs,
 each waiting turns to die,
depart this world erased
 and face the end that looms
 in dust of covered sky.

so keep these shards on sheltered shores and guard
the song of raving larks and restless gaze;
let nothing chance upon my resting yard
as sorrow sheds its form, at last, decays;
i have no edge to skip
 but only weight to sink,
 so rising tides return
in floods the currents whip
 to Winter's very brink,
 my stirring final churn.

and when my ripples flatten back to glass
remember once again the scent of Spring,
perfumed with wasted youth and sassafras,
regret dissolved to tempest underwing,
ascending cloudless heights
 through heaven's darkest spheres,
 diluting down to air,
returning now as lights,
 this starry nest appears
 to mark my vast despair.

Eulogy

mound of the earth, the funeral pyre,
sermons of fire, infernos of oak.

burning of briars, spiraling higher,
chorus expired and softly I spoke:

nothing is left, but cinders remain,
warm to the touch, as memories fade.

look to the thrashing showers of rain,
mourn with the hissing coils arrayed.

pound for the taking, body of ash,
weight of the flame, transmuted to wind.

thundering blacks, the cymbals that crash,
scavenging clouds, vultures descend.

weep with the water, falling to feet,
honor your father, drink of his heat.

Pantoums of Dementia

Movement I - Undulation

the seconds slowed to stop as Father passed,
when flocking sons returned to home to mourn,
then Mother's mind began to break at last
as moments shed in threads she once had worn.

when flocking sons returned to home to mourn,
recast in lensing rays of age amassed
as moments shed in threads she once had worn
the Father's sons adorned with clothes outcast.

recast in lensing rays of age amassed
a question, Mother, may I have a dance?
the Father's sons adorned with clothes outcast
an offered hand through loops of time's expanse.

a question, Mother, may I have a dance?
their Father knelt and tender took her hand,
an offered hand through loops of time's expanse,
their final words in wilting hearts expand.

their Father knelt and tender took her hand,
the seconds slowed to stop as Father passed,
their final words in wilting hearts expand,
then Mother's mind began to break at last.

Movement II - Rearrangement

remember now before the future fades,
the sutured minutes of memories held,
records replayed as grooving sound degrades,
advancing echoes, music notes dispelled.

the sutured minutes of memories held:
now twirling dance, oh younger selves, entrance
advancing echoes, music notes dispelled
through silent waltz that swells with last romance.

now twirling dance, oh younger selves, in trance
with candled spells of woven hands that grasp
through silent waltz that swells with last romance
of eyes reshaping molds, the fated clasp.

with candled spells of woven hands that grasp
relapsing moments sung by bells and crowds
of eyes, reshaping molds the fated clasp
of past refrains now sealed beneath the clouds.

relapsing moments sung by bells and crowds
concealed by crumbling walls, demented shades
of past refrains now sealed beneath these clouds
that clutter skies in swarms that stretch decades.

concealed by crumbling walls, demented shades
(remember now before the future fades)
invade the hollowed mind as scream pervades
records replayed as grooving sound degrades.

Movement III - Dissolution

remember ancillary note sentries:
the good can decay many ways.
phantom morrow's cough. in times realize
the mention there of tenant seasons.

the good candy came anyways;
all target the damaged mind in trance,
(the men shun their often antsy sons)
the flow ingrained decomposes.

altar, get the damn aged mind, entrance
memory erstwhile, foe kissing;
the flowing rain eddy composes
another ushered

memo rehearsed while focusing
an aim, wintry slight, upward ingrown
an other us heard
the fading names of suns.

a name when trees light up, warding grown
remembrance, ill airy notes in trees,
the fading names of sons
fan tomorrow's coffin, time's real eyes.

Larksong

at least the larks remember songs
each morning rise you're gone again.

the mourning veils of scattered throngs
depart your wake without amen.

the men who take your parts away
forget to take my silent heart.

they leave a lily black bouquet
whose petals fingers tear apart.

and when i stand alone in pain,
the stems are bare and nothing's changed.

the birds begin their last refrain
as though they knew and prearranged.

if nothing else, their voice belongs;
at least the larks remember songs.

Peter Leroe-Muñoz

She was her once

Mother-in-law is the girl posing,
blue hat and white gloves,

melting as far as she can and
smiling with bone stars as wide

as the low valley she left
at seventeen to give birth

to a responsible family that
was raised with the money

of an unpictured man who couldn't be
her love, or even like, but sensibly

financed their home on the next
bay across the ocean.

She refuses to name the picture boy
who also smiles and shares her ribs.

