

# Kelsey

## REVIEW

### 2018



**MERCER**

COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Moving You Forward >>>*



# Kelsey REVIEW



Fall 2018

Volume XXXVII



**MERCER**  
COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
*Moving You Forward >>>*

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E-mail: [Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.Review@mccc.edu)



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# *From the President...*

MCCC is delighted to share with you the work of many local writers and artists in the *Kelsey Review*. This year marks *Kelsey Review's* 37th issue, and it is a pleasure to see how this journal continues to serve the community by sharing the work of talented individuals who live and work in the larger Mercer County area. This literary journal is just one of the many ways the College shares the cultural wealth of our area.

Mercer County Community College directly serves thousands of county residents, and indirectly tens of thousands through its many ties to the community. WWFM broadcasts quality programming to the county and even the world through the internet. Kelsey Theater stages a wide range of drama for county audiences, who also have access to the college's Art Gallery. Our nationally-ranked MCCC athletic teams offer chances to root for stellar local athletes. Learn more about the college and Mercer County at [www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu).

*Kelsey Review* is available in print as well as online, where it can be shared world-wide! To keep up with the *Review* year-round, "like" the publication on Facebook.

The *Kelsey Review* is distributed in part through the Mercer County public library system and funded by Mercer County Community College and the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Each edition of the *Review* presents professional-quality poetry, fiction, non-fiction and art that provokes thought and with luck, inspiration. Enjoy what you find here.

Sincerely,



Jianping Wang, Ed.D.  
President  
Mercer County Community College

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# *From the Editor..*

In her poem “Ithaca” found in the early pages of this issue, Lauren Fedorko writes, “To be alive when there is so much hate is a marvel.” Indeed, whether in life or on the news or social media, it seems like hate has made itself a bit more visible over the past few years. However, these pages attest to the fact that we in the Mercer County arts community are lucky to possess a powerful tool to combat hate: literature, which is a form of love.

There have been many articles in recent years suggesting that reading literature can increase empathy. It makes sense that reading about the life of a person who is different from one would make one more empathetic, but I think it’s more than that. When reading a poem, one is learning to pay attention to the hidden world that breathes quietly below the hustle and bustle of daily life. This attention paid by the writer and the reader of a poem can resemble devotion, or love. The early-2018 movie *Lady Bird* touches upon this idea during a conversation the protagonist has with a nun. When the nun suggests that the protagonist must love her hometown, the protagonist denies this, saying that she merely “pay[s] attention.” The nun then replies, “Don’t you think maybe they are the same thing, love and attention?” So much about writing a poem or a short story or a piece of nonfiction is about attention—attention to detail, to language, to character, to image, and to the world around us in all its vicissitudes. In paying attention to these things, in writing or in making any kind of art, we are devoting ourselves to something greater, and sharing whatever that “greater” thing is with the surrounding community.

There is so much to love in these pages, and so much variety: we have poems about mathematicians and fruit flies, stories about time travel and dystopias, and nonfiction about nutrition facts and outdated gender norms, as well as two beautiful pieces of black and white photography. And this great variety of art is home-grown right here in the Mercer County area! Luckily, as with our previous issue, this issue will be available both in print and online, so you can share your work with the larger world.

This issue has come together with help from the following people: fellow editors Roberta Clipper, Luray Gross, and Ellen Jacko; graphic designer Daniel Migliaccio; Wendy Humphrey, Brad Kent, and Kami Abdala; Dr. Robert Kleinschmidt, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division; and Dr. Jianping Wang, President of MCCC. Thank you all. Of course, the greatest thanks of all goes out to the contributors, who share with us your art, and to the readers, who share with us your attention.

Jacqueline Vogtman  
*Editor*





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## Illustrations

Cover: “**Magic Will Set You Free**,” Ivana Vranjes Field

**Layout:** Daniel Migliaccio

**Web Presentation:** Brad Kent

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LAVINIA KUMAR

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## *Growing New Algebra*

Amalie Emmy Noether (1882-1935)  
*Mathematician*

She nurtured numbers, conserved them  
as though they were hers to blossom  
in a greenhouse. Young men flocked  
to find her secrets, till they  
found their own way to grow.

She was drawn to Math, pretty Math.  
She mixed algebra  $a$ 's and  $b$ 's  
with physics, to a new breed  
of  $y$ 's and  $z$ 's – as meticulous,  
they say, as tropical orchids.

She dreamed of shapes, colors,  
atom bits, and planet whorls,  
of truth kernel formulae, rings.  
As these tumbled from her mouth,  
they re-bred nature's laws. And were loud.

## Ouroboros

Nate Butler was working on his front lawn the day Mr. Paterson died. The unseasonably cool August weather offered a rare opportunity for reseeding the burnt patches of lawn left by an extra hot July. Nate paused between digs to stretch his back and wipe his brow. His next door neighbor sat on a folding chair in his driveway contemplating a blank canvas and arranging his brushes in preparation of his next masterpiece. Mr. Paterson worked mostly in oils and always painted his deceased wife standing in the driveway directly across the street. The Abernathys, who lived in the home Mr. Paterson fixated on, were not fans of the process. Besides the guaranteed presence of Mr. Paterson's wife, each painting showed the Abernathy's home distorted in some perverse or outlandish way. Mr. Paterson depicted the home engulfed in flames, existing underwater, and made of marshmallows. No matter how ridiculous the split-level behind her was rendered, Mrs. Paterson always stood politely, looking directly at the viewer with her hands interlocked casually at her waist. One of Nate's favorite paintings was a miniaturized and otherwise completely photorealistic version of the house sitting in Mrs. Paterson's shadow. Nate observed his neighbor raise a thumb for perspective before getting down to work. After completing a painting Mr. Paterson would take off his shirt, put it on over his head *pharos style*, and turn his easel to the street for viewing. Each installation received a fair amount of attention. The neighborhood was heavily traveled by dog walkers and families on strolls. He developed a regular following of a dozen or so neighbors who made sure their routes took them by his house for a closer look at the work.

As far as Nate and his wife were concerned, Mr. Paterson was a perfectly fine neighbor. He demanded nothing more than polite salutations, and mostly kept to himself. Well, Nate did infrequently complain about the state of their house and yard. Mr. Paterson wasn't much for upkeep and would often let his lawn grow for months at a time, ignore the fall leaves, and let the walkways remain snow covered after a winter storm. The house didn't look dilapidated, but seemed run down in some ways. It could use a new coat of paint, maybe a new roof, or some landscaping.

Nate lost track of his own work while angrily staring at his neighbor's house. How could the old man just sit there and paint while his lawn went neglected? The overgrown weeds were insane. The garage, which was left open during every painting session, was overstuffed with banker's boxes full of old newspapers and magazines. The site of the calamity agitated Nate's obsessive compulsive nature. Nate thought about walking over and offering to mow the lawn, but decided it was too pushy. He would only be asking for himself, to scratch the itch in his own brain, not to help out in a neighborly way. Mr. Paterson stood-up from his chair, arched his back, and stretched to his left, then right. He reached both arms into the air and bowed his back. Mr. Paterson started shaking his left hand. He made a fist and released over and over again in quick succession. Just as Nate thought, *I hope that he doesn't have a heart attack*, Mr. Paterson grabbed his left bicep and fell into his easel. Nate checked the pockets of his shorts, but found no phone.

"Mackenzie," Nate called out as he ran to Mr. Paterson. "Mackenzie," he called again.

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“Mackenzie, help,” he called one final time.

Nate turned Mr. Paterson onto his back. He was barely conscious, eyes focused on some far away thing, pupils noticeably dilating. Nate heard his pregnant wife approach from the house. She'd called 911, she explained as she hurried towards them, her words forced as she was already winded from carrying her eight-and-a-half month pregnant frame across their lawn. Mr. Paterson looked over Nate's shoulder, locked eyes with Mackenzie, and called for his mother.

Mr. Paterson stopped responding. Nate overlapped his hands and began chest compressions. As he counted to thirty he couldn't help but notice the scarring on Mr. Paterson's body. Each mark was medical, clean and straight incisions, flanked by little dots from suturing. Of the three he could see, the only one he could properly identify was the appendix scar. The second was high on his abdomen, maybe a gallbladder surgery, and the last was above his right nipple. At the count of thirty Nate tilted Mr. Paterson's head back, and placed his hand underneath the old man. He took a short powerful breath, blinked purposefully and told himself to focus. Nate caught site of what would become the last driveway painting lying on the ground next to them. Instead of another perversion of Abernathy's home, Mr. Paterson had painted a sky-blue blob. Maybe it was a swimming pool from above? There was too much design and purpose to the shape for it just to be a careless blotch. It was both basic and fascinating. Looking at it made him feel calm and detached. Nate pulled himself back into the moment, checked Mr. Paterson's mouth and throat for obstructions and then administered mouth-to-mouth. He knew as soon his mouth touched Mr. Paterson's that the body was beyond revival.

“He's gone,” Nate said.

“Fuck,” Mackenzie said. “My water broke.”

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At 3:48AM the baby cried, waking Nate from the light slumber of a new parent. His wife wore ear plugs on her “off” nights and did not stir. There was a bottle of breast milk on his night stand, which he grabbed before making his way to the nursery. Despite the abundance of fans and white noise machines, Nate could hear the dull thump of bass coming from the house next door. He picked his four-month-old son, Douglas, out of the crib. The bottle quickly mollified the tiny cries. Nate walked circles in the nursery doing his best to soothe the sleepy, yet agitated child. He turned on a turtle-shaped toy with plastic blue shell and plushy bottom. A calm and tranquil light shot from its back and projected a brilliant shallow seascape on the ceiling. Douglas, entranced by the light show, settled. Nate paused by the window and looked down to what he and his wife had come to call the party house. After Mr. Paterson passed, the house went up for auction in an estate sale. The new owner purchased the house as an investment property and rented it out. The boom of bass and roar of a substantial crowd peaked for a quick moment as a young man exited the rear of the house. He stood on the back deck, wearing work boots, tighty whities, and an orange vest. The young man stroked his bushy brown beard, then gathered his long hair with both hands and twisted it around into a man bun. Nate let out a judgy breath. The young man casually sifted through trash on the table. He shook out a few jackets left

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on chairs, and finally found what he was looking for. Whatever he found was lit, and smoked. He arched his back in between drags, letting his round white belly breach the cold night air. The young man carried himself in a way that seemed familiar to Nate. He had the gait of an ex-football player, someone who may have once been powerful, but had gone soft. In that way, the young man seemed relatable to Nate. The noise spiked again as the door to the deck opened. The murmur of a party patter rushed out. The young man nodded to the person at the door, put out his smoke, and returned inside. Nate rocked back and forth, counted to one hundred, and returned the sleeping child back to his crib.

Any day that Douglas slept past 6:00AM was taken as a miracle. The Butlers celebrated this reprieve from parenting by lying in bed with their phones inches from their face scrolling through screen after screen of blissfully useless unimportant information. Just before 7:00AM the short breaths of frustration became audible in the next room. Their dog, Slainte, was similarly shell-shocked by this new addition and groaned from the foot of the bed. Mackenzie mumbled *baby* as she got out of bed. Her husband followed. She thought he said *garbage* as he made his way down the stairs, but wasn't sure, and didn't really care. Douglas was wide awake in his crib, seemingly chilled-out now that Mom was in sight. She thought about letting him be for a moment, but it was impossible not to pick him up, to not hold him, to not rest her nose against the top of his head and inhale deeply. Mackenzie sang her good morning song, made up of misremembered lyrics to a tune from *Singing in the Rain* and he smiled and laughed, which made her smile and laugh. She held him to her sore swollen breast and bounced him while pacing the room. Mackenzie caught sight of Nate from the nursery window. He was walking away from the trash bin at the curb and over toward the party house. She briefly thought that last night's festivities may have been the last straw for him. The young man with a beard made his way towards her husband with his hand out. The two shook hands and began to speak. From the nursery window, the exchange seemed pleasant enough. Douglas squirmed in her arms and she said, "Ok," to him softly. "Shhh, shhh, shhh."

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Nate spotted the young bearded guy after dragging the trash bin to the curb. He stared at his new neighbor while contemplating what to do, and how to make an introduction. Should he be indignant about the late night parties? Or should he be neighborly and give the guy a chance to adjust to suburban living? In mid-debate the young bearded guy looked Nate's way and waved. Nate smiled, waved back, and walked toward his neighbor.

"How's it going?" Nate asked.

"Good, good," the young neighbor said. "Sorry I haven't been by to introduce myself, I'm still getting settled."

"No, no problem," Nate said. They shook hands. Nate could smell the booze and smoke wafting off of him. He was still shirtless under the vest, but thankfully had since put on pants.

"Well, welcome to the neighborhood..." Nate shook his head, squinted, and forced a smile.

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“Nate,” the young bearded guy said.

“Right, and you’re?”

“Nate,” the young bearded guy repeated.

“I’m Nate,” the two men said simultaneously while pointing to themselves with their thumbs.

“No fucking way,” young bearded guy said, laughing and leaning back. “We’ve got the same name.”

“Guess so.” Nate grimaced. Young bearded Nate continued to laugh and held up his hand to high-five, which was awkwardly accommodated. “Listen,” Nate finally said. “We have a four month-old, and we’d appreciate it if you can keep the all-night parties to a minimum.”

“Oh, sure.” He stopped laughing. “I’ll keep it to a dull roar.”

“That’s not exactly what I’m asking,” Nate said. He heard an urgent knocking sound and turned back to the house. His wife stood in the center of the picture window, holding the baby and waving him over to her. “I’ve gotta go.”

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Mackenzie needed to pump, *like whoa*. Some mornings were fine and others were an avalanche of pain. It was like gravity had an extra strong hold on her insides, every time she stepped a weighty electric discomfort zapped through her. When Nate entered the house the dog went ballistic and caused the baby to cry. It was just too fucking much. And on top of all the noise her tits were about to explode.

“So the bearded guy next door...” Nate began to say.

“Take the baby,” she said, almost as an afterthought, handed Douglas to Nate and made a slow but determined beeline for her breast pump. The process of putting on the contraption was second nature. The real issue, the thing that made the whole affair an ordeal, was the drain she felt while pumping. In the first month she couldn’t do it without crying. The *Let-Down*, as it was called on the *Mommy Boards* was described as a warm tingling feeling in the breast while the baby nursed. As Mackenzie experienced it, the *Let-Down* was a hormone surge that arrived in the form of depression and dread. She quickly learned to keep distracted while expressing milk. Her iPad was ideal. She’d read a bit of a book, hit a few websites, and then eventually land back on the *Mommy Boards*. For the most part the *Mommy Boards* provided a mix of practical advice, voyeuristic entertainment, and eye rolling commiserating. She created a user account at the insistence of her neighbor Jenny Abernathy. Jenny swore they were a lifesaver when she had her daughter Cindy a few years earlier. Although Mackenzie hadn’t ever directly interacted with others on the board she found it legitimately helpful for a time. The information which once seemed revelatory sat stale on the screen. She’d even gone through months, if not years, of archived posts. After six months they all repeated themselves. It was like an online high school where new moms graduated

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and a new crop came in, reading the same books, and stirring up the same drama. The darkness of the impending *Let-Down* swelled inside her. She logged-in as mother-sattva365 and typed a post saying she suspected her husband of cheating on her. She hastily revised it to read that she had found videos on her husband's laptop. *Pornography*, she thought to herself, no, *bestiality!* She wrote, reread her work, and felt she'd nailed the tone. She hit send. *I found bestiality videos on my husband's laptop and the dog is acting strange. I'm not sure what to do.* The reaction was immediate and better and more distracting than she could have hoped.

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Car doors started to slam at all hours of the night, each one set the dog off, and then the dog set off the baby. Mackenzie woke up crazy annoyed. She went through a number of different scenarios subtly differing by degrees. The politest involved some mild stalking and a casual run-in outside, like how Nate met the other Nate. The most severe involved a bag of Slainte's shit on their front door and the word *Quiet* painted in lamb's blood. Another door slammed. She shot out of bed. There was no time to wait for an opportune moment or for Slainte's next bowel movement. She heard the sounds of Nate humming a lullaby to Douglas as she crept down the hallway. A warm blue light from the toy turtle's seascape night-light spilled from the slightly ajar door. The child's toy never ceased to catch her eye. She stared at the warm Caribbean colors and rhythmic movement of light calmed her. Another car door slammed and she was back on her original mission.

Mackenzie put on her winter coat and made her way to the neighbor's house. A group of three people were leaning on a running car smoking cigarettes and chatting. They seemed to quiet as she crossed the lawn. One by one they put out their smokes and got into the car. She heard one of them say, "She mad."

Mackenzie was familiar with the modus operandi of a dealer. It was, after all, how she put herself through college. But, when she was in the game, it was out of dorms and apartments in student ghettos. Shit could be loud at all hours because there were no fucking families. She'd never set-up shop in the suburbs, even back then, she knew better. It was stupid, inconsiderate, and a bad business practice. Mackenzie stopped herself from ringing the bell and opted to bang on the door with a clenched fist. It felt more confrontational and dickish. A young woman answered the door in a bright and spry way that made her question the time of night. She panicked at the thought that it might be too early for the late night noise complaint she was ready to volley.

"Do you know what time it is?" Mackenzie asked sounding as irritated as she could.

"You came over here to ask the time?" The young woman looked over her shoulder to Other Nate, sitting on the couch, and watching TV in his underwear. "Nate, the neighbor's here."

"Invite her in," he said, without looking away from a *Friends* episode that Mackenzie remembered from its first run - The One with the Flashback. The young woman stood back, opened the door further and motioned for Mackenzie to enter. Mackenzie squinted at the young woman. There was something about this woman, the way she stood - her couldn't give a shit attitude, those boots, and that shirt ( but mostly

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the boots). She liked this girl and she normally didn't take to other women.

"This isn't a social visit," Mackenzie said, walking into the house.

"No?" the young woman asked.

"Do you live here too?"

"That's right," she said and offered her hand. "I'm renting a room from Nate, my name is Mackenzie."

"Is this some kind of joke?"

"Is what a joke?"

"Her name is Mackenzie too," Other Nate said from the couch. "She thinks you're fucking with her."

"I don't give a shit if your name is Mackenzie or Jesus Fucking Christ," Mackenzie said. "I know you're dealing and it needs to stop." Other Nate and Other Mackenzie kept looking at her, but offered no response. "This is family neighborhood," she said.

"Well," Other Mackenzie put her arm on Mackenzie's shoulder and led her to the love seat. "Sit, have a vape, let's talk this over." Other Mackenzie took an inflated clear plastic bag off of what looked to be the base of a blender and handed to Mackenzie. "We can't just stop, but maybe we can amend our hours. Say no pick-ups after eleven."

"No pick-ups after eight, and I won't call the cops." Mackenzie put the plunger of the bag in her mouth and inhaled deeply. The neutered taste of marijuana filled her mouth, and a sense of relief, long absent from her life, glowed inside her. She exhaled and leaned back into the love seat. "Not bad," she said and nodded to Other Mackenzie and Other Nate. They sat there quietly for a few moments and watched television and didn't talk to one another for a bit. Mackenzie felt happier than she had in weeks.

"What's that blue light coming from your house?" Other Nate said after a bit. He was looking past the television and out the side window.

"That's our turtle," Mackenzie said. "He's a toy that shoots calming blue light out of his back."

"The light is hypnotic," Other Mackenzie said.

"It helps Douglas go to sleep," Mackenzie said.

"It reminds me of something," Other Nate said just before dozing off.

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The most recent cold snap came to an end leaving a rare balmy sixty-five degree

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December day in its wake. Nate was determined to take full advantage of the unseasonably warm day by walking around the neighborhood with the family. The circular and interconnected layout of their neighborhood was ideal for family walks. Nate, Mackenzie, Douglas, and Slainte could cover five miles of ground, and never be more than a mile away from home. This proved advantageous when Douglas had diaper blow-outs or got sick or any other number of surprising baby related emergencies that frequently caught them by surprise. Midway through their second lap the family hit their stride. Mackenzie pushed Douglas along while Nate assertively steered Slainte past any number of noteworthy sniffing spots. They were coming up on their house and having such a fine time that they decided to keep going.

“You shouldn’t be allowed to own a dog.” A call came from across the street. Nate stopped and turned, finding his neighbor, Scott Abernathy, standing on his lawn in his bathrobe.

“It’s a free country, Scott,” Nate replied. “And quite frankly, it’s none of your business.” Scott was an angry over the hill high-school administrator obsessed with maintaining certain esthetics in the neighborhood. Nate wasn’t surprised that Scott rushed outside and shouted something ridiculous to him. However, he was surprised that Scott was angry enough to march toward him with, what seemed to be, the initiation of a physical confrontation. Nate puffed out his chest and wrapped Slainte’s leash around his hand. Scott’s wife, Jenny, was vigilant and always on alert to temper her husband’s aggressive civic concerns. She rushed out the front door calling after her husband. Scott ignored Jenny until she caught up with him and grabbed him by the arm and turned him to see his three year-old daughter watching them through the window. The two exchanged hushed, but urgent words until Scott threw his hands up in the air and returned inside.

“What the fuck was that?” Nate asked.

“I have to catch you up on a joke,” Mackenzie said. “Have I ever told you about those Mommy Boards?” Mackenzie casually told Nate about how Jenny Abernathy had directed her to numerous mommycentric blogs and message boards that had been of help to Jenny when Cindy was born. Mackenzie forgot that Jenny helped set-up most of her accounts and knew her user name. A fact that was totally forgotten when Mackenzie started to troll the other moms with news that her husband might make the dog lick peanut butter off of his balls. As their largely pedantic argument continued on without a foreseeable end, Mackenzie let slip that she spent an evening hanging out with their neighbors in the party house. The admission was more of a desperate attempt to move on to another topic, rather than a slipup.

“What is wrong with you,” Nate finally interrupted. “We have a kid, you’re a mom. You can’t get high with the neighbors and post nonsense on the internet.”

“Becoming a dad has made you a total pussy,” Mackenzie said. They stood silently looking at one another. Nate attempted to speak, but only mustered a frustrated noise before walking out of the room.

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Douglas's crying pulled Nate from sleep. He robotically rose from bed, grabbed the bottle of breast milk off his nightstand, and went to his son's room. Douglas, as part of his current routine, stopped crying as the door opened. All the books and articles Nate read stressed how he shouldn't do anything to engage the baby during night feedings, but the sight of his son's smile made him happy in a way nothing else ever had. He scooped Douglas from the crib, smiled back and baby talked nonsense words, confessed his love, and made any noise that he knew would illicit a smile or giggle. Nate situated Douglas for his feeding, put the bottle in the boy's mouth and then walked to the dresser. The turtle was not in his usual spot, but it was late, and Nate was unconcerned with the absence. Douglas settled and seemed content with the bottle. Nate continued to circle the room until the boy no longer drank or squirmed in his arms. Semi-confident that Douglas was asleep, Nate stopped his pacing and stood at the side window. He gently rocked the boy back and forth, watch the boy's heavy eyes. Nate looked up and noticed a familiar looking blue light coming from the party house. The thought that it might come from Douglas's turtle sent a shot of adrenaline through his body.

Feeling sure and righteous, Nate went into his room ready to wake his wife. The bed was empty. He quietly searched the house. Each empty room fed a nagging feeling that she'd gone next door. All the anger from their earlier argument became crystalline. He pulled on his snow boots, put on a hunting cap, wrapped Douglas in a blanket, and walked next door. Shock and Awe, he thought to himself. What are they going to say to a forty-year old man standing in his underwear holding a baby? Nothing, that's what you say to that.

Nate walked out of his front door and through his neighbors' back gate. He saw the blue sparkling light of the turtle spill out onto the deck. He put his face up against the sliding glass door. No one flinched. He pulled the door open expecting to be hit with noise and pot smoke, but it was quiet with just a hint of something mundane. The room was brilliantly awash in the turtle's light, like they were all causally sitting in the bottom of a pool. His wife and Other Mackenzie were lying on a sectional couch nearly head to head sharing a vape bag. Other Nate sat in a recliner, legs kicked out, and head back. He held a cigarette with a precarious ash between his fingers, seemingly content to let it burn down to the filter. There was a little girl in the other room, her back to them, busily flipping through the pages of an old photo album. It looked like Cindy Abernathy, but he doubted Scott would ever let this crew around his daughter.

"Mackenzie," Nate said. "What the fuck?" The two women looked up at him and shrugged. "That's it? You're not going to say anything?" He walked over to the turtle, picked it off the floor and flipped the control switch to off. The light in the room didn't change. There was a moment where the strangeness of this phenomenon didn't register. Other Nate started stirring, fidgeting in his recliner like he was trying to get comfortable. He started talking, but it was hard for Nate to make out what he said. He adjusted Douglas in his arms, feeling him slip a little. He pulled the infant up to his chest. He was now looking at the turtle, registering how it was clearly off, and yet the room still glowed with the brilliant color of its artificial underwater seascape.

"I've seen light like this before," Other Nate said.

.....

“I saw it off the coast at Galveston,” Mackenzie said.

“I saw it off the cost at Galveston, too,” Other Mackenzie said.

“I was in the Caribbean with some friends,” Other Nate said. “We chartered a boat out to this old deserted island that used to be a Civil War fort. We were there to get high and drunk and sleep on the beach and swim a little,” Other Nate continued, and as he spoke Nate recognized the story as his own. How he and his friends had done the same thing after college. Part of a month long trip they took.

“We’d just taken the last of the Molly and decided to snorkel. The water was so clear, you could see for a mile. I followed this big sunfish into some pylons left from a dock. I got a little turned around and found myself on the outside of the reef over a deep and empty ocean. I saw this circular blob, like a thicker blue fluid floating underneath me, and I dove for it.” Nate remembered all of this, but he never dove. He saw the dark blue blob floating underneath him like a bubble in a lava lamp and got scared. He turned back towards the pylons, and found his way through them and back to his friends. “I don’t remember what happened after I touched it. I woke up in a hospital in Bimini, alone with no idea who I was. After a few days of calling around they found my stuff at a hotel in Key West. My driver’s license said my name was Nate Butler and I lived in this town.” He took a drag from the cigarette he’d been letting burn down. “I didn’t remember any of that until just now.”

Cindy entered the room holding the photo album open. Douglas was becoming difficult to hold. The baby suddenly became heavier than he could manage. Nate dropped the turtle to the ground and in order to hold his son with both hands.

“These pictures are my future,” Cindy said as she displayed old wedding photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Paterson.

“That’s creepy,” Nate said and then weakly called to Mackenzie as he struggled to hold the baby. The task became impossible. Douglas fell to the floor. All the fear that ever existed in Nate’s heart surged through his body. The baby landed safely, but before he could pick him back up, Douglas was crawling away. He’d barely ever rolled over on his own. And now he was up on two feet, clumsily at first, and then surefooted after only a few steps and growing in size as he moved further away. The boy was as big as a preteen by the time he was halfway across the room. Cindy, still holding the open photo album, was growing as well. She started walking toward Douglas, reaching out for what was now a fully grown muscular man. In Douglas’s last few steps towards Cindy the weight began falling off him as quickly as it appeared. He even shrunk slightly. Cindy and Douglas stood next to one another as a frail older couple. They took one another’s hand and stepped into the full blue light of the room as Mr. and Mrs. Paterson.

Nate tried to move towards his son, but found his body felt locked in place. He glanced toward Mackenzie, still able to move his eyes. She and her counterpart were up off the couch and similarly immobilized. Other Nate was on his feet as well, a thin layer of smoke from his cigarette began outlining his body as if he was incased in a thin fog. He could feel himself start to move under the power of the outside force. With great speed he collided with Other Nate.

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Mackenzie went cold when she saw Nate and Other Nate smash into one another and disappear. She was so scared that she might have even peed a little. Mackenzie felt the gravity of movement, looked over to Other Mackenzie, who had closed her eyes. Thinking that they were about to be slammed together, Mackenzie closed her eyes too, but she could still see. It was as if she watching her surroundings on a screen in a big dark theater. When the Mackenzies collided, she felt nothing. There seemed to be nothing left of her other than the vague idea she exited, but that awareness seemed to fade as something else emerged. An awareness of everything bloomed. Everything she was and everything that could possibly be in the universe and beyond dawned on her like sun breaking the horizon. She felt Douglas and Nate, her parents, and everyone who ever lived. She felt hydrogen and carbon, nitrogen and oxygen, iron and sulfur; the dust of stars and remnants of the first moments of existence. Just as the very last bit of herself disappeared into the effluvia of the universe, there was light. The perfect blue light of the liquid sphere blinked on in the infinite dark distance. It moved toward her, enveloped her, and blinded her with a painful burst of a billion stars. She found herself running out of the front door of her home watching as her husband futilely tried to breathe life back into their old neighbor's body. The memory of what had just happened disappeared quickly. Mackenzie looked on, feeling helpless and frightened. She felt like she was forgetting something, but couldn't concentrate. She was just somewhere else, she thought, but it was too strange, she was in a panic. She held her hand to her stomach. Mr. Paterson was looking into her eyes and she felt so connected to him, like she knew him more deeply than their relationship could possibly bear. It seemed like he was calling to her as if she was his mother. There was a warm gush underneath her sun dress.

"He's gone," Nate said.

"Fuck," Mackenzie said. "My water broke."

LAUREN FEDORKO

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## *Ithaca*

To be alive when there is so much hate is a marvel.

Toughannock Falls is an unimaginable height—  
I consider the length of two hundred and fifteen feet.  
Sequoias are comparable in how when you look up  
Their treetops disappear into the skies.

The rumored tragedy of Chief Taughannock looms and swirls in dark waters below,  
How his loyal body was thrown from the precipice.

The sound it must have made  
When it hit the base—  
Water: slashing in a whiplashed fury.  
Rock: flat and hard.  
A few seconds to take everything.

When you're alive it's sometimes impossible to forgive.  
When you're alive there is so much that can kill you.

I watch the vultures circle high.  
Their shadows casting monstrous versions of themselves  
Near hikers' boots.

MICHAEL TORRES

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*Late Summer Cascade*



LOIS HARROD

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## *Vultures*

They disappear for days,  
the blue-enamel heaven  
empty as a pot,  
no ripe meat  
rising in the kettle,  
no random reek.  
The canal where we walk  
scrubbed of duckweed,  
vegetable protein rot.

Then they return  
wheeling the steeple,  
cadaverine  
putrescine  
rising on the wind,  
great trundles reminding  
some somewhere  
something is dying,  
dead, climatic shift,  
black plague.  
We sniff our breath,  
our armpits,  
whiff nothing yet.

## *Candlestick Cousins*

As I drove into Brooklyn this May day in 1993, I also drove into my grandmother's past. I rang the bell at Apt. 7F and when the door opened, I faced my grandmother's 90-year-old first cousin, Evelyn. The confident tone of her voice put me immediately at ease, as if I had known her my entire life. She ushered me into the living room. Light poured in from the ample windows.

"I remember the day your grandmother Eva arrived from Europe," Evelyn said. If her father hadn't come to America, Evelyn could easily have been one of those women in our mutual ancestral shtetl, Kozlow, (once Poland, then Austria-Hungary, and since 1918 in Ukraine). She could have covered her head with a kerchief in a pattern that clashed with her dress and oversized sweater. She might have sported lavender anklets squeezed into backless slippers that flapped against the floor. Her home would have lace curtains to let in as much light as possible. But, Evelyn was born and raised in America, New York City, to be exact. She had reddish-blond hair curled away from her face, was a bit plump and perfectly amiable. But there was more to her than that. I studied her, watched her movements. In her younger days, she must have vacillated between proper young lady and cheeky vamp. Everything about her was symmetrical: hair parted in the middle, perfectly spaced eyes and eyebrows. But her lips smirked a bit as if to suggest she had a secret and wouldn't I like to know what it was.

It did not occur to me as I sat on her sofa in the soft daylight that one hundred years before, Evelyn's father, Benzion Zuckerkandel, arrived in America at age nineteen in May 1893. I did not know as Evelyn busied herself in the kitchen pouring me a drink that a surprise awaited me on her father's ship manifest. Only now in 2018 as I checked his immigration record in the Ellis Island database did I find it. Right below Benzion's entry was one for Henoch Zuckerkandel, twenty-nine years old. That's my great-grandfather. I never knew he came to America. His passage occurred just about a year after Eva's birth. I imagine he was scoping out the place before he brought the whole family, which was to have a few more additions before the time my grandmother emigrated. He must have returned to Europe. Maybe he couldn't make a go of it. Maybe he couldn't convince my great-grandmother to leave Kozlow, maybe she was pregnant again. The horrors of the Holocaust could have been avoided if only they'd all have come to America.

Evelyn told me how my grandmother knew no English. How exciting it must have been for Evelyn to meet a first cousin from the Other Side of the Pond when she was ten years old, someone who shared a Yiddish name, Chava, with her. I imagine Eva would have used Yiddish with her uncle. She must have been scared, too. She would not have remembered him from Kozlow, having only been a baby when he left. Now she was meeting him as a family man, meeting his wife and daughters.