Before more questions, she yanks the crinkled snap, buries
it in the crust of a book and sighs in the valley tongue.

Genealogy resumes as scheduled.

James B. Nicola

Mary

She asked me, “What is the prompt for Saturday’s Writers Circle?”—which I host. She was not sure she’d be walking again by then. I told her “Unexpected Fun.” “Being alive,” she chuckled.

The Alchemy of a Lie

The first sin of his life: his first Confession.
He soon believed what he had never done.
His self-identity as a malfeasor—
think of Sisyphus, who's rolled the rock
all the way up, all of a sudden losing
a tender grip—has been downhill since then.

The first love of his life was not to be
requited, nor the second, third, or fourth.
So desultory dalliances ensued,
and fickle quick fulfillments of a night:
names rarely traded, thank-yous genuine,
though felt not with the heart but other parts.

The first win of his life felt like a hollow
victory. For everybody knew
he cheated, or believed he did. It was
not true. But Rumor is a nasty bitch
whose bite marks never fade. So he became
the world's worst winner. Wealth seemed to expunge.

The first of fourteen failures in his life
was not his fault. None of them really were
any more than the first. But yesterday,
sans spouse, sans job, sans home, sans faith, he went
back to his hometown parish, took confession,
and took back his first sin to start again.

Swearing Out Loud

The day I found out that my mom was not
My Mom I burped YOU LIE and uttered words
unmouthed before

It was her funeral

Some relatives I had not met before
were talking about it

I swore a storm
and found out that my mom was

not

My

Mom

the day so strewn with black crepe everywhere
that any morbid misery of mine
was nothing as I cursed the world

At home

I did not speak for two

three

four

five years

There everyone had known except for me

Not one was to be trusted I resolved

Now that I've had two children of my own
plus Syd's three and we've been through their teen years
when both of us were daily cursed out loud

I've started visiting My Mother's plot
whenever we go back to my home town
just to say thank you

Thank you

Thank you

Thank you

David E Poston

Crossroads

for Robert Johnson

the moon being new
he can't see
where the good way lies

a voice from the dark says
Stand where you're at
so the man stands at the crossroads
in the pitch-black night

says to himself
Might not be the devil
but it sure ain't the Lord

when a man's unwelcome
once the sun goes down
he should be afraid

but he wants to ask
what Virginia and the baby
had to die for

~~~~

he must have stood there for a while  
though he would never tell a soul

he just starts walking  
and he walks all that anguish  
down the road  
in spite of the weight of it  
which in time he  
almost  
learns to bear

though there is no rest  
from the hellhounds  
trailing every soul  
in every crowd  
from Rosedale to San Antonio  
to Chicago to Dallas  
who hears  
that anguish

and all those souls  
in all  
those joints  
say

*We who bring our sorrows tonight  
will lay them down for a spell  
and though we are not made  
for walking the path you walk*

*we will take them up again  
and walk on in darkness  
nor will we stop for fear of it*

## **The Great Molasses Flood**

*North End, Boston, 15 January 1919*

imagine  
two million gallons of molasses  
under a brilliant winter-blue New England sky  
roaring like an el train  
    smacking you  
with enough force  
that you are spared from  
choking and guttering  
    indecorously  
in its dulcet stickiness

ask yourself            would you rather  
the oblivious fade  
of a morphine drip  
or a tsunami of irony

ask yourself            was it secobarbital  
or the eye dropper cap  
that took out Tennessee Williams

imagine that poor apocryphal tortoise  
loosed from the eagle's touch  
    tumbling toward  
Aeschylus's bald head

that's how I imagine  
my friend learning  
his leukemia            had un-paused

## **Kali Sutherland**

### **I Am Still Alive**

Only when you give yourself up to the world unknown does it's darker sides begin to show  
And you find it everywhere.  
It's hidden in the walls,  
Under our beds,  
In-between the cracks in the staircases  
And it spews  
Out of the dirty, rusty old vents.  
The worst of it is in the showers though.  
You can't avoid it there.  
No matter how much you try to burn everything away  
The mold sits, waiting on the floors, the walls,  
And it looms  
Above you on the ceilings; threatening at every turn  
Discoloring skin as it's hidden within falling condensation.

No matter how much I scratch myself raw  
I will never be clean

People leave and all I can do is loathe myself  
For all the opportunities I've missed  
For all the times I never simply said "Hi"  
People stay and all I can do is loathe myself  
For not being better  
For not doing more  
I am never good enough and nothing I do will change that

Body language scares me for I see every small thing as hatred  
"ive done something wrong again"  
And then You come to me  
Joke about me  
You say that I need thicker skin  
But what you don't understand is that your  
Jokes  
Are my  
truths  
I walk on eggshells so I don't wake You up  
I am afraid of your eyes

Burn into me as they shake my pathetic soul  
I worry that your voice will tear me in half  
Leaving me to wilt away as I attempt to tape myself together

I've thought about leaving  
Throw my corpse into the fire so that  
I'm less expensive that way  
But I am afraid of pain and continue to make us all suffer

I have never been singular  
These waves ebb and flow  
Leaving me for a day, a week, a month,  
Until it all comes crashing back and I cannot stop myself from drowning

I am too big to allow even a chance of swimming

I fall apart and tangle myself in madness  
Carve a smile onto my face  
"i am alright"  
Sounds are muffled in my ears  
My skin turns grey; my eyes empty  
I hear the choir sing but my mouth is glued shut  
I hold a gun in my hand and distantly wonder  
Constantly asking myself "why?"

I am tired of drowning.  
Of not feeling  
I like to feel  
Let me live in the moment and see beyond my understanding

I barely float above the water long enough to finally ask for help

And I see that your eyes no longer burn  
I hear that your voice is full of Love  
I finally feel your hugs as they caress my healing heart  
I am learning to see the sunlight as more than a dim glow  
People leave and I will be okay  
People stay and I truly smile with them  
I will work on fixing  
Gently sewing myself up piece by piece  
I'm not good at it yet but I will continue to do my best as it's all I can do

As I continue to learn to no longer  
grieve living.

## Wally Swist

### A Corner we Inhabit

You barely recognize me  
when I see you among your  
tablemates, all of you searching  
infinity, a choreography  
of all of your hands in the air,  
a sisterhood of bees flying  
before each one lands  
on a flower. But I wheel you  
to a corner we normally inhabit,  
take away the slinky bracelets  
that are probably someone else's,  
and snap on the signature  
silver bracelets you wore daily.  
You begin to realize who I am  
and settle in to that, take  
my hand in your lap, place it  
in both of yours. After  
your breakfast, you offer  
an uncanny clarity, follow  
my sentences, as I allow you  
to find your way, help  
you finish your thoughts  
only when necessary. When  
it is time to go, I listen to  
my inner voice. Instead of  
turning around to see you  
try to stand up to follow me,  
swaying back and forth,  
inciting both of our fear  
levels beyond measure,  
I blow you a kiss, and you  
respond by catching mine,  
then I catch yours, thinking  
that you may only be able to  
conceive of doing one thing  
at a time, and it works.  
So, when I turn back,  
I see you still safely seated,  