"Eva stayed with us for years at Lynch Street in Williamsburg," Evelyn said. "It was like having an older sister." Eva was ten years older than Evelyn. How strange it all must have felt for my grandmother. No goats or chickens in the backyard. No thatched roofs. Maybe even little Yiddish.



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Uncle Ben probably had more room and more money. He had sponsored Eva's journey. But a widowed aunt on her mother's side offered her more comfort on the Lower East Side. Here my grandmother could relax with an aunt and cousins she already knew, with people inside and outside the home she could converse with completely in Yiddish.

Perhaps it had been a plan to send Eva to America first and then her siblings would follow. Eva Zuckerkandel was brave to come to America alone. I could not imagine the strength she had to muster to leave home, her parents, and seven siblings. She must have thought she was off to a great adventure, the whole world open to her in a way Kozlow, a shtetl of 700 people, could never be. Uncle Ben paid for Eva's wedding to my grandfather in May 1918. His Zuckerkandel family home served as her first home in her new country. He had a reputation, so Evelyn told me, of paving the way for family members to come to America. But when Ben sponsored a younger brother, he got more than he bargained for. The seventeen-year-old brother didn't want to work, although he had been a tailor in Kozlow. After just a few months, he wanted to return home. Ben wouldn't pay his way. The brother stayed, became a gambler and ne'er do well, and never married. He legally changed his name. "We saw him frequently," Evelyn said. "But my father refused to talk to him." Eva would have known him, since he was only ten years older than she was. What she thought of him, I couldn't say, and my father did not recall him at all.

"I want to leave you my candlesticks," Evelyn said. "They were my mother's." I nearly cried. I barely knew her, and here she was giving what was to me her prized possessions. I knew from my genealogical research that female immigrants left home with two treasured items: a featherbed and Sabbath candlesticks. I also knew as the youngest of four daughters, I would never inherit my mother's set. Evelyn's candlesticks witnessed my grandmother's first Sabbath in America just a few days after she arrived on a fair, warm September Monday in 1913. Perhaps Eva helped her aunt light them. Perhaps she wondered what her own mother and sisters were doing that same Shabbos in Kozlow. Perhaps she recited the ancient Hebrew blessing, uniting her with her non-Yiddish speaking cousins.

But why give the heirloom candlesticks to me? Why not give them to a more immediate family member? As I now think about it, the candlesticks formed a bridge between the Old Country and here, between the immigrant and the American born. Maybe no one else in her family cared about family stories or the past. And then here I showed up, as interested as if I had been one of Evelyn's contemporaries. I felt at home here, speaking about people long dead but as if I had personally known them all, as if I could see them now milling about the apartment. I was open to the idea of ghosts. They already knew all that I wanted to know about my family's history. I was connected to them through my DNA and my research, which now served as collective memory.

I needed visual images to make that memory more visceral. Evelyn gave me a snapshot of a pregnant Eva, circa 1924, my five-year-old father standing in front of her, their fingers touching. She's holding my uncle Harry, the baby, and it looked like she was ready to give birth again. The only photos my family had of Eva were at my parents' 1946 wedding. Now here she was, proud mama of two boys. I wondered what dreams she might have had then. Did she think about bringing over her brothers and sisters,

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her parents? Was she already contemplating investing in real estate around town? Or did she worry about how she would run the family business while being a mother? She could not have known that she would develop diabetes and cancer and die far too young. Evelyn also gave me an 8x10 photo of her younger self and a 1957 photo of Ben Zuckerkandel with a great-grandchild.

Evelyn and I continued to write for a few more years. Our letters were filled with news of current family, weddings, and bar mitzvah celebrations. She looked forward to attending these, because otherwise she was bored. No spouse, no children, no sisters. One of her nephews would pick her up and take her to these events. She had become the dowager aunt. In 1996, at the age of 96, she was still living by herself in Brooklyn. Then the letters stopped. I assumed she passed away. Her nephew called me in 2004 to inform me of Evelyn's death at 101. He knew nothing about the candlesticks. He and I lost touch.

Visiting with Evelyn that May day in 1993 placed me shoulder to shoulder with my grandmother's America-born first cousin. She gave me her warmth and whatever memories she had. She made me feel my grandmother's arrival in America. But I still didn't know the woman who had never held me, never combed my bangs to the side and fastened them with a barrette. She never praised my latest drawing or felt the tingle of my fingertips in hers. Eva never sat with her grandchildren on her knee or celebrated their milestone events. She never got to attend two of her sons' weddings. No matter how hard I tried, the realization slowly sank in that I would never really know Eva.



My grandmother, Eva, with my father in front of her, ca. 1924.



Evelyn Zuckerkandel in her heyday.



Ben Zuckerkandel with his great-grandson in 1957.

LAURA TAHIR

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## *Family Prayer*

For many years my dad drove an orange juice tanker from Florida to Ohio and back, and that's how he met Colleen, my mother. She worked at a chicken plant in Ohio that shared a huge parking lot with the bottle factory on my dad's route. He found her there twisted halfway into her red Nissan Sentra as if she had been wrestling with the metal machine and defeated, frozen into that grotesque frame I hold in my memory. Her chin and elbows wrapped around the seat's edge. Her fingers clawed the steering wheel. She tried, but her arms could not pull her body into the car. One knee was beneath her stomach on the side of the seat and her other leg stretched straight out onto the graveled ground. Her uniform was torn and she wore no shoes. She raised her head, turned her blank face to him. It was depleted even of fright and agony. I often think of this image when I see large coiled roadkill in New Jersey ditches.

Dad rescued her, let her ride with him in the tanker. Her ideals had been trampled on and she was broken, but he was kind and his world was a place she could slip into with ease. When they weren't on the road they lived in a mobile home in Florida, and I imagine they were happy in the beginning. But then I came along.

Colleen hated the heat down south and she got depressed as hell, so we moved up to the outskirts of Cayesville, New Jersey where my paternal grandfather had a big old farmhouse with a huge kitchen and lots of little rooms. Grandpa was a generous and indulgent African American. His wife, my dad's mother, was German and died when my dad was a boy. Grandpa said she loved apples, but other than that no one said much about her.

Grandpa was a retired Army Captain, but nothing like you would expect a military man to be. Maybe it was because I'm a girl, but he wasn't harsh or strict. He listened to me, and even when I asked dumb questions he made me feel like I was smart. He'd say, "You know, Taylor, I never thought about that." My dad was away a lot driving and Colleen often travelled to Ohio for court or spent days at a time in mental hospitals in New Jersey, so Grandpa was the one who was with me most of the time. He tutored me at home because he said school wasn't a good idea for girls with my background. He taught me to read and do number puzzles. Sometimes Colleen went with us when we did things outdoors, like fish or swim. Grandpa always made it seem like everything was going to be alright. I loved him as much as or more than I loved my dad, if that's possible.

When I was seven Grandpa died suddenly while raking leaves. That was a sad and crazy time for all of us. Colleen took it the worst. She said she couldn't stand being inside all day, that she had to get a job. She went on tons of interviews but I don't recall she ever got a job. After Grandpa died my dad stepped it up with the prayers. Morning, noon, and night.

I had to go to a real school after Grandpa died and I hated it. They put me in third grade because I was ahead of the kids my age who were in second grade. Grandpa was right about how I wasn't going to fit in. It was the first time I heard the N word, and it was the first time I heard fuck, but they pronounced it *fock*. They sang my name in a snarky lilt: *Taylor Cruz, The Mestizo Girl*. It got so I didn't care anymore. After a while

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they called me *Whitey* and got friendly with me. Right around that time Colleen got some psychotic notion my dad's skin was going to turn white. "After all, Sammy, you're fifty percent there already," she kept saying. I didn't want him to be white and it scared me when my mother talked crazy. I can't believe how confused and ignorant I was.

Dad prayed every morning. It sounded like mumbling unless you got close to him, and then you could hear what he was saying. Colleen didn't like that he prayed so much. "It's over-the-top, Sammy. You could be talking to me some of that time." She said that often, but he kept praying. I know how annoying it must have been for him because until recently I too couldn't stop myself from praying. The only one I ever told about it was my shrink.

I was in fourth grade when Colleen told us she didn't have to go back to Ohio anymore. She also stopped looking for a job. I suppose she figured she needed to be home to take care of me, but that was not great for her mental state, nor for mine. At my dad's request she reluctantly went to see his shrink, Dr. Kehoe. She went once and that was it. "She can't get you to stop praying, Sammy, so how do you think she's going to help me with anything? And how am I supposed to talk to some white chick about my problems?" This confused me because Colleen is as chalky white Caucasian as they come.

As far as I know, Colleen did little all day but sit outside on a beige plastic lawn chair in our backyard. Grandpa had always done our yard work, and after he died the place looked awful. In the summer Colleen looked as dreary as the tawny weeds and drooping dandelions around her. She sat out there even in winter, in her old navy blue pea coat with her legs wrapped in blankets and scarves.

Cayesville Elementary School was a mind-numbing hellhole for me. My most hated class was fifth grade Social Studies with Mr. Palochik. I have no idea why, but everyone called him Chicken Penis. He had gray skin and gray hair and all he did was tell us to copy stuff from old textbooks he handed out at the start of class. There was gray dust on the computers stacked on a table in the back of his classroom. I often cut Social Studies. I could walk into town and be back in time for the next class.

One winter day I cut classes early. Cayesville's streets were lined with dirty plowed snow and the sidewalks were icy. It was too cold to be outside so I went home and chanced it that Colleen wouldn't get upset with me. I let myself in the front door and went straight to the kitchen table where Grandpa used to sit, by the window but close to the radiator where it was nice and warm. Colleen was out back, slowly swaying from side to side on her beige plastic chair. I lifted the sash just long enough to yell out: "Hey Colleen, it's only me in here. Everything is OK." I think she heard me because her head bobbed a few times. I made myself hot tea and looked through our *National Geographic* magazines.

Eventually Colleen got up and walked around to the side of the house. It took her forever to get to the garage. I heard her kick snow off her boots. She slowly opened the kitchen door and shuffled over to the table. She looked like a zombie with all her head gear. "You want some tea, Colleen?"

"No, thank you, baby."

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She sat down across from me and took off her ear muffs and hat and scarves. Her eyes looked glassy from the cold, or maybe she had been crying. She rested her gloved hands crosswise on her shoulders as if she were hugging herself. Colleen was too dependent ever to be nasty, and that day she was even pleasant. She didn't question me about being home from school. Instead, she told me to sit down so we could talk.

"I'm already sitting, Colleen."

"Taylor, I wish I could love you like a mother should love her daughter, like your daddy loves you."

Colleen's smile always confused me because on her face it looked like a mistake. She told me what happened at the chicken plant in Ohio. She shivered, even with her coat on. She told me how much she missed her job there. Seriously? I forgot everything she said that day, until it came back to me in therapy.

About a year later Colleen left us. That's when my dad had to quit his dream job and take care of me. He loved driving the tanker, but what could we do? Grandpa was gone and I was just a kid, so Dad got a 9-to-5 job in the tool section at Lowe's Home Improvement selling drill bits and screw drivers. Dad and I had the next fifteen years together. I learned to compulsively pray thanks to that.

Every few years I would hear my parents talk on the phone. Dad told Colleen she was welcome to come back home anytime, and I was always relieved when that never happened. He handed the phone over to me once, and I had no idea what I was supposed to say. I was in high school at the time, so I told her I wanted to go to Rutgers and major in Sociology. She cried. That was the last time I spoke with her.

Dad died of a heart attack three years ago, same as Grandpa, raking leaves out in the back yard. It could have been worse. Colleen could have stayed with us all those years. Sometimes I'm sad for her. How could she not be messed up after what happened?

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I've had bouts of depression and lots of OCD for as long as I can remember. Some days I've felt so weighted down with hopelessness that I can't get out of bed in the morning. My OCD is the same for me as it was for my dad. I can't leave the house if I don't recite a long prayer each morning. I can also get obsessed with counting things, like license plates, or windows on buildings, but that doesn't bother me much.

I see the same shrink my dad went to for years and Colleen went to for one session. The therapy is called ACT, which stands for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. ACT is supposed to get you focused on what you value in life so you can move toward what you want instead of getting fused with weird-ass thoughts and feelings that hold you back. The idea is that you can't push those thoughts and feelings away, so you may as well accept them, like rapsallions on the bus that you're driving through life. Eventually they get off your bus. If you haven't crashed into a building or driven off a bridge. ACT is a talk therapy. Dr. Kehoe mixes in her own interpersonal style, and sometimes we veer way off the topic.

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I always sit on the wing chair near the heating and A/C unit in Dr. Kehoe's office. I imagine the ergonomic honey-colored leather chair she sits on all day is the same one she sat on 20 years ago, struggling to help my dad with his scrupulosity problem. She rotates a few inches slowly right and left. For someone as dowdy as Dr. Kehoe, she has some nice things in her office, like devices that work as humidifiers and dehumidifiers, several air purifiers, a weather station, a solar-operated generator, a Purell hand-washing dispenser, and a battery-operated waste basket that snaps up and scares people the first time they get near it.

Dr. Kehoe has big dark eyes and glasses with round red frames that maybe she wore when she was my dad's shrink. The rest of her is pretty non-descript, kind of a generic 60-something health care professional look. I don't know everything, but I think there are two types of shrinks: the narcissistic know-it-alls and the ones who try to pretend they don't think they know it all. Dr. Kehoe is the latter type, so she doesn't have to worry about how she dresses or how she looks, as long as she comes across as humble.

What happens in talk therapy? We talk. We reminisce.

*God the Father with gratitude I walk on your Earth. I beseech you to pardon my sins and wake in me the good. Protect my family, my baby girl Taylor, my wife Colleen, and my father here on Earth. Protect me from any spirit that would annihilate them or cause Satan to enter our beings. Oh Lord bless our bodies and keep them clean. Protect us, Holy Father, in travel, and in daily discourse that we may hear and speak your truth.*

Dr. Kehoe smiles. I tell her more of what I remember:

He put the cup to his lips. But only after he said the prayer, when he was free of contamination.

He was called *Daddy*. But the first word I learned was *cup*. Then *Daddy*. Then *Mommy*. New words poured in like a flood, even though I didn't know back then what a flood was. But I had the idea of what a flood was. I said the words with my own mouth and thought they were me. I thought I was a cup. My right ear against his smooth warm brown chest, I was a cup. Where had that memory gone? Where did it come from? When did she tell me to call her Colleen instead of that word that means she is my mother?

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The following Saturday morning I sit for three hours on my living room couch. My thoughts race. Dr. Kehoe says to focus on the present, where I am, what's around me. Focus on sensations. What do I see? What do I hear? Wooden spool coffee table. Book cases. Rug with wine stain I should have cleaned. A dog barks. I push air from my lungs. And wouldn't you know it, it comes right back in through my nose. The rhythm keeps me safe.

I go to my afternoon appointment with Dr. Kehoe.

"So what's been happening with you this week, Taylor? Oh, before we start, how's the temperature in here?"

"I'm good," I say, annoyed at her obsession with room temperature. Doesn't she know

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that once we start talking I probably won't notice if the earth's crust breaks along some fault line right outside the window? She looks at me a few seconds to see if I might change my mind, and when it is obvious that I have said all I want on the subject she opens the blinds with the small remote control that seems to appear magically in the palm of her left hand. The view beyond the ground floor office is a small asphalt lot full of potholes and a few cars. Dr. Kehoe sits down and does her slow swivel and fools with the armrests on her fancy chair.

"Everything is about the same," I say, ignoring the most important piece of information I could possibly provide. Maybe I'll keep it to myself to avoid the possibility of her taking credit. But I cave.

"Well, actually I need to tell you something. I haven't been sleeping well since I saw you last week. Too many images run through my head. The praying's been the same, except for this morning. I sat on the couch to pray, but instead I heard Colleen's voice. I closed my eyes and it was like a dream, and it stayed up there in my head. It was what she told me that day I came home early from school, and it made me want to tear my skin off. All I can remember is that I breathed. I didn't pray."

"You accepted the anxiety and chose to let it go," Dr. Kehoe says.

"Oh, yes, I have that privilege." I am barely able to talk. "Do you know what he did to her, Doc?" Dr. Kehoe nods right before I put my face in my hands.

"Put it into words, Taylor. What's going on now?" Whenever I cry uncontrollably Dr. Kehoe tells me to find words for what I'm feeling.

"Now I know why she hates me. No way *she* could accept and choose."

"I see," Dr. Kehoe says.

"And no way praying can undo that. Such a waste of words. Over and over, talking. All that repetition. You can't change the past." I wrap my fingers around my upper arms and squeeze. I think my teeth are going to crush inside my mouth.

Dr. Kehoe says something about dropping an anchor to ground myself, to be aware of my breathing and of her voice. I breathe, and I hear her describe religious scrupulosity to me once again.