now engaged, your face  
shining, cheeks lit,  
as deep as roses in bloom.

## Dharma

Because you are now doing better  
in the Dharma Unit,  
I miss you even more as I leave  
and when I return home,  
since you are clearer again,  
since you remind me more  
of who you were when we were  
at home together, although  
you couldn't remember those days,  
which is much like the word Dharma  
itself, what the ward has been  
named, a Sanskrit word difficult  
to translate. Some regard it  
as "the way," but it is not  
Tao, known as the watercourse  
way; others say it means truth,  
if so, we can think of it  
as truth of the way or the way  
of truth, similarly that can be  
a journey, and then it could  
be a journey of truth, still others  
don't think it can be translated  
at all, but if it actually can  
be defined Alzheimer's may  
represent the ultimate journey  
due to its endless grind  
of the individual into variations  
of nothing, so Alzheimer's,  
in a way, is similar to Dharma,  
but the former is a complete  
erasure, whereas the latter  
is best to think of as a path,  
and you are always  
my path, just where I left you,  
in your wheelchair,  
looking down at your lap  
where you stroke and preen  
your white owl puppet,  
your fingers moving over  
the wings as they do  
over the backs of my hands.

## Your Glasses

They were lost, then found  
in a nurse's cart between the shelves  
and the metal backing, having fallen  
in between the struts. Now I think  
I can bring purpose to every morning,  
and ask you for your glasses  
so that I can clean them, after which  
I can fit them on your face.  
But your disease, although ever-present,  
is never predictable, and we all live  
in the humility of its rapid changes.  
Every time I ever so carefully bring  
your hair behind your ears to place  
the curved ends of your glasses  
around each one, each a small shell,  
and position the lenses and the nose pads  
so that they are aligned with your face,  
within minutes you take the glasses  
off again, playing with their slender stems  
in your hands. After going awry  
at least a dozen times, I try to explain  
once more that you need to leave  
your glasses on so you can see better,  
which you agree, forgetting that  
you are the one taking them off.  
I check behind your ears to see if  
you have developed sores,  
but fortunately your skin is clear.  
When the call for breakfast is lifted,  
I wheel your chair into the dining area,  
park you at our table. Perhaps  
the cheese omelette will make you forget  
about wearing your glasses,  
perhaps you will finally leave them on,  
without my ever needing to know why  
you couldn't remember the reason  
you kept taking them off.  
By the time the last morsel of one  
of your favorite breakfasts is consumed,  
I'm looking at you and you're looking  
at me, both of us at ease with the other,  
enough to continue watching rain fall  
on a Saturday morning, occasionally  
both of us blinking when some droplets.  
strike the windows, streaking the glass.

## Handkerchiefs

I found the box on the bottom shelf  
of a small three-tiered cherry end table  
pushed to the back so I couldn't see it.  
When I held the box, I felt its lightness  
but suspected something might be  
inside, something special, knowing  
your proclivities for sweet surprises.  
Opening the box, I saw the Lane emblem  
imprinted on the inside cover,  
a company known for their cedar boxes  
of varying sizes, and inside this  
miniature I found a plethora of folded  
embroidered handkerchiefs,  
all announcing themselves  
from another era, mostly meant  
for women. stitched with images  
of flowers and fruit. When I presented  
the box to you, your eyes brightened  
and you began to sort through each  
handkerchief with quiet glee,  
not unlike Psyche when jealous  
Aphrodite tasked her with sorting  
a pile of mixed grain, in order to  
gain Cupid back as her lover,  
emblematic of the soul's journey  
toward immortality, as you  
fold and refold the handkerchiefs,  
placing them in piles only you  
can discern what their significance is,  
though they all intimate beauty,  
a rose blossoming among so many  
linen roses touching your hands,  
the radiance illuminating your face.

## Embracing It All

Nearly forgotten,  
I came upon your black velvet  
dress you wore the night  
of the reading I was accompanied  
by the jazz cellist, your elegance  
on display in its significance  
and understatement, how you  
moved in the folds of that  
softness made the word beautiful  
something soothing to the touch.  
I took it from one closet  
to hang it in another, to archive it  
for the bluest of rainy days.  
Taken by surprise in my sorting,  
I chanced on your passport  
to Scotland when you were  
an au pair in Bridge of Weir,  
when you worked for Quarriers  
Homes and oversaw a group  
of orphans, your six month stay  
there between college and grad  
school, where you blossomed as  
a young woman in the photographs,  
your proud entries written  
in Parker fountain pen. Then all  
the boxes in various sizes, both  
wood and steel, containing treasures,  
one silver, lined with red plush  
containing miniature matching  
tea cups and saucers, heartbreaking  
in their sweetness of the thought  
of you assembling them together,  
both forethought and afterthought,  
made me catch my breath.  
Most of all, the photograph of you  
on the beach before the surf  
on the Cape, elated, arms stretched  
so as to try to embrace all of it,  
participating in the dance  
of all things, that I showed to you  
this Easter morning, and even though  
you can only say individual words  
and are unable to speak in complete

sentences, I am grateful you are  
still able to appreciate the wind in  
the trees, the colors of their flowers,  
and what is remarkable in  
the quality of the light that makes  
everything tremble in its brilliance.

## Paris Taratuta

### I love you, but please don't touch me

my chest constricted,  
squeezed;  
I felt your cheek  
pressed against my shoulder.  
I was glad for the fabric of the sleeve  
protectively between  
your skin and mine.

a cold bolt of energy  
tempted me  
to jump up and run when  
your hand rubbed up and down my arm,  
or your fingers entwined with mine,  
sweaty,  
my stiff knuckles aching to pull away.  
I try not to meet your eyes.

I convinced myself not to cry,  
thankful you told yourself the same.  
*I need us to be just friends again-*  
I needed to be free.

don't look at me with sad eyes.  
my skin is trapped in the shape of me, and  
trapped it may stay all my life.  
I needed to be free.

**she isn't me; she is free**

she was so proud, I remember.  
tracing inside the lines with color,  
cross-hatching the flowers.  
cross-legged, or propped up by elbows  
on cat-furred carpet,  
but she isn't me.

make a movie, plastic limbs  
stiffly gesturing toward one another,  
voices comic, hair in knots,  
velcro fashion. she  
experienced friendship as easily  
as on small screens.  
but she isn't me.

bouncing, squealing,  
in circles; falling, brushing the dirt  
off thin pink sweaters, bruising  
her nose with her knee.  
packed between them, side-by-side  
like sardines.  
black cat, mummy mummy,  
popcorn, front-flips.  
but she isn't me.

drawing owls, puppies,  
spider-kitties, girls with swords,  
with ten-color pens on notebook  
paper, her cover pages.  
forming the shapes of stories.  
singing songs.  
proud, I think.  
but she isn't me.

she isn't me.  
I mean, if I were her  
then I'd be free.  
I'd be happy, I believe.  
but she isn't me.

**Kelly Talbot**

**Stone Plea**

Touch this  
weathered form.

Know that  
obsidian  
fades to charcoal.

Feel the mana  
etched in  
these runes.

Read the worn  
soul-braille.

Squeeze hard.

Blood still exists  
within this stone.

## Violated

Jagged life  
cutting through my veins,  
billions of green needles  
bursting through my pores,  
manifestations of myopic dreams  
engineered to shatter  
my purity, my diversity,  
until monolithically  
cannibalizing  
eons of evolution,  
I feel your parasitism  
and I cannot scream.

My soul unravels as I decay  
into a genetically modified orb  
as my aquamarine rolling fields  
of hydrogen and oxygen  
synthetically choke,  
harden, and grow cold,  
and I stiffen into a spinning,  
spiraling, marbled tomb.

**Sam M Woods**

**A TASTE OF GRIEF**

A room that's white everywhere,  
a decaying body in bed.  
A thoughtless painting on the wall  
with six flowers above her head.

My sister making herself small.  
An aunt I wish wasn't there.  
A language I can't understand.  
Antiseptic air.

Waves from oceans in my ears.  
The incessant need to run.  
The sound of someone else's tears.  
Air escaping someone.

My father falling to his knees.  
Time that moves too slow.  
All I taste is grief and fear  
before I turn to go.

## TERMINAL

I wasn't surprised when I heard what happened.  
Dead in your mother's basement,  
Choked on the good time you poisoned yourself  
with.  
I wasn't even sad.  
We mourn people like you before the crash.

I saw you once, brush in hand,  
painting red letters on the wall—  
fat, jagged text I couldn't read.  
Could you?  
Did you always know it would end like this?  
Fear kept me frozen.  
For that, I'm grateful.

I do think about your mother, though.  
Does the basement look the same?  
How much did she know?  
Why didn't you ever feel her fear  
the way I felt my mother's?

You loved her, I think—  
as much as your brain could love anything.

I was a tourist in your world.  
Still am, if I'm honest.  
But I haven't missed my flight home. Not yet.

## GABRIEL

With a kitten dying in the next room, I step outside to have a conversation with God.

The weather is dreary and gray, but there's no rain yet. I smoke a cigarette and cry, trying to gather my thoughts. I've never really prayed; I've never really believed... but sometimes you have to hedge every bet you have.

I throw the cigarette butt, a habit I detest. I will walk around with butts in my pocket, stinking of them, so they don't end up as litter. Today I don't care.

I cry, sob, beg and plead with Him. Tell him *I know this is stupid, I know there are more important things, but I need this thing. I really need it. I need this miracle. I know I've asked for them before, and maybe I've gotten a few, but I really need this now. If not for me then for him. And if you can't do that, then I need you to take him so this stops. I don't know if I believe in you, and most days I'm sure I don't, but isn't this when you're supposed to reveal yourself to me? Isn't this when I'm supposed to hear you, feel some inner peace, something? Shouldn't the clouds part, and the sun warm my skin? Shouldn't I be reassured? Aren't you supposed to be here when I need you most, and God, I need you.*

The silent stream of thoughts flows through me. This wind picks up, and it gives me goosebumps. I stare at the sky for a second and think *Aren't you supposed to help me?*