"Taylor, it's a form of OCD. A person can be overly concerned that something he or she might say or do would be considered a sin or a violation of some moral code. People with this disorder have excessive concerns with morality, blasphemy, sin. The obsessiveness becomes so painful that sometimes the only way to relieve it is through ritualized prayer, or trips to confession. Or repetitive cleaning. It's a way of undoing what one perceives to be evil." I recite to her a new prayer:

*God the Father, with gratitude I walk on your Earth. I beseech you to pardon my sins and wake in me the good. Protect my family as they collect the chickens for execution. They stun them, hang them, stab them.*



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I think Dr. Kehoe looks uncomfortable so I want to interject something sweet. “My dad looked like Al Jarreau. He had that voice too. Don’t you think so?”

Her face changes. She looks younger. “Yes, Taylor. He was handsome. His voice was distinct.”

She should say he sounded like Al Jarreau. I get annoyed.

I tell her about the people at the chicken plant. The workers were mostly from Central America. The bosses were white people. They liked Colleen and made her a boss.

*And god bless the boss of Colleen. Lord, I admit with sin in my heart I wanted to kill him but instead I took her away. Protect the bosses from any spirit in me that would annihilate them to keep them from the path of Satan. Protect the Guatemalans. Oh Lord bless their bodies and keep them clean.*

I’m a little shaky, but I have to say it.

*Headless, they are shackled to the line that runs them to the chute where they are scalded and metal fingers pluck the feathers from their skin. Hooks puncture and rip out the gizzards and hearts and livers to spin madly and then twirl in a freezing bath. A machine will soon replace the immigrants, but for now, Almighty God, bless those who saw the birds in half and remove their bones, for their flesh too is soft. Protect the people and the chickens, Holy Father, those who eat and the eaten. And in daily discourse help them that they may hear and speak your truth.*

I remember what Colleen told me about Cruz, how the boss was going to have him deported. The gangs apparently found out Cruz was in Ohio and the boss was afraid of trouble. He would surely get killed if they sent him back, and that broke Colleen’s heart. She never spent much time with the man, but she spent hours on the phone with his girlfriend in Guatemala to find out everything she had to know to marry him. It was the least she could do. What the boss did to Colleen was unspeakable, and yet she told it to me, and I can see how my mother got sick, why she didn’t want to be my mother.

“Colleen watched them slit the throats one last time,” I tell Dr. Kehoe. “She told me about it. She wouldn’t look at me. She stared out the kitchen window at the snow. The bird comes toward the stunner and is so calm, she said, she who had been a virgin until the boss raped her. He took her shoes when he was done.”

I look down at my hands that are as light as the teeth of my brown father. We are light bright white, she says. I hear Colleen tell me we will never look like Sam, that Sam is too good for us, that we are Irish. I tell Dr. Kehoe how it happened:

“Don’t tell me that’s human cruelty, the boss told her. *Because they are not human.* You are like me. You, for God’s sake, are Irish. You called OSHA on us for giving those filthy undocumented animals a nice place to live? He shook his head and laughed at her. You don’t think we know you married that fucking dirty wetback so he could get his green card? You want a visit from the police?”

I grab tissues, but I don’t feel like crying anymore.

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“What I hate is myself because I am from that boss. Sam loved me like crazy so he could undo that act. Isn’t that right, Dr. Kehoe?”

“Taylor, Sam loved you more than anything, as much as he loved Colleen. There’s no need to reduce love to a compulsive act. That’s not why he loved you.”

“But that’s why she hated me, isn’t it? I’ve been coming to see you for two years. You never told me what she must have told you. My dad must have told you.”

Dr. Kehoe says nothing.

“The floor was slick with water and wet bird parts. He pushed her down and pinned her there and threatened to kill her family if she told anyone. She felt bloody chicken bones beneath her as he pressed her into the floor. He ripped the clothes from her body like he was defeathering a bird, and he plunged himself into her. That is how I was conceived. That’s what she wanted me to know.”

“Keep talking, Taylor.”

“You knew this. Why didn’t you tell me?” I feel desperate. Something this horrible I must have made up. “Tell me this didn’t happen, Dr. Kehoe.”

“It’s your story, Taylor. Your mother told you her story and now it’s your story. I couldn’t have told you that. It wasn’t for me to tell. Sam certainly wanted you to know, but he must have thought the time was never right. You know more about your story now, Taylor.”

“Is OCD genetic?” I ask Dr. Kehoe.

She goes on talking. Something about how genetics isn’t always a basis for connection, about how Colleen used the Cruz name to make the marriage look real, about how much it cost Sam in legal fees when Colleen sued the boss for rape, and about how the judge let the boss win in exchange for ignoring the marriage fraud. I hear words, from somewhere. Can one act erase another? The judge’s power to make crimes fungible was a travesty of justice, even more unworthy than the hours my father and I prayed to foil a future injustice. Our lame apotropaic rituals could never make up for what went on in that chicken plant, nor prevent it from happening again.

“Some of this you’ll never know for sure, Taylor. Remember what you can. And know what’s most important is to hear and accept the stories you tell yourself, but don’t let them rule you,” Dr. Kehoe says.

I leave there that day, aware of the venom I think I inherited from the white boss. For months I would direct that confused loathing toward Dr. Kehoe. Looking back on it, her acceptance of that hatred is the same thing I do when I am at my best. Accept it for what it is, a thought, or conversation, or story, or feeling. That’s when I get relief from the depression and the mad acts and habits that try to rob me from having a decent life. Sometimes it works. And sometimes I think one day I’ll find Colleen and tell her everything will be alright.

VIDA CHU

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## *My Mother's Hands*

Her red manicured nails  
used to dance across the keyboard.  
Fingers adorned with sapphires and diamonds  
pulled my hair into braids.  
We sisters rushed home after school  
for a dish of Mama's mango ice cream.  
One day she put a match to her old letters,  
lifted her suitcases and slammed the door.

Now the nails are cut short,  
the knobby arthritic fingers bare.  
An age-spotted hand twists  
the leash of her faithful Welsh Corgi  
while the other gropes the empty mailbox.

## *Word of Mouth*

They were babies, not chronological slap-them-on-the-bottom babies, but babies all the same. They had been wiped clean, blank slates. They had full use of their musculature, could wipe their noses, empty their bowels, but during the wipe process their speech centers had suffered a minor catastrophe. Normally they would have been exterminated. It had been such a costly mistake that the Halls of Reckoning had no other recourse. Speech was to be recovered manually.

The long line of neonate adults, their skin glistening, their eyes bright, were perfectly capable of speech. During the wiping process memory had been severed from language. They had no prior experience that linked speech to favorable or unfavorable events. Corporal RT3 would see that this was so.

He looked over the infant speakers as they lined up before the feeding station, a large compartmentalized glass wall like the historically famed Horn and Hardarts. All vestiges of culinary delights, from chicken salad on rye to gelatinous fruit salads arrayed themselves before them. One word was all it would take to open the doors to the glass-enclosed treats. Some of the neonates salivated, others opened and closed their mouths, puckering like newborns, others wore angry or fearful gazes. It was these latter that Corporal RT3 watched most carefully.

These neonates were to become the new scholars to replace those that had been liquidated, those that had had memory, had indulged in rebellion. They would provide counsel that was not tinged with emotion, with memory. Their advice would be factual, flat, and statistically correct. Their severed memories would not stir them to rebellion as they sought a way off this dying planet. They would lodge in the Hall of Reckoning. The Corporal's was an important post. He had looked on as the previous scholars combatted their way into infinity and he was not necessarily in agreement with what had been done, but he would tell this to no one.

The modifications, the reinforcements, were primitive but they produced results. Like a slot machine, he thought grimly, the ball bouncing, the words tumbling. One word elicited another until in a matter of weeks the bearer of words was complete with a litany of words. Those with lisps, stutters, or other impairments were deemed too distracting and culled out of the selection process.

They were to become an army of scholars versed in the great thinkers, Socrates, Homer, Newton and tempered with humor, Johnathan Winters, Don Knotts, and Flip Wilson. Those who uttered "coup" or "counter intelligence" were immediately removed.

Corporal RT3 had been at this for three days and he watched the neonates with a kind of wonder. A woman, hungry looking, who had refused to speak during this time, had pushed her way up the line. They went unfed between sessions, water yes and nutrients but no solid food. She had a starved look and the Corporal glanced at her tattoo. Babylonian History, tongue: Aramaic. She pushed her way to the front of

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the line staring at the microphone he held in his hand. She remained mute, her stark intelligent eyes now staring into his.

Normally he would have removed her because of her aggressive glare. He was trained for such eventualities. She was used to starving. He could see from the scars on her back she had been reduced to menial labor.

“Speak!” he cried as pushed the microphone toward her mouth.

She padded around on her bare feet, cupped her hands around her mouth and whispered, “Noise.”

He smiled. “Good! Another!” he said his voice sharp and unrelenting.

He delayed releasing the food. “Another!”

“Angel!” she shouted, her head swiveling on her shoulders as if looking for someone in the line of bodies. A tremor rose among the waiting neonates, like an unexpected wave.

He didn’t know the meaning, thought perhaps it was part of her knowledge of Babylonian history, but it unnerved him. He felt perhaps it was something argumentative. Corporals, and there were many, were ever on the alert for anything smacking of political heresy.

“Very good,” he said sighing deeply and he pointed to the glass wall. She pressed her face against the wall, her lips leaving saliva on the glass. He opened the door and extracted an egg salad sandwich.

The sandwich was wrapped in cellophane and he gingerly handed it to her and asked her to step aside. She quickly had it open and again he motioned to her to move. She looked squarely at him and offered him half of the sandwich. He shook his head vehemently, and pushed her aside. As he began another reprocessing, a childlike man in his twenties, he watched her from the corner of his eye, saw the gobs of creamy egg salad, mayonnaise smeared across her lips and mouth.

“You there! Z40B! You can’t eat in here,” and he pointed to a doorway at the end of the hall. “In there!” he cried as she stuffed the rest of the sandwich into her mouth, her cheeks bloated. She smiled brokenly. Normally he would have called her out for restructuring, but the line was long and people were hungry. He had words to get.

The process of restoring language took about 8 weeks. It was a slow process eliciting just a trickle of words at first, “to be, “friend”, “mending.” Later the words would flow into themselves like a symphony. Paragraphs, essays, stories would come tumbling out. At times the Corporal would have to force them to stop. The more words they knew, it seemed they no longer hungered for food. The Corporal, however, was not alone in his work. There were many corporals all working to restore words. At times, too, the work seemed dangerous.

Once in a while, a great while, the corporal thought, a word would flower and die in

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anguish. Tears and shouting would occur and the neonates would be briskly escorted away back to the mines or fields or laboratories. Sometimes the sensory memories were not severed completely and he would have to look up and down the line looking for neonates that seemed to be practicing their words. Sometimes the neonates were explosive though naked and without weapons.

Their future role as sterile, objective counsels to generals and the oligarchy, required precision. One misstep, one sad or angry neonate could bring the whole universe that had been carefully constructed tumbling. Corporal RT3 took his job seriously.

The next morning he found himself looking for her. It was hard to distinguish features. Their heads were shaved and their torsos were all sunken. It was through some miracle that he remembered her tattoo. Z40B. Babylonian History: Tongue Aramaic. The tattoos were emblazoned on their arms just beneath the shoulder. He looked for her as he strutted up and down the line. He had an unbidden moment of regret thinking she had been whisked away during the night after the patrollers, the secondary patrol, language experts, studied their spoken words. What had she said? Noise? Noise was benign or at least he thought so and then he saw her leaning against the glass wall. He thought she might faint, her look was so dire. He took her arm to reveal that she had been standing before a steaming bowl of soup, cut off from her by the glass window.

“Word?” he said.

For a second time she looked at him and smiled, revealing newly missing teeth.

“Pho,” she said, cupping her mouth as if revealing a secret. “Pho.”

Every hair on the back of his neck stirred unpleasantly.

“Again?”

“Pho.”

He knew the meaning of ‘faux.’ Though not a good word, it was not entirely inflammatory.

“Again?”

“Pho,” she said, slipping her arm onto his shoulder, pointing to the glass window.

But ‘foe’ was entirely wrong. He brushed her hand off his arm and took her by hers, the tattoo obliterated by his grip, when the Arbitrator implanted in his wrist started flashing. He called it his purity button. It measured sexual arousal and as they walked the length of the room, he waited precious moments before he pressed the flashing light, privately enjoying what was going on between his legs. As they reached the sentry at the exit door, the door back to ignominy, he pressed on the flashing light and received the first warning electrical shocks, mild at first, and then greater until his body succumbed.

She was struggling now and shouting. “Pho! Faux! Foe!”

CAROLYN PHILLIPS

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*The human experiment  
has ended*

finches search for wild seeds  
backyard feeders are empty now  
the maple and the oak breathe deeply again

at the landfill kudzu enshrouds  
the dross in orgiastic green,  
tendrils lashing cell phone  
and laptop together  
in incestuous embrace

silent messages clog coaxial cables  
the words piling on each other  
in a jumble of unheard cries

and leaf-cutter ants march along  
carrying the precise shapes needed  
for their underground nursery  
as they have always done.

## *Tag Sale at Area 51*

Not one among the thousands standing in the rain that day looked surprised to find the Nevadan desert sodden and gray. After all, this was Area 51 and these were conspiracy theorists. The unexpected was—as a matter of course—expected.

They were here in response to a classified ad:

*Tag Sale: Groom Lake Test Facility. Fri 9am-2pm.  
Parts electronic and otherwise. Parking \$5. No early birds.*

Of course, they recognized Groom Lake as Area 51, that infamous repository of government secrets. And, of course, they arrived early. Days early. They camped along the roadways in RVs rigged with satellite scramblers and filled the registers of Las Vegas-area motels with pseudonyms and pseudo-addresses. They had parsed the ad for hidden messages, argued over possible anagrams, but only agreed on two points:

1. The government must think they're idiots to try charging \$5 to park in an empty desert.
2. All vindication and validation hinged on the word "otherwise" in "parts electronic and otherwise," though they disagreed on what it signified. Props from the Apollo "moon landing"? Alien skeletons from downed U.F.O.s? Invisible spacecraft?

"Weather machine!" insisted the wild-eyed little man standing too close to Arthur in the crowd outside the gate. "Global warming? Propaganda! The Establishment's stupidest cover-up yet."

Arthur hadn't expected his casual remark about the rain to trigger a spit-spattering tirade about top-secret weapons responsible for rising sea levels and violent weather. But then he looked around and realized he might be the only attendee not plotting to expose a bureaucratic lie or substantiate a pet theory. His only objective was to make it through his first adventure without Marcy.

Before retirement, she had always set their itineraries—and set them at full throttle. She rented the Ferrari to race along the Amalfi Coast; he sat in the passenger seat with a grin plastered to his face. That's how he'd pictured their retirement: an exhilarating ride with Marcy at the wheel.

But something changed last October when she retired. No plans materialized to hike the Himalayas or sail the Seychelles. Marcy spent her days watching television in the living room of their North Las Vegas home. Her only regular outing was a nail salon two blocks away.

"Isn't this nice," she would murmur when Arthur joined her on the sofa. She would snuggle closer and sometimes fall asleep on his shoulder. She was always tired. (Heart trouble? Depression? Cancer?) He would put an arm around her and hope he radiated



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serenity, not anxiety. Or restless discontent. Or shame about his restless discontent.

Arthur checked his watch. 8:32AM. The wild-eyed little man—who reminded Arthur of his terrier Bailey launching himself against the front window at the mail carrier—stepped closer and thrashed his arms. “Tornados! Hurricanes! Floods! Whatever it takes to scare the populace into submission!”

The man’s breath smelled of celery. Arthur stepped back. He tried to appear interested, but the man’s intensity embarrassed him. Or perhaps he was embarrassed by his own inability to match the crowd’s fervor. Despite the dreary weather, the gate area outside Area 51 was festive. One bushy-bearded group sat in camp chairs under a tarp swapping tips for living off the grid. A couple in matching camouflage jumpsuits marched past sharing a packet of freeze-dried venison. A fistful of young men in combat boots argued passionately about the role of Freemasons in the New World Order. Ladies with lime-green beehive wigs hustled through the crowd hawking “J-Rod for President” t-shirts depicting an egg-headed alien with beady black eyes.

Arthur imagined whispering to Marcy, “Compared to these characters, *we’re* the aliens.”

She would have laughed.

8:40AM. The weather man’s diatribe ground to a halt. He glared at Arthur with fierce disgust and then huffed off, likely in search of a more excitable audience.