As soon as I think it the rain starts, heavy and hard. I laugh through my sobs and scream "I don't know what this is supposed to mean", out loud this time. I stand there for a while, getting wet, laughing and crying, not sure what to think of any of it.

I promise God I'll name the kitten Gabriel if he lets me keep him. Then I promise I will call him Gabriel no matter what, as a show of the faith I don't have yet. I don't tell anyone his name yet. I don't say the name out loud.

## Good Bones

I keep dreaming of a house falling apart.  
The foundation cracking.  
Water damage so deep it feels  
like the whole thing might give in.

When I wake  
You tell me the house has good bones.  
I don't know much about skeletons-  
of people or houses-  
but I assume it's fine.  
You say it's fine.  
So it must be fine.

Our bones aren't so good these days.  
Old and creaky.  
Patched, but holding.  
Still: good bones,  
they say.

Last night the floor went soft again.  
Tiles buckled like grief under the fridge.  
The wallpaper peeled itself  
back into memory.

Something under the house is shifting.  
Wet breath behind the drywall,  
a spine that grows in rain.

They say the bones are good.  
Say it like gospel.  
Say it like saying so  
will keep the whole thing standing.

We nod. We believe.  
We learn not to flinch  
when the ceiling sighs.

What is rain but the ritual of forgetting?  
What is rot but a history  
no one wants to write down?

I dream the house folds inward,  
swallows itself beam by beam.  
Still, we hold ourselves upright.  
Still, I sleep.

# Contributors

## Non-Fiction

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry chapbook, *Fairytales*, was published by Bottlecap Press. Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams*) was published by Type Eighteen Books.

Katie Kent is a writer of fiction and non-fiction, living in the UK with her wife, cat and dog. Her non-fiction is published in *The Mighty, Ailment*, and *OC87 Recovery Diaries*. She was a runner up in the Oxford Writing Mentors Competition in 2022. Her website is at <https://www.katiekentwriter.com/>.

Jane, writing as Luna, is a UK-based writer exploring the quiet intersections of mental health, identity, nature, and transformation. Her work blends lyrical prose, personal truth, and mythic imagery to honour the resilience found in invisibility, recovery, and hope. She writes at @Stilllightstories.

Penny Nolte creates gentle narratives of family and place. After a long pause from storytelling her newest work is found in *The Avalon Literary Review, Macrame Literary Journal*, and *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*, among others. Originally from upstate New York, Penny now calls the Green Mountains of Vermont home.

Maria has been published in newspapers and magazines, including *Gordon Square Review*. She enjoys writing and nature, along with spending time with her brilliant husband and beautiful daughter.

Dale Scherfling is a former National Guard and Navy journalist and photographer. His work has appeared in *Third Act Magazine, Does it Have Pockets Magazine, Lost Blonde Literary, All Hands Magazine, Pacific Crossroads*.

Andrea Tate, MA, MFA, is a writing professor at Antioch University, where she teaches Writing and Publishing. Andrea's essays have been featured in *HuffPost, MSN, BuzzFeed, Manifest Station, Brevity Blog, Hippocampus*, and more. Andrea is currently working on her memoir, *I'll Show You*. For more on Andrea, see [andreatate.net](http://andreatate.net).

## Visual Art

Roger Camp lives in Seal Beach, CA where he muses over his orchids, walks the pier, plays blues piano and spends afternoons reading under an Angel's Trumpet with a charm of hummingbirds. His poetry has appeared in *Pank, North American Review, Rust + Moth, Southern Poetry Review* and *Nimrod*.

Sean Bw Parker MA is an artist, writer and musician. He has written or contributed to a number of books on culture, justice reform and poetry, had artwork shown at exhibitions, given talks at venues and festivals, and lives in Worthing, UK.

Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. His monologue show, *Twelve from Texas*, was performed recently in NYC by Equity Library Theatre. His poetry collection, *Maybe Birds Would Carry It Away*, is published by Kelsay Books. Gallery - <https://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/f861509283>

Amyah Walker is a graphic design student at The University of Olivet

## Fiction

William Ade's recent published stories include *Maggie and Rick* (Malice Domestic 2025); and *Punch Drunk* (Three Strikes You're Dead 2024). He had stories in the 2018 and 2019 Best New England Crime Stories, and literary publications, *Rind Literary*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *The Broken Plate*, *Black Fox Literary*, and *Transcend Magazine*.

Victoria Dunn is a retired technical editor living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her poetry has appeared in *The Broken City* online magazine and *Four Tulips* online and print magazine. Her short story "The Benko Legacy" will appear in the *Fault Zone* anthology in December 2025.

Carsten ten Brink is a writer, photographer and artist. He has traveled over two dozen times to Latin America, where he worked on archaeological, vulcanological and conservation projects. Current WIP include editing a novel set in South America, preparing a short story collection and writing a 'novel-in-stories'.

Duke Stewart has published in numerous magazines including *Cimarron Review*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Passages North*, *Shenandoah*, *Permafrost*, *Main Street Rag* and *Bellevue Literary Review*. Honors include several Pushcart nominations, a NEA grant and a Best Story Award from the Kansas Arts Association.

Huina Zheng is a college essay coach and an editor. Her stories appear in *Baltimore Review*, *Variant Literature*, and more. Nominated thrice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, she lives in Guangzhou, China with her family.

## Poetry

Sharisa Aidukaitis is a writer and college educator in upstate New York. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Quarter(ly)*, *Penstricken*, *Waffle Fried*, *Moss Piglet*, *Drifting Sands Haibun*, and elsewhere.

John Delaney's publications include *Waypoints* (2017), *Twenty Questions* (2019), *Delicate Arch* (2022), poems and photographs of national parks/monuments, *Galápagos* (2023), a collaborative chapbook of his son Andrew's photographs and his poems, *Nile* (2024), poems and photographs about Egypt, and *Filing Order: Sonnets* (2025). He lives in Port Townsend, WA.

Michelle Hartman is the author of four poetry books, four chapbooks, her work has appeared in *Crannog*, *Galway Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Penumbra*, *Poem*, *Carve* and many more. She is the former editor of *Red River Review*.

Fiona Hartmann is a writer living in Toronto, Canada. She is interested in creating thought-provoking fiction that creates emotional connections that transcend through the digital landscape of modernity. Find her published and forthcoming work in *Kelp Journal*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Neologism Poetry Journal* and elsewhere.

Marah Jo Heikkila loves writing, exploring new cities, and savoring coffee flights, spending time with their nephew. They enjoy attending concerts and embracing life. Their work appears in previous editions of *The Garfield Lake Review*, *Toe Good*, *Havik*, *Qua Literary Magazine*, and *Dipity Literary Magazine*.

Jessica Hinds is an award-winning writer and founder of [MeditativeWriting.org](http://MeditativeWriting.org)

Grant Moore is a software engineer with a background in mathematics and physics. His poetry often uses formal constraints to explore themes of loss, memory, and the structures we build to understand the world. He lives in Cumberland, Maryland.

Peter Leroe-Muñoz is an emerging poet from the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry has previously been featured in *Modern Haiku*, *Acorn*, *Soul Poetry* and forthcoming works by *Twin Flame Literary* and *The Fool's World*.

James B. Nicola is the author of eight collections of poetry, the latest three being *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*, *Turns & Twists*, and *Natural Tendencies*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Actor's Guide to Live Performance* won a Choice magazine award.

David E. Poston's poetry and prose have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *The Twin Bill*, *BRILLIG*, *moonShine Review*, *Pedestal*, and *North Carolina Literary Review*. A new poetry collection, *Letting Go*, is forthcoming from Fernwood Press in fall 2025.

Kali Sutherland is student dedicated to the learning of all within the publication industry in order to satisfy her love of reading through the creation of her own novels.

Wally Swist's book of poetry *Aperture* (Kelsay Books, 2025) regards caregiving his spouse through Alzheimer's. He has completed an essay collection, *Wood and Nails: Caregiving as Spiritual Practice*. Yuseff Komunyakaa selected Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love for the Crab Orchard Open Series (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012).

Paris Taratuta is a junior student at the University of Olivet studying Writing & Publication and English. She aims to become a freelance editor and fantasy novelist.

Kelly Talbot has been an editor for *Wiley*, *Macmillan*, *Oxford*, *Pearson Education*, and other publishers. His writing has appeared in dozens of magazines and anthologies.

Sam is a full-time janitor, perpetual student, lifelong writer, avid reader, and lover of all things creative. Her work has been featured in numerous literary publications and recognized in several competitions, including a first place win in the Whitby Public Library National Poetry Month contest and multiple finalist placements.

## Projects of the Bill Buchanan Fund

2026 is the 23rd anniversary of The Bill Buchanan Fund and the centennial of the birth of Bill Buchanan. Bill Buchanan died in Sri Lanka before he could return for the celebration of his 80th birthday. Well over one hundred of his former students, colleagues, neighbors, family and friends participated in the service that was held for him. They came from around the country, and recited poems, played music and told stories for three and a half hours. Five years prior to that event, many had gathered in Klock Commons to celebrate Bill's 75th birthday, just like they had for his 70th.

Throughout Bill's 16 years of teaching at The University of Olivet, his classes were not as populated as the required courses. However, they were no less important. In his honor, the Bill Buchanan Fund was established on April 2, 2003 to create projects in support of the liberal arts. As the fund grows so will the amounts of the prizes and the award. Currently the Buchanan Fund awards the Stevens Award and the Coleman Prizes (in prose and poetry). The Stevens Award recognizes an excellent educator in the tradition of Arthur R. Stevens & Charlotte Whitney Stevens, who both taught in Olivet. The first award honoring Art and Charlotte Stevens was presented at the Honors Convocation on April 17, 2019.