Arthur was left alone with his damp shoes. Uncomfortable, but he was still glad to be there. He hadn’t made up his mind until early that morning after a long night of indecision. A government tag sale a few hours from home, he finally concluded, was tame enough to attempt on his own yet adventurous enough to appease his restlessness. And not exotic enough to seem disloyal to Marcy.

While following Bailey’s waddling backside on a shortened version of their morning walk, he had dithered over what to tell Marcy, if anything. Maybe he should say outright how much he missed their adventures. But then she might accompany him out of a sense of obligation. Maybe it would be better to first show her the newspaper ad and gauge her interest. Or would that make it more awkward if she wasn’t interested and he went anyway? An invitation might even prompt her to sit him down and reveal some terrible medical prognosis.

Better not to know.

To his relief, there was no need to decide. By the time he and Bailey reached home, Marcy was engrossed in a recording of yesterday’s *Today Show*, her most concerning preoccupation. (Early-stage memory loss? Dementia?) She acknowledged his return with a cheery wave of her lavender nails. He left a note and fled before he could change his mind.

Why lavender? She had never been the pastel type. Why nail polish at all? She had

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never been the manicure type. Or was he reading too much into this harmless new interest? Maybe she simply never had time before.

8:51AM. Arthur looked up. The carnival atmosphere outside Area 51 had vanished. People pressed toward the entrance, gazing into the gray distance to appear nonchalant while jockeying hard for position. They were no longer comrades; they were competitors.

Arthur joined the crowd at the chain-link fence and flimsy tollgate. Las Vegas had cheap apartment complexes with better security. But the two armed guards in their dust-colored fatigues were impressive. In their mirror sunglasses they looked impervious to the incongruities around them—the rain-soaked desert, the crowded wilderness, the inconsequential gate protecting immensely consequential (allegedly) state secrets.

9:00AM. If there was a signal, Arthur missed it. The crowd surged forward, and he found himself shuffling among the crush and jab of shoulders and elbows, backpacks and handbags.

The tag sale had begun.

Armed guards directed the swell of people through the jet-sized doors of a hangar set apart from the other buildings. At the sight of the laden tables, attendees dropped any remaining restraint and sprinted down the rows.

Eventually Arthur was swept into the back of the hangar, where the crowd was sparse enough that he could inspect the merchandise. The nearest table held scrap metal pieces. Unrecognizable but nothing to excite speculation. Other tables were piled with office electronics: obsolete computer monitors, printers, and rotary phones.

Arthur wasn't the only one disappointed. The people around him stopped shoving. Individuals melded into groups, and groups huddled between tables, muttering.

*Where are the disassembled U.F.O.s and reverse-engineered spacecraft?  
The technologies that control people's minds through digital television?  
Proof that human-alien hybrids are running America?*

An acne-pocked young man in a black trench coat approached a guard. "Hey, what's all this stuff supposed to be? Where's the good stuff?"

The guard's face remained expressionless behind his sunglasses. "This's it. Take it or leave it."

The questioner turned to those watching. "Can you believe this junk?"

"Yeah," a woman yelled out. "Why'd you let us in if you don't have anything good?"

The crowd's murmured agreement was broken by a gaunt, shaggy-haired man with a shrill voice. "Oh-ho, I know why. It's a ploy! These are all parts of something huge—let's call it X—that They're trying to hide. So They busted X into a million pieces, disguised the pieces as boring stuff, and are selling 'em off, one by one. Once X is scattered, no one can

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prove it ever existed!” He looked around in triumph. “They want to use us to hide Xi!”

The audience quickly found truth in this. “Aha!” “I knew it!”

The young man in the trench coat swept aside a box of battered staplers and stood on a table. “Wrong! I’ll tell you what’s *really* going on. They know we figured out what They’re up to, so They lured us here to get rid of us. I, for one, won’t be surprised when the floor drops out and we’re buried alive with all this junk in an underground nuclear missile shed!”

The audience gasped. Someone screamed.

“Ha!” countered shaggy-hair man. “Where’s your proof?”

“Proof!” scoffed trench-coat man. “As if anyone here needs *proof*.”

The crowd rumbled. The guards stiffened and began muttering into their walkie-talkies about “Code Jaundice” and “Situation 51.”

Arthur, whose general policy was to avoid conflict, moved toward the nearest door.

A guard stepped in front of him. “Exit’s that way,” he said gruffly, pointing his chin toward the open hangar door at the other end of the building.

“Bathroom,” Arthur replied, watching his own earnest reflection in the guard’s mirror lenses.

The guard paused, distracted by the warring factions forming among the tables. (“They’re *using* us!” “They’re *after* us!”) “Left, then down the stairs.”

The restroom was truly restful after the scene upstairs, but Arthur added its institution-white walls and fixtures to his mental list of Area 51’s disappointments. However, while washing up, he noticed a pair of mirror sunglasses nestled among the balled-up paper towels in the trashcan. One earpiece was bent, but they fit. The bathroom mirror showed a Man of Mystery. A Man of Adventure. A man of baldness and slight paunchiness but one capable of finding his own way out. Doing his own reconnaissance. Arthur straightened the sunglasses on his nose and soundlessly opened the door.

Outside the bathroom, guards shoved past, ordering use of the hangar’s sprinkler system to quell the growing upheaval. Arthur, hurrying in the other direction, wondered what the wild-eyed man with the weather machine theory would make of this method of crowd control.

The long underground corridor was silent except for the squelch of Arthur’s shoes and the chill buzz of the fluorescent lights. He shivered. Government ploys seemed more credible down here. What if the guards were alien hybrids hiding their glassy insect eyes behind mirror sunglasses? And what if the owner of the bent sunglasses wanted them back...and wasn’t far behind?

Arthur’s sense of adventure vaporized. A door up ahead was open a crack. He would turn himself in.

His knock pushed the door open further.

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“Hello?” he whispered, only half hoping for a response.

The room was dimly lit, made dimmer by the sunglasses. He could make out a large space with a shiny linoleum floor. In the center stood a beige, closet-like structure with an open door.

Arthur circled it cautiously. “Hello?”

The structure was dark and empty. It looked ordinary enough, but—after watching hours of cable television movies with Marcy—Arthur firmly believed that one should never enter a dark, empty structure. Never. Which is why he was shocked to find himself bolting into it after hearing a faint noise in the hall: a drip or a blip or a footstep. Or nothing at all.

The latch clicked shut and an overhead light blinked on. Arthur yanked at the door handle, frantically, vainly. He was standing in a cramped space constructed of molded plastic, reminiscent of an airplane lavatory but without the emergency exit instructions or service call button. He was desperately skimming the long list of posted restrictions (“No smoking. Not for use by pregnant women. Do not operate while intoxicated.”) when the whirring began.

A female voice overhead, tinny and distant, startled him. “Hello? Is someone *in* there?”

Arthur froze.

A second voice, this one booming and male, joined the first. “What the heck! This’s *my* mission!”

“I— I’m sorry,” said Arthur. “It was an accident. I wandered in by mistake.”

The female was quick to soothe. “It’s okay, it’s okay. We’ll talk you through it. You activated the next E-NOW mission.”

“My E-NOW mission!” The intercom crackled with the man’s outrage.

“E-NOW?” Arthur desperately needed to sit but didn’t dare so much as brush against the structure’s sides.

“Expansion of a Naturally-Occurring Wormhole, moron,” snapped the man. “You know. Time machine.”

“But don’t get too excited,” said the woman. Her chuckle soothed Arthur. It reminded him of Marcy’s imperturbability. “It’s been classified as experimental for decades. Probably always will be. Too many paradoxes. And potential abuses. Right, Mike?”

The man—Mike—made an odd croaking sound that triggered in Arthur’s mind scenes from a laughably bad cable movie he and Marcy had watched one dull afternoon. Frog People wearing colander-like helmets emerged from underground tunnels to take over the world. Their croak-laugh after tricking the hero into their trap sounded like Mike’s noise.

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Arthur stared at the door latch. What if he threw his weight against it?

The female reached the end of a long explanation. “So that’s why we’re studying it. We only have clearance for small hops back in time. Then we check that nothing substantial changed.” She paused. “Are you okay?”

Arthur nodded numbly at a chin-level aperture that might be the camera. *Hops?* He tried not to picture the two speakers as having moist, green skin and wide, lipless mouths.

“Good. Actually, this is a great opportunity!” A moment’s static couldn’t disguise the brightness in her faraway voice. “I’m convinced the E-NOW could spawn a revolution in work-life balance. I work a ten-hour day in thirty minutes! And it’s connected to the HVAC, so commuting takes seconds. So once you try it and see how great it works, you could tell the other guards and then all of you would benefit.”

*Guard?* She thought he was a guard? “Wait! Stop! Please! I’m sorry but I’m not—”

“Let me guess,” Mike interrupted with nasal sarcasm. “You’re not familiar with the HVAC either? (...bunch of idiots guarding this place...)”

“It stands for High-Velocity Alternative Conveyance.” Her voice cut in quickly, perhaps to cover the male’s rudeness. “You know, the underground train system with entry points across the globe? It’s not well-maintained these days, but it’s still a great system. You wouldn’t believe the places I’ve visited between projects. And at a moment’s notice. Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat, sunrise in Patagonia, sunset in Zimbabwe—”

There was a cheerful “ping!” like a toaster oven. The door unlatched.

“So now what?” Mike sounded sulky. “I suppose you’re going to let *him* do *my* mission?”

“He might as well. It’s straightforward enough.”

Not knowing what to expect, Arthur decided to throw in his lot with the maybe-Frog People, at least until escape was possible.

He had to lean forward to hear the female’s instructions over Mike’s mutterings. “Now, when you open the door, you’ll find yourself at a press conference that happened yesterday. Earlier today, one of our agents visited the scene and accidentally knocked into a big vase.”

“Nudged,” said Mike. “‘Knocked’ makes it sound like the vase fell over. It just got nudged a little. Barely moved.”

“Still, the motion was caught on camera. And our mandate is to not take *any* chances with recorded footage of the past, no matter how minor. All you need to do is stand behind the vase—the one to the left of the stage—and hold it steady without being seen on camera.”

“Just stand there?” asked Arthur. “Like a normal human? I mean, like I belong there? Will anyone—any... being—be able to see me?”

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“People at the press conference will see you, but that’s fine as long as you’re inconspicuous and stay out of the cameras’ views. That’s all Mike was supposed to do on this mission.”

As Arthur adjusted the volume knob on Mike’s complaints, he grinned at his own silly fears. Mike couldn’t be a Frog Person, because a Frog Person wouldn’t be inconspicuous at a press conference. Besides, who ever heard of a frog named Mike?

He had to increase the volume when the female voice returned. “It should only take four minutes. When the speaker says ‘This is all a conspiracy,’ that’s your cue to return to the E-NOW through the door marked HVAC. I’ll take it from there. Okay? Ready?”

“I think so,” said Arthur cautiously. “I mean, it sounds easy enough.”

“Great! You’ll do fine. After your visit, we’ll review the footage to see that everything is back to normal, okay? Now. Take a deep breath. When you’re ready, open the door.”

“And don’t interfere with anything else, or you’ll cause *real* problems,” Mike added. “Just hold the stupid vase still.”

Arthur took a deep breath and opened the door.

The brightly lit room was crowded with people. Regular human people, mainly reporters with cameras and microphones. They were facing a stage, on which a large man with a graying crewcut and navy suit was saying, “I deny all allegations of embezzling government tag sale proceeds.”

The scene looked vaguely familiar. Had he seen this on last night’s news?

Arthur straightened his sunglasses—grateful for the disguise—and located the waist-high ceramic vase filled with dried flowers. Avoiding cameras, he circled the crowd and—with a growing appreciation for his own inconspicuousness—stationed himself behind the vase. He gripped its lip with one hand and wedged a hip against its cool ceramic side. The dried leaves and flowers scritch against his raincoat to the beat of his pounding heart.

As the speaker, addressed by reporters as “Senator,” expounded on his devotion to American principles, Arthur took in the bewildering situation from his hiding place. If this event took place yesterday, what happened to today? Was it possible to be both here and home watching this on tv? If the news cameras panned over the vase, could he—if he had been sitting on the sofa beside Marcy yesterday (today?)—have glimpsed the rain-coated elbow or damp shoe of a certain Man of Mystery? Or would that count as being seen on camera? He pulled in his elbow and foot.

Suddenly, Arthur was knocked from behind with such force that he barely managed to keep the vase still. His head was thrown forward, and the sunglasses flew off and landed among the dried flower stems.

Arthur stifled a gasp and reached through the stems to retrieve his glasses.

His fingers closed instead on an envelope. It was marked SENATOR in block letters. It hadn’t been there a moment ago.

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“This is a conspiracy!” shouted the senator.

His cue! Arthur frantically groped for the sunglasses. From deep in the vase he heard a gentle clink as they settled on the bottom. Now what? He stuffed the envelope in his raincoat pocket and scuttled toward the door marked “HVAC.”

As soon as the latch clicked shut and the overhead light flicked on, Arthur regretted his spur-of-the-moment decision to take the envelope.

“Hello?” he said, panting into the camera. “I think I made some mistakes out there. Some changes.”

A moment’s static, then the female voice returned from its tinny distance. “Oh my word!”

“I’m sorry. My sunglasses fell deep in the vase. And I took something.”

“You aren’t a guard! I thought you were a guard!”

Arthur touched the bridge of his nose in surprise. The mistaken identity had slipped his mind. “The sunglasses. I meant to tell you. I found them. I came for the tag sale and then needed the bathroom and...” He stopped. It was hard to explain.

“I’m sorry, I—” They both spoke at the same time, then broke off, leaving a silence that seemed to stretch eons.

“Look,” she finally said. “If I had known, I never would have sent you out there.”

“No, no. It’s fine. It’s good. In fact, it’s exactly what I needed.” Arthur felt the truth of this statement as he spoke. He had felt alive out there. Energized. Adventurous. Worthy of mirrored sunglasses.

“Well, it’s very kind and accommodating of you to say that, considering how much you... Considering you aren’t the type to...”

The aura of the sunglasses slipped away. Arthur grimaced in self-deprecation. “I don’t exactly look like a Man of Mystery and Adventure, do I. But I’m great at being inconspicuous.”

She laughed uncomfortably. “Well, that was exactly what we needed. Someone inconspicuous. You did great, by the way. Really great.”

Arthur’s blush spread to his ears and throat. He felt himself straining toward the warmth of her voice.

The E-NOW’s whirrings were the only sound for a few moments. It struck him that Mike hadn’t chimed in.

“Where’s your co-worker?”

“Mike? Oh. Bathroom. Meanwhile, I’ll say what he won’t: thanks for undoing his error.”

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You probably already figured out he's the one who knocked the vase in the first place."

Arthur held up the envelope. "Then is he also the one who hid this in the vase? I hope I didn't cause more trouble by taking it."

"No, you did the right thing. Quick thinking. Great instinct on your part. Leave it in the machine, and I'll take a look." She made a sound that might have been a sigh. "I did suspect. He's so cagey and possessive about his trips. Guess I should revisit the scene and see what else he's been up to."

The whirring changed to a whine. Her distant voice brightened. "Well. Guess I'm going to be short an employee. Ever consider this line of work?"

Arthur smiled at her joke. Wait. Was she serious? "I can't!" he sputtered.

She laughed. "Just kidding. You've probably had enough adventure to last the rest of your life."

"Oh, no. It's not that. I was craving adventure. I need it in my own quiet way. But my wife. She needs me till she gets back on her feet. Then I'll—we'll—be off. She's the leader of our adventures. She's amazing. Fearless. She's..."

Arthur blushed again and pretended to be interested in a glowing knob near his elbow. Why was he telling this stranger about Marcy?

"Well. You're just full of surprises," she said after a moment. "If you like adventure that much, want me to send you home by E-NOW? I can get you there before you left this morning."

Grateful for the subject change, Arthur thought back over his morning: the drive, the drizzle, the dissension. It seemed like a different world—a bland world—compared to this one he had stumbled into. "Yes. Please."

"Great! And, hey, I'm really sorry about the misunderstanding. I guess I... Well. I shouldn't make assumptions."

This time when Arthur stepped through the E-NOW door, he found himself outside in cool morning air. Bailey glanced up from leisurely sniffing a nearby utility pole.

Arthur shut the door behind him. On its exterior was stenciled, *Glitzy Nailz HVAC Access*. He was behind a strip mall two blocks from home.

He looked at his watch. 6:05AM. He would leave for the tag sale in ten minutes. Except he had already been there. What does one do with a morning the second time around? Maybe nothing. He was exhausted.

When Arthur arrived home, Marcy was, once again, sitting on the sofa watching a recording of yesterday's *Today Show*. This time, Arthur collapsed beside her.

She squeezed his hand. "So. Did you buy me anything?"