The Jim Coleman Prize was established in memory of Tim Boal, Class of 1969, and funded through the Bill Buchanan Fund. Prior to the Garfield Lake Review, The University of Olivet had faculty member Jim Coleman, a professor in the 1960s and 1970s. It was through him that the undergraduate literary journal we know today exists.

While Mr. Coleman now lives in Connecticut, his Comet connection continues through the Jim Coleman Prize, which has been awarded since 2008 to students who have been published in the *Garfield Lake Review*. The honoree is chosen annually by outside judges.

## Past Honorees

- 2025 Logan Schreiber
- 2024 Logan Schreiber
- 2023 Hanna Sauve
- 2022 Savannah Baker
- 2021 Penelope Katz
- 2020 Kailey Collins, Class of 2022
- 2019 Emma Cole, Class of 2018
- 2018 Adam Walle, Class of 2017
- 2017 Linda Jo Scott, professor emerita of English
- 2016 Meghan Eldred, Class of 2015
- 2015 Camieo Green, Class of 2014
- 2014 Meghan Wilkerson, Class of 2013
- 2013 Jennifer M. ten Haaf Hodges, Class of 2012
- 2012 Jennifer M. ten Haaf Hodges, Class of 2012
- 2011 Jacob “Coby” Heller, Class of 2012
- 2010 Anabel Montalvo Hall, Class of 2009
- 2009 Anya Letson, Class of 2008

The University of Olivet strives to provide diversity and depth to students because its founders understood the value of a liberal arts education. Those associated with the fund experience this value. Marty Mason Jennings ('67) earned a degree in the fine arts, and Steve Burton ('68) studied chemistry. As a philosophy major, Jim Briney's ('69) education included biology, chemistry, math and physics. Marty and Steve are advisors to the fund, and Jim is its founder and representative.

## **A History of The University of Olivet and the *Garfield Lake Review***

The University of Olivet, the home of the *Garfield Lake Review*, has a storied history beginning even before the founding of our nation. Pilgrims that traveled across the ocean seeking religious freedom were the first Congregationalists, the founders of the earliest colleges in the United States. These same Congregationalists also funded the defense in the court case of the Amistad, a slave trading ship, in which the slaves won their freedom. These revolutionary efforts would trace their way to Olivet, Michigan. Naming the University of Olivet after the biblical Mount of Olives, Rev. John Shipherd founded the school in 1844 in a small area of south-central Michigan. Because of Olivet's unorthodox view – offering anyone, including women and minorities, an education – the state of Michigan refused to grant Olivet a charter, so it opened as a private institute. Into the early 1900s, the University of Olivet transformed from a primary school for educators into a true liberal arts college. By the 1930s and '40s, young president Joseph Brewer pushed forward with innovative educational policies that allowed Olivet to become a haven for scholars. By the late 1990s, Olivet had experienced many changes, and the faculty created a new Olivet Plan to encourage students to combine the founding principles of the Congregationalists and the reforms of President Brewer. The Olivet Plan still exists today, allowing students to focus their education on the global mindset. It is a nationally recognized educational plan. One of school's proudest accomplishments is the *Garfield Lake Review*. The *Garfield Lake Review* is a production of University of Olivet students interested in creative writing, artwork, and music; it began in 1971 as a project in a creative writing class. The founders of the program were Professor James Coleman, Brent Danielson, James Hudson, Andrew Johnson, Amy Leithauser, George Parmenter, and Norm Wheeler. The *Garfield Lake Review* is the annual literary and visual arts magazine produced by University of Olivet students, and it is a proud member of the University of Olivet Media Board. From its inception, the policy for the *Garfield Lake Review* has been to accept submissions from students, staff, and alumni. Submissions from outside of the college are accepted as well. Submissions for the magazine are accepted every fall; see guidelines at [garfieldlakereview.com](http://garfieldlakereview.com). Works are chosen through a blind screening process that was introduced in 2006. The blind screening assures that no author will be judged by race, creed, sexual orientation, or political ideology. The selections are reviewed, selected and edited by students on the *Garfield Lake Review* Editorial Board. Readers interested in donating financial support for future issues of the *Garfield Lake Review* should contact the University of Olivet Advancement Office at (269) 749-7000. The University's website is [www.uolivet.edu](http://www.uolivet.edu).

The University of Olivet is committed to the principles of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination. The university, in its employment, student admissions, recruitment, and personnel policies and practices, will not discriminate against any individual on the basis of age, color, sex, gender identity, disability or disability status, height, weight, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, race, religion, military or veteran status, or sexual orientation.