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Had he been supposed to pick up something for Marcy while walking Bailey? It was confusing to keep track of time the second time around.

He looked down at her hand on his. Marcy's nails were bright coral. Hadn't they been lavender before?

"You got your nails re-done?" he asked.

"I was at Glitzy Nailz anyway."

As Arthur thought this through, the newscaster said, "Let's go live to a press conference where Senator Jay Rodman is addressing allegations of government tag sale fraud."

"I need to watch this," Marcy said. "But, hey, want to come along tomorrow?"

"To the nail salon?" Arthur asked cautiously.

"For starters. But you'll need these." From the pocket of her quilted housecoat, she pulled out a pair of mirror sunglasses with a bent earpiece.

**AYESHA SULTANA**  
.....

## *Apparently Invisible*

Look how she's oppressed and abused  
Stuck behind walls how could she refuse  
Smothered in the heat, not at all amused

The poor thing silent and ugly  
Left without a voice after being treated so roughly

A stain in the crowd, a menace to society  
Look how she smiles horridly  
What plot is she scheming as she passes so calmly

It seems as though Halloween must've come a little early  
As the children scream monster and point horrifyingly  
Adults burst with laughter or anger as they glare accusingly

Demonized by the very journalists who were supposed to show sympathy  
Reveal the truth and leave aside all mockery  
But they used freedom of expression to spew hatred and agony  
When it was only supposed to be used for spreading compassion in humanity

She's right there but they can't see  
Not because of the veil she wears but because of the ignorance they adopted blindly  
Refusing to question, or hear her side of the story  
Dumbfounded when she speaks, that's not her voice in reality!  
She is supposed to be silent so her voice is just imaginary

It's the 21st-century, must she be so backward?  
Publishing fake stories claiming to free the caged bird  
Only harming humanity in the name of moving forward

It's not your fault, forgive me, I'm sorry  
Apologies for not being there to explain  
When the media bashed my cause with disdain  
I forgive them for the animosity they could not contain  
And from the fear-mongering from which they could not refrain  
I'm sorry you had to hear everything that was wrong  
And took it to heart as you swore at me but for God, I stayed strong

You couldn't escape what you were surrounded by,  
As your glares dug deep, though I know you didn't try  
Like innocent lambs, you conformed to the news of the wolves and silently you stood  
As she was stabbed to death and her scarf portrayed red riding hood  
In a world screaming for justice how sad was her fate  
But the continuous ignorance is an even sadder state

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The very platforms that were meant to raise awareness against hate crimes made them  
go viral  
Now many hide their faith only for survival

I hold no grudges nor do I blame  
I speak for every woman who chose modesty as her name  
Who chose to let her intellect speak before her body  
Who decided to break free from the immoral shackles of society

Let go of the false notions I plead  
In a dark world, only the enlightened one will succeed  
Ignorance is truly the greatest cancer  
Just walk up to her and ask her  
So respectfully she will give you an answer  
That will free your tortured heart from its anger

Believe me or not I wear this veil independently  
To preserve my dignity  
For my God loves a modest lady  
Those who follow in the footsteps of Mary (Upon her be peace)  
The mother of Jesus (Peace be upon him),  
They tried to tear her to pieces  
Attacking her chastity  
While she was the pinnacle of piety  
A Woman so beautiful and selfless  
A reminder for those so selfish

Now forgive me if I chose role models who were not plastic  
Over airbrushed models with lifestyles so drastic  
Whose actions and features weren't edited and painted  
Pioneers of women's rights  
Pushed behind the unrealistic models that are tainted  
And teen prodigies who forced girls to conform to body images that out of starvation  
they fainted

Accept me for who I am and not for what you've seen on the news  
So what if it hits one billion views!  
The millions watching a movie doesn't make it real  
Hear my story from me, for I endure and I feel

Let the world hear  
My voice so loud and clear  
That I am free  
This is me

**MARION POLLACK**  
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## *Model Apartment*

“You have to clean the toilet today, Marion.”

“Why me, I’m the worst at it and I hate it the most.”

“Tough cookies, Marion. It’s your turn. You can’t get out of it this time.”

At P.S. 36, the Bronx, as in every other junior high school in all the boroughs of New York City, girls in 8th grade had to take a class called Apartment. In the 1950’s we had to participate in this as part of a three segment series that included cooking and sewing. The boys had shop all year.

The wicked old maid marm who taught the class had a wiry hair coming out of the mole on her chin. She was always dressed in black and was anorexically thin. This woman promised to prepare us for marriage.

This was accomplished by teaching us all the intricacies of cleaning an apartment. It included lessons on the importance of cleanliness and the joys of neatness. I don’t know how this teacher was able to dirty the apartment for each class meeting, but it was always a filthy mess, the bathroom especially grimy.

Of the three segments, I liked cooking class best. I especially loved putting huge globs of mayonnaise in the tuna fish, egg salad and green jello molds. None of which I ever had at home. The aroma of delicious chocolate chip cookies was followed by stuffing as many as we could into our mouths before the bell rang.

“Those are my cookies, I know the ones I baked.”

“Yeah, yours all have weird shapes.”

“Now girls, they all taste delicious.”

I loved the little mandarin oranges peeking out of cool whip ambrosia. We hated cleaning up there too, but we giggled hysterically as we all pitched in. Not so when it came to Apartment.

The struggle to master the treadle sewing machine was almost as bad. Thread kept getting stuck and stitching was always crooked. It was impossible to get the rhythm of your feet on the treadle and the push pull of the wheel all at the same time. We had to make jumpers in preparation for making our own graduation dresses. Mine was a, not too ugly, green waffle patterned cotton which hung crookedly, with lumpy pockets and twisted bodice. My girlfriends and I decided to wear our jumpers all on the same day and suffered the raucous laughter of the boys.

When it came to the graduation dress I was at a complete loss. Mom bought me a few

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yards of beautiful white piquet material and helped cut out the pattern. The actual sewing was another thing entirely. I ended up with a torn, gathered up mess. Fortunately, when I came home crying, my mother took me and the dress upstairs to 5B to Mrs. Becker, the seamstress. At times like this I really appreciated living in our apartment in Parkchester. Our building held the wonders and talents of a hundred people.

“Oh boy, this is quite a challenge. But don’t worry, I can fix it.”

She tore the dress apart, pinned me up with what was left of the soft white cloth. In two days she made me a lovely, capped sleeved graduation dress. I proudly wore it on graduation day with several crinolines and felt gorgeous.

Back to the Apartment.

In the beginning I had no idea what “Apartment” was. It was in the basement of the building down a dark sinister hallway. It had an old dingy door which creaked when it opened. We were always frightened to enter, tiptoeing in the dim light. You were assigned to “Apartment” with nine other girls in order to learn how to clean house, not to mention ironing and proper dress.

On the first day we were given a lecture by our old, stiff necked teacher about how important it was, when dressing, to put your skirt on first and then your freshly ironed blouse, which had been on a hanger. After the skirt was on you could undo it and tuck in the blouse very carefully. We were all choking and gagging to squelch our laughter. A demerit here could mean detention.

I am dying to know if the curriculum was exactly the same in as far away as Brooklyn.

Each time we met in “Apartment” we had to decide among the group who would team up for kitchen, bedrooms (hospital corners), living room, closets and bathroom. Who would Hoover and who would dust. Somehow there were always old clothes in the closets and dirty dishes in the sink. Did someone actually live here?

You never wanted to get the bathroom with its rusty faucets and rank odor. In the corner stood a plunger to be used every time, for the stuffed toilet, bathtub and sink. Why were there always wads of hair stuck in the drains? Who actually used this bathroom? An old gray mop was used with Ajax cleanser for the floor.

Lucky for me I had one good chubby little friend who I could bribe to do my bathroom duty.

“Sandy, if you do it today, I will take you to the candy store after school.”

“I don’t know Marion, you only got me an egg cream, a pretzel and three marshmallow twists last time.”

“How about I add to that four chocolate jelly rings and a coffee ice cream cone.” I calculated it would all come to fifteen cents. So worth it.

“Ok, Marion, but don’t ask me ever again, or else I’ll tell on you.”

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We have come a long way, baby! Can you imagine our daughters ever actually taking a course in house cleaning? It is, of course, obvious that they haven't.

It makes me feel very old to think that we were segregated and subjugated in that way without complaining. We did have an inkling that this was ridiculous, causing lots of joking and laughter.

We wondered too, what went on in the awesome, brightly lit wood shop where the boys made birdhouses and bookshelves, and sometimes came away with bloodied fingers. They would show their wooden objects and war wounds with pride. We never even thought to even ask if we could try it.

EDITH MCGOWAN

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## *Only the Seasons Change*

You could always count us on one hand.  
As usual I dressed with care,  
saved two seats per high command,  
my coat and pocketbook in their chairs.

The back room was small,  
piped in music set-up for exactly forty people—  
four rows of black linens, tables sat cheek by jowl.  
Those used to privilege complained steadily, bitterly.

Tinny taps on water glasses to quiet the din.  
Perfumes, colognes cloyed the night  
as the lecturer went on too long, again.  
When he finally came to an end,

I craned my neck, but no I hadn't missed anybody—  
only us three blacks in the room of forty.

## *The Driver's Seat*

At seven, I had a creative mind without a firm grasp of consequences and there was a monster in our basement.

The monster's name was Maytag. His shiny white cubed body was elevated on four legs tapering down to tiny wheeled feet. I liked watching the colors of clothes swirl in the sudsy water of his belly. They would dance and have fun until life was squeezed out of them by the monster's toothless and terrible turning wringers.

My mother fished out each sacrificial garment and fed it into the perpetually hungry rolling jaws. The clothes dove into the rinse water tub to be swished by hand. Then it was through the wringer in reverse and into the wicker basket balanced on her hip. She sighed at the occasional cracking sound that signified the need to replace another broken button.

I played with my dolls but was really watching each step of the familiar cleaning process. Mother smiled as I poured pretend tea and awaited my chance to be a hero. I knew she wanted to ask me to come outside but didn't because I was having a nice picnic with my dolls.

Mom carried the basket of stiff, damp, lifeless laundry up the stairs to the pulley clothesline that ran from the back porch to the big tree on the other side of the driveway.

I had been told not to touch the washing machine, but not today. Today I was almost invisible. Mom was worried about my sister. Carol had the measles and was wearing a harness that kept her in bed. If she stayed in the darkened room until she got better, she wouldn't ruin her eyes. Mom and I waited until Carol was asleep to do the laundry.

Mother was outside. Carol, my shadow, was asleep. I was alone. I reveled in the freedom to do what I wanted. I removed my doll's dress, picked up some washcloths that I'd used as picnic blankets, and marched to the monster's lair. He slept, but I knew the location of the lever that would bring him to life. I used both hands to move the bar and shivered with happiness as the monster awoke. I heard the mumble, the rumble, the whir as the monster taunted me with words I couldn't quite understand but knew to be a challenge.

I accepted.

Waving a green washcloth, I moved closer and closer, lightly touching the turning cylinders with the fabric until they bit. The fiend was strong, but I was stronger. I snatched the green square from the jaws of death. I felt my heart dance. I tried again with a white washcloth. Victory, the hero wins. I raised my arms above my head and kicked imaginary balloons into the air.

I picked up my doll's dress, a pretty pink one with tiny white flowers, two snaps in the back, and lace around the hem. The dress fit on my hand like a puppet, I waved my



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arm back and forth in tantalizing dance movements. Closer and closer I inched. I was teasing. I was twirling. I was testing. I was caught!

My fingers hurt. I screamed. My wrist. I'm being squished. I screamed louder. My elbow. The rollers spun round and round.

"It hurts, it's hurting me. Mom, mom, mom!"

*Can't she hear me? Why isn't she coming?*

Mother heard and rushed to my sister's bedside. Carol was still asleep. My screams reached a crescendo punctuated by quick hollow thuds of mother's feet on the cellar steps.

She shrieked when she saw what I had done. She unplugged the menace.

"Oh no, oh no. What have you done? What have you done?" she said.

My screams became sobs. Mom pulled the release lever on the wringer, cradled my arm, and surveyed the damage. It wasn't pretty.

My elbow bone stopped the wringer. A friction burn from the roller, that continued to turn in place, created a patch of angry red mush on the side of my arm.

Still screaming, mother improvised. She tied my arm to a Sear's catalog using diapers. This seemed to be the only idea she had.

When she completed this task, she just held my arm and made loud wounded cat noises.

*She isn't helping me. She needs to help me and she isn't. I will never be like this.*

I stopped crying and put a finger on a tear on my mother's cheek.

"Mom, it's okay. Let's call dad," I said.

She did.

Although I was only seven, I climbed into the driver's seat of my life and made a decision that formed my character. I resolved to be calm.

STEVE SMITH

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## *Hitting the High Notes*

*Doo Wop 1961*

At fifteen years old, running out the front door and cursing my father again, promising never to come back, I wondered if I was as bad as he said I was. I climbed the steep hill and rocks below Palisades Amusement Park, crawled under the bandstand then ran up the aisle and blended into the crowd of fans to watch my favorite Doo Wop groups up on stage - “The Flamingos” “The Five Satins” “The Turbans” “The Cadillacs”- beaming young black men, their conked hair slick with brilliantine trying hard to please their adoring young fans. The singers were resplendent in purple and white, hot pink, canary yellow and glittering periwinkle tuxedos, hips grooving as they did a syncopated stroll, their gospel honed falsettos and deep basso harmonies like salvation lifting me out of my gloom, showing me how I’d like to feel, look and sound. And in my mind I saw myself gliding across a stage microphone in hand, my blonde pompadour polished back with pomade, a pronounced roll to my gait, my father almost forgotten as the audience clapped and cheered me doing the *Hand Jive* and the *Madison* and hitting the soaring high and low notes, the *Doo Wop she Doo be Doo be Doo Wops*.

## *Coney Island Mermaid*

My mother grew up on Coney Island. Her family rented the third floor of a rickety wooden building three blocks from the sea. From the greasy windows of the apartment you could see the bungalow next door, where one of the broken panes was replaced with a dirty rag.

It was hot on the third floor—a fan my mother’s aunt had loaned them chugged away, barely blowing the mail, including the overdue rent bill. Every evening, amid the smell of burnt onions, my mother could hear the Schramms below, screaming at each other, throwing pots and pans. The house would rumble as if it were under the Cyclone.

Sometimes, my mother saw a shadowy figure pass in the window of the bungalow next door. No one knew who lived there. Nobody ever came out to talk to neighbors, to buy groceries, even to throw out garbage. My mother and her sister named the shadowy figure Ray.

Whenever the weather permitted, my mother escaped the apartment to the magical world surrounding her: the beach, the Parachute Jump, the Cyclone, the Steeplechase. She didn’t have money for the rides, but she learned to scour the ground for fallen change that would buy her the occasional thrill.

Her parents—my grandparents—ran a candy store. My mother and her sister were not allowed to eat the candy, not because my grandparents were concerned about their teeth rotting, but because they needed every penny to make ends meet. The Schramms were bean counters, making sure their inventory brought maximum profit. “Shoo,” they said whenever children wandered in without parents. With the ever-present temptation, my mother and her sister played in the streets, ragamuffin girls in hand-me-down dresses.

There was a boy who played with them whose name sounded like Morris. The boys playing stickball called him Missy. Morris often stayed home from school, reading and drawing.

My mother and her sister didn’t have books. Sometimes they’d go to the beach with Morris and draw in the sand. Anita would draw stick figures of girls in nice clothes. My mother would draw children with round cheeks who were allowed to eat candy. Morris would draw sea creatures, monsters and mermaids. Soon Anita, who was a few years older, grew tired of these games and ran off to find older friends, or even help my grandparents in the store. My mother would stay and listen to Morris’s stories about the figures he drew. She would sit at the sandy shore, staring out at the sea, as Morris talked about an ugly old witch who lived on an island they could just barely make out on the horizon. The old lady’s hair was made of seaweed and she had a spiky wand she’d use to beat children. If the children were especially naughty, she would turn them into pigs.

“She was once beautiful,” Morris told my mother. “And in love with a handsome prince. But then the prince drank a potion that gave him wanderlust, and he sailed

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away to another land. The beautiful young girl also took a sip of the potion, hoping it would transport her to her hero. But the potion reacts differently for different people, and it made her grow warts and develop evil powers.”

My mother wondered whether the Schramms had imbibed a potion that made them so mean and ugly. Sometimes, when they threw pots at each other, she secretly wished they'd maim one another. Then her parents would become the bosses of the candy store. She promised Morris that if that ever happened, she'd share the candy with him.

There was also the story he told my mother about a mermaid named Pearl. “Although Pearl was a magnificent swimmer, she aspired to be a singer, but alas the sounds she made were not quite as beautiful as what she heard in her head. This made Pearl sad. The sea witch loved to find others who were even less happy than she. She went into her laboratory and mixed up a potion, attaching a label that read: ‘Take one table-spoon a day for voice enhancement.’ Then, with a stroke of her wand, she dropped the bottle in the sea so that it floated just above Pearl’s head.

“What’s this? thought Pearl, grabbing the bottle and reading the label. When she saw what it was purported to do, she screwed off the cap, sniffed to make sure it wasn’t poison—in order to guarantee success, the witch had made it smell like chocolate—and took a sip.”

Meanwhile, the ship on which the witch’s handsome prince sailed was on a mission in Pearl’s part of the sea. When he spotted Pearl sunning herself on a rock, her hair and fin flowing beguilingly, he became smitten. He ordered his crew to sail closer.

The sea witch was watching on her crystal ball. She knew this was her opportunity. The potion Pearl had just sipped would switch the soul of the witch into Pearl’s shimmering body, leaving Pearl behind as the witch of the sea.

“But, once again, the potion didn’t work as the sea witch intended,” said Morris. “Her soul indeed went into Pearl’s body, but at that moment a huge wave came and swept Pearl off to sea. The prince was mystified. He ordered his crew to find her. They searched for days and days. All they found was the seaweed snarl that had been the witch’s hair.”

“What ever happened to Pearl’s soul?” asked my mother.

Morris shook his head. “Never found.”

When Morris wasn’t telling stories about sea witches, he taught my mother to blow bubbles and swim like a mermaid.

One rainy afternoon, stuck indoors, my mother heard the Schramms’ door slam below. She heard screaming, and the usual throwing of pots and pans. She couldn’t make out the words. When my grandparents weren’t working in the Schramms’ candy store, they’d tell my mother and her sister to ignore the fights. My grandfather would whistle and my grandmother would sing. One day they brought home a radio. The radio remained on whenever they were home, helping tune out the Schramms.

But even the radio could not block this argument. It sounded like Mr. Schramm was killing Mrs. Schramm. Although it had been what she wished for, my mother didn’t

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want Mr. Schramm to survive his wife. She didn't like the way Mr. Schramm looked at her. He frequently talked about how he hated children. He'd let my grandparents rent the apartment on the condition that the children were kept out of his way. But lately Mr. Schramm was looking at my mother in a creepy way.

They had to share a toilet with the Schramms on the second floor. It was actually a small closet with a filthy toilet, and a tank hanging on the wall. My mother would hold her nose. She and her sister would drink as little as possible so they didn't have to use the toilet.

In the evenings, after my grandparents cleaned up from a dinner of fried fish and mashed up hardboiled eggs with potatoes, my grandfather would go downstairs to play pinochle with Mr. Schramm and two other men. They drank something that lingered on their breath in a way that made my mother feel like she had to throw up. Mrs. Schramm must have felt that way too, because she'd leave their apartment when the pinochle players came.

Mrs. Schramm sat at my mother's kitchen table, talking to my grandmother. My grandmother served her tea in a jelly jar. She would have preferred to have the evenings to herself, to catch up on housework, to darn socks or cross-stitch a tablecloth, but felt beholden to Mrs. Schramm.

On the afternoon when it sounded like Mr. Schramm had murdered his wife, my mother wondered whether she should check in on Mrs. Schramm. In the end she decided she'd let someone else find the body, but she did have to use the bathroom. Quietly, on tiptoes, she made her way to the second-floor water closet. The door was slightly ajar, and Mr. Schramm was inside. My mother tried to slip away before he saw her, but it was too late. "Hello little girl," he said, turning around, not even bothering to zip up his pants. There was a sneer on his face as he exposed himself.

She ran back up to the third floor and closed the bolt on the door. It wasn't a very strong bolt—Mr. Schramm could easily break in if he wanted to. My mother stayed pushed up against the door for a long time, her mouth dry, her heart pounding. She only let go so that she could find a tin can to pee in and then wash it down the kitchen sink.

When my grandparents came home, she told them that Mr. Schramm had killed Mrs. Schramm. They looked at one another and then at my mother. They didn't say anything. Soon Mrs. Schramm was at their door.

After that, Mr. Schramm would come home in the afternoon and knock at my mother's door. She would remain quiet, under the covers, with the door bolted. "I know you're in there," Mr. Schramm would say. My mother told her parents, and they would just look at each other. My mother was terrified of using the bathroom. My mother was 12 years old when she developed tonsillitis and had to stay home in bed with a fever. My grandmother would take periodic breaks from the store to check on my mother. When Mr. Schramm offered to check on her, my grandparents were powerless to stop him. He let himself in with the master key as my mother slept off her fever. When she awoke, he was sitting beside her on the bed, his hand on her breast. She was too terrified to scream, too weak to run. His hand made her pain even worse. At that moment, she wished she were dead.

The next day, though barely better, she forced herself to get out of bed and go back to

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school. She didn't tell her parents what happened. She knew they would just look at her and stare down at the floor. "Beholden" was the word they always used.

She was afraid to tell Morris or Anita about Mr. Schramm. Would they believe her? Maybe they would think she was sick for thinking up such things. Or maybe they would think she had done something to provoke it.

One day, Morris came to tell her he was moving away to Long Island, a real island.

"You drank the magic potion," she said. She wished for some, too.

Feeling as she imagined the sea witch had felt—before she turned into the sea witch—my mother went for a swim in the sea. Looking back at the shore, so far in the distance, she felt free. Free from the Schramms, from her beholden parents, even free from the loss of her best friend. Swimming was like flying, she thought. She could swim forever. She could swim to another continent and never grow tired. Her body was meant for swimming. Suddenly her legs melded together, her feet turned into a fin, and her body was covered with shimmering blue-green scales. Basking in the sun and surf, she formed bubbles on the curl of her tongue and blew.

My mother loved being a mermaid, and as long as the weather was warm, she would swim out to sea for hours. She had to swim beyond where anyone could see her, in order for her fins to form. As long as she was a mermaid, she didn't have to be beholden.

One afternoon, during lunch, the Schramms started in. There was yelling and screaming in Yiddish, words my mother had been taught never to use. She turned up the radio—she loved listening to *The Shadow* and *The Inner Sanctum*, but she could barely hear it over the cacophony of the Schramms. She made it louder. Suddenly the shadowy figure in the bungalow next door opened the rag-patched window. Ray revealed himself, a bald man, shirtless, with a hairy belly. "Shaddup in there!"

Terrified, my mother ran out without even turning off the radio. She didn't have time to grab a bathing suit. She ran the three blocks to the beach, took off her shoes in the sand, and waded out in her skirt and blouse. She swam the distance she needed and as her fin formed, she felt soothed. She thought long and hard about what it would be like to stay out at sea, a mermaid forever. There was no reason to go back.

This time she began to feel cramps. She'd been warned not to swim after eating, but she ignored the pain, focusing instead on how good it felt to be wild and free.

She got caught up in the tide, which was dragging her out, but didn't fear drowning because mermaids don't drown. Her clothes were weighing her down. She thought she was alone, and then a man appeared, carrying her back to shore. Back on land, her fins and her tail disappeared. She was a girl again.

"You could have drowned," the man said. He was kind. My mother blinked to make sure she was seeing right. The man was Ray.

My mother eventually wandered far from Coney Island, spending her adult years in California where she swam every day, albeit in a lake. And perhaps because she feared turning into

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Mrs. Schramm, she never fought with my father, though so many times I wished she would have stood up, but she always felt beholden to him for rescuing her from her childhood.

When I was 5, my mother took me to the library. There on the shelf were books written and illustrated by Morris. I grew up reading tales of sea monsters, mermaids and sea witches. But the story of my mother's near drowning, and being saved by that strange and reclusive man, was only recounted in the final days of her life. In all the years of watching her swim back and forth across the lake, we had no idea. In finally telling it, it was her way of letting us know she was ready.

**IVANA VRANJES FIELD**

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## *I'm Waiting...*

How long will you let the silence pierce my ears...  
Till they bleed?  
Should I hold my breath,  
Or will I faint?  
If I wait,  
Will I wait forever?  
... I think I heard my heart drop.  
Will you pick that up?



## *Numbers Don't Lie (But They May Fib a Little)*

Any foods that diet gurus declare to be unhealthy are taboo in our home. My wife won't bring them into the house because she would like to stick around for as long as possible and she values my company.

In order to get through our doors, a product must carry documentation including at least one of the following qualifiers: sugar-free, no sugar added, fat-free, reduced-fat, caffeine-free, low-sodium, low-calorie, or "lite," although I have no idea what "lite" actually means.

So one day last September I was amazed, when she was unpacking the groceries, to see that she'd brought home a package of muffins. Our home is a temple where worshipers practice gustatory restraint. How could she desecrate that temple by admitting a package of killer carbs? Did she think that just because the package had a *kosher* symbol on it that all the bad stuff had been removed?

She put away the last freezer item, a container of fat-free, no-sugar-added ice cream, and noticed that I was still standing there. She traced the imaginary line leading from my eye-balls to the counter and realized that I was staring at the muffins. Without even waiting to be asked, she went right into her explanation.

"Every night after dinner," she began, "we have coffee. I have a couple of pieces of whole grain flatbread with mine, you have three sugar-free cookies with yours. I got bored having whole grain flatbread for dessert every single night. I needed a change. I was sure you would welcome a change from those sugar-free cookies you have night after night. So I got these muffins. They're sugar-free and they're not too high in calories. In fact, one muffin has no more calories than your three cookies."

I was skeptical, so I picked up the package and tried to read the label. Why do they put all the important information on food containers into such small print? In order to read it I had to get out my magnifying glass.

Yes, it was sugar-free. Okay, that was one thing in its favor. At least it wouldn't wreak havoc with my A1C. Under "Nutrition Facts" it stated that a serving contained 170 calories. Three of my sugar-free cookies total 130 calories. I could have argued that 170 is more than 130 and, therefore, one muffin did have more calories than three of my cookies but, in the spirit of the presidential polling season, I ignored the disparity and considered the two numbers to be in a statistical tie.

Some other numbers on the label, however, I found impossible to reconcile. The serving size was defined as 2 oz. The net weight of the package was 15 oz. The package held six muffins. Even the Wizard of Oz couldn't divide 15 oz. by 2 oz. and come up with a quotient of 6. Were the basic rules of arithmetic changed while I wasn't paying attention? Had I somehow slipped into an alternate universe where mathematical rules are arbitrary?

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I re-examined the label, passing the magnifying glass slowly over each line. There had to be some explanation. Then I saw it, the key to unraveling the mystery. The figure it showed as “Servings per Container” was 7.5. In order for there to be 7.5 servings in the package, each serving would have to consist of just  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a muffin.

Silly me! I had assumed that one muffin equaled one serving. I guess I was wrong to think logically. But it was understandable that I should make such a mistake. After all, when I went to a diner and ordered coffee and a muffin I was sometimes served only  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a cup, but never  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a muffin. I’ve seen menus where the daily lunch special was a cup of soup and half a sandwich, but never  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a sandwich. Maybe I don’t eat out often enough.

But getting back to the muffins, I calculated that each muffin actually contained not 170 calories, as implied, but 212.5 calories. I can just imagine some marketing executive saying, “We can’t tell customers that our sugar-free muffins contain over 200 calories. Who would want to buy a sugar-free product that can put on weight? But if we define the serving size as  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a muffin, we can honestly claim that a serving has only 170 calories. And if that doesn’t work we can redefine the serving size as half a muffin, bringing the calorie count down to barely over 100. We won’t have to change the product at all – only the label.”

So, accepting that a serving is  $\frac{4}{5}$  of a muffin, how do you divide a muffin into two pieces with one piece exactly four times the size of the other? And what do you do with the smaller piece, the one that is only  $\frac{1}{5}$  the size of a whole muffin? Do you accumulate fifths until you have four, which would qualify as a serving? What do you do with the half serving, the fifths left over from the last two muffins? Hold on to them until you buy another package? Save them for a very small child?

Isn’t it wonderful how we consumers are protected from misrepresentation by the government’s requirement that Nutrition Facts be supplied with each product?

LAURALEE LEONARD

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## *Old Ladies*

We meet in dusty rooms.  
No one misses us.

Ha! Let them revel in the flesh.

We hold truths  
even we cannot bare.

LAURALEE LEONARD

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## *Italiana*

And when the garlic hits the oil  
and the sizzling begins,  
a memory of you opens.

Your tall unbent self  
sturdy as an ancient tree,  
standing, in your blue morning robe,  
cooking some feast required by the law of families.

Did you ever speak within all those hours?  
Pots laid on top of pots -  
no inch of kitchen untouched  
by the splatter  
of your deep red gravy.

D.E. STEWARD

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## *Susquehanna*

On I-80 from Newark on the way west to Wellsboro in Pennsylvania as if fleeing the thinning and diminishing urban sprawl in the empty Sunday dawn

“The roads are our nature shining / beyond delay, / fretting to race on —” (Les Murray)

Stop at one steep turnout, harvested forest below and all around, Kittatinny folds spread northward toward the Catskills, the first slate-colored juncos of the season, bright white outer tail feathers flashing away over a brush pile

Robert Frost’s snowbirds

At the next overlook above the Water Gap and the Appalachian Trail, another car alone, a happy medical school student proudly on her way out of the Bronx and into Pennsylvania for a rendezvous with a friend she met when they hiked it all, Georgia to Maine

Who knows her ethnicity, originally from somewhere, a small brown person with no accent in English, piercings and quirky clothes, got into medical school, took time to hike the Trail after she finished her undergraduate and this weekend rented a Zip Car and got back to it out of the city again

She said New England had the most open ridges and was the best, that the Carolinas and Virginia were monotonous green

The omnipresence of the Appalachian train, Georgia into Newfoundland, arcing northeastward, a terra-link for many to where it was whence they came

The front that walled us in before the Atlantic’s rivers encouraged the roadless ways that opened up the rest of North America

The ways in, St. Lawrence, Merrimack, Connecticut, Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna, Potomac, James

Down on the Delaware itself to walk the Trail far enough northward to no longer easily hear the interstate, meet a typically civilized sixtyish Veronese, maybe a technician, engineer or craftsmen, Sundays he drives out from Essex County to hike, says it keeps him from nostalgia for the Dolomites, has seen bears, coyotes rarely

Then over the river and on into the garishly peculiar strip-mall Poconos of Monroe County, Pennsylvania, the newest commuter zone, stand-alone development houses perched for the I-80 run back across North Jersey to the George Washington Bridge

The whole planet is roads and cars

.....  
We all were there for the Chelyabinsk meteor in early 2013, that near-Earth asteroid explosion out east of the Urals, when their open highway and speeding cars looked like every open highway with speeding cars

We had the clips almost simultaneously with the event, a lot of dashboard cameras there

From way out there back of beyond for most of the world, while in Chelyabinsk of over a million with all its bridges, roads, streets, cars, they are the nexus of the world

There they drive to live and live to drive like nearly everyone else on smooth asphalt, engineered grades and curves, shoulders, with good signing and painted center lines, shoulder and edge markings

Cars worldwide are the defining contraption of the century present, century past

Allowing us to sail the hills and ridges, course along the rivers and the coasts, loop around congestion, gun up high mountains, go to deserts, take easy access to almost anywhere, glimpse asteroid explosions and car-bomb chaos

As simultaneously cities draw us into ourselves

The Eurasian norm, to live within the walls and venture out to the land, but now everywhere including Monroe County, PA, we travel everywhere outside at will

As the hamlet, village, town that has been so kind to our mortalities, becomes strip mall, filling station, convenience store

But we do what we do where we do it and will always be whether hydroponically in space colonies or underground or planting potatoes in a subsistence dystopian extreme, potato eyes down, heeled in, with a knowing wink to the kids following along to learn

We shall see

Downstream

The past has always been the future that is already there, but we cannot see the future and its shaggy little islands well enough to respond to it

So we go ahead into the expansive Pennsylvanias of our lives, trying to drive past the past as we imagine

“...the past, which is the live dark matter that flows and undismissably with us, and impends unseen over every point we reach” (Les Murray)

The kenning of vivid mind-hunger

Of the road sometimes and always through the ease of imagination

After Wellsboro coming down the Susquehanna's west bank on US 15 from Sunbury toward Harrisburg

.....  
November's vellum cornhusks

Maples naked on the slopes and against the ridgeline sky with fall's leafless red hickories and ridge white oaks

Vaulting of the bare Appaloosa-patched white sycamores on the creeks and flats before reaching the river

The Susquehanna's broad sweeping bends, headland bluffs profusion of shaggy little islands in the stream

Imagining what else I've seen like this

"Imagination is nothing but extended or compounded memory" – (Giambattista Vico)

But then how to imagine what will appear next

Picturing what you have yet to see from what you have already known

Extending regional memories of other river roads

On along the Saguenay, St. Lawrence, Penobscot, Merrimack, Connecticut, Hudson, Delaware, Potomac, James, Missouri, Mississippi, Colombia

And glimpses from bridges and their approaches and often from the hills beside

All the rivers

Rhone, Rhine, Imjin, Snake, Yukon, the Cristalino to the Amazon

The bliss that flows from remembering things past

*Natsukashi*

From big rivers, mountains, large lakes, seacoasts and backlit skies

The Susquehanna's islands' scrubby brush and high-water saplings, driftwood, their apparent slant, everything points downstream

People here claim it is the widest unnavigable river in the world

So wide that its valley has rarely flooded in human times

"It is not that Americans exist only on the surface, but that their surface is where their depths are supposed to be" (Terry Eagleton)

As before leaving Tioga County back up above Williamsport in Liberty, Pennsylvania, off I-99 on the way south from Wellsboro, a rural auction house Sunday gun sale that began at ten-thirty after or instead of church

.....  
ASSAULT RIFLES in .223 & .22; Browning BPS 12 gauge; WINCHESTERS: Post 64 model 88 in .308; 1892 in 32/20; two 1894 in 30/30 and 32/40; Rare model 71 Deluxe in .348 cal; also Marlin 1895 in 38/56 cal; Remington models 591 and 592M in 5mm; HAND GUNS: Smith and Wesson 686 SS .357 magazines, etc.

A Horton crossbow, three Malayan throwing daggers, about seventy boxes of different caliber bullets, at least fifty antique wooden ammo boxes, German dagger by Siegfried Waffen of Soligen, scope mounts, “a good selection” of holsters

With ammunition and reloading tools and casings, bayonets, swords, big knives, and suchlike paraphernalia table-displayed to be auctioned after the many dozen guns

“It might be interesting if, after spending too much of the last fifty years talking in circles [about the gun issue], we in America could see ourselves as reluctant tourists in the land of our own psyches. It might be helpful to begin shifting our discussions to the way in which all our souls are broken when we dehumanize by general habit” (Patricia J. Williams)

But then the peaceful Pennsylvania woods, over half the state in forest

Rolling south toward through Tioga and Lycoming toward Williamsport on US15, almost nothing but trees, hardwood trees with conifers in the gorges

And in Northumberland where the West Branch of the Susquehanna joins the main river, Joseph Priestley’s Georgian-Federalist house lies back from the water on the open shore

The apparently rational English Unitarian, a millennialist sure that he would see Christ’s return, worked on phlogiston theory chemistry to his death there in 1804

Trapped in their times and their beliefs weeks from “the news,” five days rough travel west of the port of Philadelphia over two hundred years ago

Querying minds making the most of their ideas and what substantiations they had, and imagining the rest in extension of their compounded memories

Tourists in the land of their own psyches on the frontier of their Anglo world like many who landed here and pushed west with the goal of clarifying the soul and edifying the social condition

“The good and happiness of the members, that is the majority of the members of the state, is the great standard by which every thing relating to that state must finally be determined” (Joseph Priestly)

Defender of the French Revolution in 1785 Priestley said, “we are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition,” arrived in Philadelphia to find his kindred Quakers fat and smug so kept going

As it were

And when to his chagrin slave craftsmen were brought in on the construction of his big new Northumberland house with his old man’s new world chemistry laboratory he demurred when told that there was no one else to do the job

As Günter Grass put it, Weimar will always be down the road from Buchenwald



WANDA PRAISNER

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## *Marraine de Guerre, Godmother of War*

*In memoriam: Pfc. F.F. Villani,  
plot A, Row 18, Grave 38,  
the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery*

A statue of the Archangel looks down  
on a woman kneeling by a white cross,  
anemones and mums in hand.

A Godmother of War, Regine, like a thousand  
others, has adopted a grave of an American soldier—  
one of 30,000 fallen in the Battle of Hutgen Forest  
to liberate Belgium from the Nazis.

Nothing known of her Pfc, named Frederick,  
until his sister came in 1957 to take soil  
from his grave, home to Newark, New Jersey.

In his last V-Mail, October 1944,  
he asked for single-edged razor blades.

Regine's father, ten years old then, remembers  
running after GIs for chocolate and gum.  
Frederick's father's hair turned white overnight  
after receiving the telegram.

Regine places the bouquet on the headstone,  
her right hand leaning on an arm of the cross.

*Fruit Flies, Fox & Squirrel*

I discard an old cantaloupe,  
fruit flies still hovering over it,  
when I notice color & movement  
out by the fence.

Unmistakable. A fox, its russet  
coat highlighted in morning sun  
as it pumps away at the kill,  
a squirrel. It gnaws

at the head, perhaps the brains  
tasty as a rabbit's, to an owl.  
For an hour it eats, maneuvers it,  
even sits at times

at the propped-up meal,  
top half-gone. I tap  
on the window, it looks at me,  
then returns to feed,

its backside an arch  
like the bend of a bittersweet branch.  
It finally stops, goes back  
to leftover pieces, licks

its face with its black front paws,  
then picks up the remains  
& disappears. I go out,  
spook cedar waxwings

at the birdbath as I lift off  
the slab of ice. Nothing remains  
by the fence—no bone, tuft of fur,  
only matted-down myrtle

& a few old oak leaves, tawny  
in sunlight. I console myself that  
the squirrel had its time in my yard.  
A fruit fly lives only a day.

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# Contributors

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**Allen Appel** was born in 1937. He received his BA in English from Brooklyn College in 1959, and his subsequent career involved developing computer applications. He moved to an active adult community in 2003, where he writes for the community newspaper.

**Vida Chu** grew up in Hong Kong, came to America for college, and stayed. She has lived in Princeton for over fifty-three years. Her poems have appeared in *Kelsey Review*, *Princeton Arts Review*, *US 1 Worksheets*, and *The Literary Review*. She has children's stories in *Cricket Magazine* and *Fire and Wings*.

**Nancy Demme** has been a Children's Librarian and facilitated creative writing groups for adults, teens and adolescents for 25 years. Her work has been published in *US1*, *Confrontations* (LIU's literary journal), *Kelsey Review* and *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*. Her novel *The Ride* made the short list for 2015 Sante Fe Writers Project Literary Award and was runner-up for the 2015 Howling Bird Press Fiction Award. *Fish Factory Fiction*, a one act play, underwent a reading at the Mill Hill Playhouse in Trenton, NJ. Active in the Garden State Storytellers League, she also teaches Writing in English to ESL students and creative writing to teens, adolescents, and seniors. She continues to take courses in everything from playwriting, children's literature, song writing, drawing, screen writing, fantasy and storytelling.

**Ilene Dube** grew up in Brooklyn and spent much of her childhood in Coney Island, hearing about its glory days from her parents while witnessing its demise and then resurgence. She recently illustrated a children's book, *Smell Coney Island*. Her short stories, poetry and personal essays have appeared in *Atticus Review*, *Corvus Review*, *HerStory*, *Huffington Post*, *Kelsey Review*, *Foliage Oak*, *The Grief Diaries*, *The Oddville Press*, *Penny Shorts*, *Unlikely Stories* and *U.S. 1 Summer Fiction*.

**Lauren Fedorko**, M.Ed., is an Adjunct Professor of writing at Rutgers University, teaches AP Literature, and advises a creative writing club for her students. Her passion for writing is longstanding and ongoing, composed mostly of poetry and creative non-fiction. She enjoys exploring, good company, photography, and traveling the world every chance she gets. Her work has been previously published in the *Kelsey Review*.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** 16th and most recent collection *Nightmares of the Minor Poet* appeared in June 2016 from Five Oaks. *And She Took the Heart (Casa de Cinco Hermanas)* appeared in January 2016, *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis (Cherry Grove Press)* and the chapbook *How Marlene Mae Longs for Truth (Dancing Girl Press)* appeared in 2013. *The Only Is* won the 2012 Tennessee Chapbook Contest (Poems & Plays), and *Brief Term*, a collection of poems about teachers and teaching was published by Black Buzzard Press, 2011. *Cosmogony* won the 2010 Hazel Lipa Chapbook (Iowa State). Dodge poet and 3-time recipient of a New Jersey Council on the Arts fellowship, she is widely published in literary journals and online ezines from *American Poetry Review* to *Zone 3*. Links to her online work at [www.loismarieharrod.org](http://www.loismarieharrod.org)

**Barbara Krasner** holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts and teaches composition and history at Mercer County Community College. Her essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Smart Set*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *The Manifestation*, *Poor Yorick*, *Minerva Rising*, and other publications.

**Lavinia Kumar's** books are *The Celtic Fisherman's Wife: A Druid Life* (2017), & *The Skin and Under* (Word Tech, 2015). Chapbooks are *Let There be Color* (Lives You Touch Publications, 2016) and *Rivers of Saris* (Main Street Rag, 2013). Her poetry

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has appeared in several US and UK publications such as *Atlanta Review*, *Colere*, *Dark Matter*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Exit 13*, *Flaneur*, *Kelsey Review*, *Lablit*, *New Verse News*, *Orbis*, *Peacock Journal*, *Pedestal*, *Pemmican*, *Poetry 24*, *Symmetry Pebbles*, *Lives You Touch*, & *US1 Worksheets*. Her website is [laviniakumar.org](http://laviniakumar.org).

**Lauralee Leonard** has been a resident of Mercer County since 1995 and has also worked in the county for the majority of that time.

**Edith McGowan's** work has been published in *U.S. 1 Newspaper* Summer Fiction Issue three times and *U.S. 1 Worksheets* 2018. She attends several poetry workshops. Edith is retired and lives in Princeton Junction, NJ

**Carolyn Phillips** is a resident of Lawrence Township. She has taught English and now convenes a poetry appreciation group at the Lawrence Senior Center, where the members continually remind themselves of the strength and beauty of poetry and its ability to enrich their lives.

**Marion Pollack** is a memoir and poetry writer. She is a therapist at Aroga Behavioral Health. Marion lives in Lawrenceville, NJ with her husband Bob. She has two grown children and six grandchildren.

**Wanda S. Praisner**, a recipient of fellowships from the NJ State Council on the Arts, the Dodge Foundation, Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and VCCA, has won the Egan Award, Princemere Prize, Kudzu Award, First Prize in Poetry at the College of NJ Writers' Conference, and the 2017 New Jersey Poets Prize. She was a featured reader at the Governor's Conference on the Arts, as well as the Dodge Poetry Festival. She's appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. Her latest books are *Natirar* (Kelsay Books, 2017) and *To Illuminate the Way* (Kelsay Books, 2018). She's a resident poet for the state.

**Judith Salcewicz** has lived in Mercer County for over forty years and is a retired teacher. She is on the Board of Trustees for Lawrence Historical Society and is a member of the Lawrence Writer's Group. Her work has appeared in *The Kelsey Review*, *Horse Network*, and *Women's World Magazine*.

**Steve Smith** is a Poet/Artist from Pennington N.J. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts, he is retired Theatrical Scenery Painter.

**Sharri Steen** lives in Rocky Hill, New Jersey, and splits her work time between medical writing for local pharmaceutical companies and teaching high school biology at The Wilberforce School in Princeton Junction. Her publications include short stories in *The First Line* and *U.S. Route 1*.

**D.E. Steward** has never had a pedestrian job since college. He has nearly a thousand publication credits in journals and has also published *Chroma Volumes One through Five* (Archae Editions, Brooklyn, 2018, in press).

**Ayesha Sultana** wrote her poem as an autobiographical spoken word piece based on her own real-life experiences growing up as a veiled Muslim woman in the United States. The poem, a full version of which can be found on the *Kelsey Review* website, is meant to raise awareness about the false images and misconstrued ideas that surround Muslim women and their roles in Islam.

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**Laura Tahir** lives in Mercer County and practices as a psychologist in Allentown, NJ. She has published articles and chapters in academic books and magazines.

**Michael Torres** is a recent graduate from the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University and currently works part time at The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association in Pennington and at a local camera shop in Lawrenceville. His primary inspiration for photography stems from his fascination with the natural world.

**Ivana Vranjes Field** is currently a photographer in the tri-state area. She lives in Mercer County and graduated from TCNJ. She is a self-taught photographer and was recently inspired to start up writing poetry again after taking many years off. Working on film sets was her inspiration behind taking up photography. Seeing the shots being set up and creating the mood within a scene, was very beautiful to watch and very intricate in its own sense, which pushed her towards purchasing a camera and giving it a go. She has earned some IMDB credits for previous independent film work, and currently she enjoys reading books, studying the human mind and the human experience, art, more reading, and a lot of traveling.

**Tim Waldron** is the associate prose editor of *The Literary Review* and the fiction editor of Serving House Books. His short-story collection *Stories for People Who Watch TV* is forthcoming from New Meridian Arts. His first collection of fiction, *World Takes*, is published by Word Riot Press. His work has appeared in the *Kelsey Review*, *Bull Magazine*, *Vol. 1 Brooklyn*, *The Lit Pub*, *The Literary Review*, *The McNeese Review*, *The Serving House Books*, *Mud Luscious Press*, *Dogzplot*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Sententia*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Atticus Review*, and *What's Your Exit?*

# Editors & Staff

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**Roberta Clipper** is a fiction editor of the *Kelsey Review*. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and is a full Professor at Rider University. A fiction writer and poet, she has published many stories and two novels, including *The Bride Wore Red* and *Fifty-Fifty*. On a Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship, she served as a visiting professor at the International Institute of Information Technology in Hyderabad, India during the Monsoon Semester (fall), 2009.

**Luray Gross** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and is the author of three collections of poetry: *Forenoon* was published in 1990 by The Attic Press in Westfield, NJ, and *Elegant Reprieve* won the 1995-96 Still Waters Press Poetry Chapbook Competition. *The Perfection of Zeros* was published by WordTech in 2004. A storyteller as well as a writer, she works extensively throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania as an Artist in Residence.

**Ellen Jacko** is a poetry editor of the *Kelsey Review* and earned a BA in English Literature at Rutgers University and an MAT in English Education at Trenton State College. She has had a variety of post-graduate experiences including the study of twentieth century British poets at Exeter College, Oxford University, England. For more than thirty years she taught at Allentown High School in Allentown, New Jersey. Additionally, for fifteen years she was a member of the adjunct faculty at Mercer County Community College.

**Jacqueline Vogtman** is Editor of the *Kelsey Review* and an Associate Professor of English at Mercer County Community College. She received her MFA in Creative Writing-Fiction from Bowling Green State University in Ohio (where she served as an assistant editor of *Mid-American Review*) and her BA in English/Creative Writing from The College of New Jersey. Her fiction has been published in *Atticus Review*, *Connotation Press*, *Copper Nickel*, *Drunken Boat*, *Emerson Review*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Versal*, and other journals both in print and online.

# Submission Guidelines

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The *Kelsey Review* is published each Fall. Submissions are open from January 15th to May 15th. We respond no later than August 15th. The *Review* considers submissions from those who live and/or work in the larger Mercer County area. Use our electronic submission system, Submittable (<https://kelseyreview.submittable.com/submit>), to send us your:

## **Short Fiction**

Length: approximately 4,000 words maximum

## **Poetry**

Send no more than six pages

## **Essays, Creative Non-fiction, and Reviews**

Length: approximately 4,000 words maximum

## **Artwork & Photography**

Upload as a jpg file (Black and white only for print issue; color accepted for online publication)

Writers and artists who appear at Mercer County events such as poetry readings are also eligible. Organizers of such events should encourage those who work and/or live in the area to submit short non-fiction critically informed review of the event; the editors will contact the writer/artist to extend an invitation to appear in the *Review*. We see this as an opportunity to promote such literary and artistic occasions and venues within the county.

We invite proposals for non-fiction articles on any topic relevant to the people, history, businesses, educational institutions, artistic traditions and/or government of Mercer County and the surrounding area.

Except for art and poetry, the *Review* generally only accepts one item per author.

Electronic submissions: We accept all submissions through our online submission system (see above). We no longer accept submissions by postal mail (or email!).

- All rights are retained by the author. *The Kelsey Review* remains available online after publication.
- Each year we nominate up to six published items for the Pushcart Prize. See [www.pushcartprize.com](http://www.pushcartprize.com) for more information.
- We accept simultaneous submissions. If we accept an item placed elsewhere, it is up to the author to clear any conflicts upon acceptance to KR.

Send questions via email to [Kelsey.review@mccc.edu](mailto:Kelsey.review@mccc.edu), and find us on Facebook!

Jacqueline Vogtman  
*Editor*



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